

RAMBLINGS REPORTS 2019-20

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14/03/20 - Action from Hykeham Town (red & blue) v Wyberton (Lincs League SC S-F) 6-1

R No.38: WebEd - Saturday 14th March 2020; **Hykeham Town** v Wyberton; Lincolnshire League Supplementary Cup Semi-Final; Kick-Off: 3pm; Venue: Priory Academy; Skellingthorpe Road; Lincoln; Lincs; LN60EP; Result: 6-1; Admission: £2; Programme: No; Attendance: 34 - REPORT TO FOLLOW

R No.37: WebEd - Saturday 7th March 2020; **Briston** v Hopton; Norfolk FA Junior Cup Quarter-Final; Kick-Off: 2pm; Venue: Briston Pavilion; Stone Beck Lane; Briston; Fakenham; Norfolk; NR242PS; Result: 0-2; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 77

Whilst spending the weekend down in Suffolk to visit my sister-in-law Jane, who lives in Exning, I am taking the opportunity to travel to north Norfolk for my footy fix this afternoon. During my formative hopping career covering many games down in this neck of the woods, I still love watching the local county cup competitions. To be honest nothing really beats attending those Norfolk and Suffolk FA junior and primary cup ties, involving teams from different leagues competing against each other. I still get the same buzz tracking down those quirky little grounds found at some remote and unknown outpost, usually hidden off the beaten track. Today is no exception either as I grab my camera bag and tap a new code into the *Garmin Sat Nav* before setting off along some old familiar roads on my way to the outskirts of Fakenham.

Unlike the poor weather we've experienced in recent weeks, it's a beautiful sunny afternoon which makes a welcome change for the football traveller. The cross-country journey from Newmarket which really isn't that far distance-wise but still takes a good ninety minutes to cover on what are essentially narrow winding country roads, seems to take a bit longer due to some very slow-moving traffic. The village of Briston (located some 10 miles to the east of Fakenham) can easily be accessed from the A148 (main Kings Lynn to Cromer link road) by taking a more scenic route through neighbouring Melton Constable. The final half-mile or so along the narrow, muddy Stone Beck Lane looks better suited to tractors but I get to the lovely tree-lined recreation ground with plenty of time to spare before the kick-off. A short driveway in one corner of the site leads to the car park where the Briston Pavilion, a long red-bricked building made up of several adjoining function rooms, stands in front of you. This also doubles as the local village community (and recycling) centre, as well as providing changing rooms for both football teams and officials. There's no mistaking where you are with the name proudly displayed in large white lettering attached to the end wall facing you. It also has a section of modern solar panels fitted part-way along the top of the roof facing the playing fields.

The main football pitch marked out parallel to the club buildings is found on the far side of the field. Pride of place goes to the bijou main (well, only) stand, positioned slightly off-set behind the goal line and in front of a neatly cut hedge (at the end where some new residential housing overlooks the field). It certainly adds to the attraction and makes for an interesting feature as *FGIF* stalwart and hopping guru Brian Buck commented on his visit here for a Pre-Season Friendly a couple of seasons ago (*see TT No.9 for 2017-18 uploaded in the main TT Archive section*). This standing cover with its plain fascia and sloping roof has been erected straight on top of the grass (without any underfoot material to stand on) and provides cover for probably twenty or so spectators making it ideal for any fans attending a normal league game here in bad weather, I would think. There are no dug-outs or perimeter barrier by the by the side of the pitch which incidentally drops dramatically down towards a new modern skate park with its striking blue coloured ramped track, situated at the bottom of the slope. There are some fine views from the field where many new bespoke (and very expensive) properties can be seen dotted over the landscape on the adjoining fields.

A little bit of club history for you now. After a period of five season's absence, a newly reformed Briston Football Club returned to the North East Norfolk League, finishing as the Division Two runners-up in 2016-17. However rather than take promotion they decided that a new challenge was needed and instead applied successfully to join the recently expanded Crown Fire Central & South Norfolk League. With it came immediate honours as the club took the second division title at the first time of asking and then went on to win the first (top) division last season. So far, under the guidance of young enthusiastic manager Brandon Hudson, they have continued to dominate proceedings this campaign currently remaining unbeaten in the league with twelve wins out of fourteen games played to date. Today sees the visit of high-flying Hopton who, like Briston, are having a cracking season themselves, sitting proudly in joint top place of the Great Yarmouth &

District League Division One (along with Celt Rangers who co-incidentally have already booked a semi-final place in this year's junior cup competition). With both sides in such terrific form an intriguing cup-tie is in prospect. To get to this stage the hosts had beaten fellow C&SNL side Dussindale Rovers Reserves 4-2 here in the previous round played back in January, with the visitors winning by the only goal of the game at Anglian Combination outfit Freethorpe FC.

As expected, today's game, re-arranged after a postponement here seven days ago (due to a waterlogged pitch), was an absolute belter and lived up to all the pre-match hype on social media. After a goal-less first half the game came to life just two minutes after the break when the hosts missed a penalty kick after the ball was struck straight at the keeper. Almost on the hour mark the visitors took the league following a neat counter attack down the left when x scored from a ridiculously tight angle slotting the ball somehow between the keeper and post. Briston thought they had equalised ten minutes later but their goal was adjudged to have come from an offside position and was rightly ruled out by the man with the whistle. Within five minutes Hopton scored their second and defining goal when an unmarked x placed the ball neatly past the stranded keeper to increase their lead. Despite creating chances to get back into the game the hosts couldn't convert any and so it was Hopton who held on to win the tie deservedly by 0-2.

The match, a feisty affair at times, was expertly refereed by Robert Bunting who adopted a firm but fair approach from the start. I'm sure that any lesser official would have wilted under the pressure especially from a spirited Hopton side who challenged many key decisions particularly in the opening twenty minutes. It was also a notable game for young home keeper Jonny Brown who was making his 100th appearance for the Bulls (club's nickname - check out the badge logo). For the record, Hopton will now travel to face ACL-side Heacham FC (who beat Dersingham Rovers 4-0 in one of the day's other ties at this stage). They will meet in one of the forthcoming Norfolk Junior Cup Semi-Final to be played next month.

The game played in mostly sunny conditions on a soft but playable surface attracted a superb, much larger than average crowd, with nearly eighty spectators in attendance. This included several travelling fans who had made the hour long drive up from the outskirts of Lowestoft. One face though stood out in the crowd amongst all others, that belonging to a twelve-week-old terrier pup who was firmly tethered throughout to his owner's lead. I'm sure if they had such things, he would certainly take the winning prize for '*Briston's Cutest Pet*' competition - take a look in the gallery, if you get chance. No doubt you will agree. Neither a programme or refreshments were made available.

During the half-time break helpful club secretary and part time-lino, Tom Stewart told me that the club have ambitions to move up the pyramid in the near future which I take it to mean the Anglian Combination League. Indeed, several teams from the C&SNL have made the step up already including former sides Hingham Athletic FC and Castle Acre Swifts FC who have successfully climbed to Divisions Two and Three of the ACL respectively. Any application would involve meeting some ground grading requirements and with it a possible two-year ground share away from the Briston Recreation Ground in order to complete the improvements

at the leafy Stone Beck Lane ground. Please keep this classified information under your hopping woolly hat though as it is only speculation at the moment.

So, another terrific afternoon's entertainment, in one of my favourite all-time competition's. My chosen *Match of The Day* was a splendid advert not only for the county cup competitions but also for both the Central & South Norfolk League and Great Yarmouth League too. A visit to Briston Football Club is certainly one you should consider if you find yourself in the area - info about the club can be found on the generic *FA Full-Time* site covering the C&SNL as well as the pro-active *twitter* account which is regularly updated. You won't be disappointed by what you'll find at this friendly, well-run club. The joys of hopping in remotest Norfolk continues. Have fun whenever you venture off the beaten track.

R No.36: WebEd - Saturday 29th February 2020; **Briggensians** v Ashby Bowl; Scunthorpe & District League Division Two; Kick-Off: 2pm; Venue: Brigg Recreation Centre; Wrawby Road; Brigg; Scunthorpe; North Lincs; DN20 8DS; Result: 1-4; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 15

I doubt many of you can remember where you went for your footy fix twenty-eight years ago on this very day. It's an impossible ask really and the answer is, of course, a resounding: 'I've got no idea!'. Well why would you? it's hard enough for some of us to remember what we were doing twenty- eight minutes ago, let alone nearly thirty years back. Well, the reason I pose this question is that this was the last time when a Leap Year (yes, it's the 29th February, today) actually fell on a Saturday. What an incredible thought. After ticking off the *Ninety-Two* and joining that select band of completists, it was around this time that I was serving my apprenticeship as a non-league hopper. I had racked up just over one hundred and fifty grounds over the space of three years - small fry compared to some elite hoppers I know, most of whom easily surpass this figure (and the rest) in just one season. Little did I realise at the time that I would be still football travelling and ground collecting all these years later.

In fact, like you, the only way I can be exact about this date myself is by looking through my archived record of games. Mine were, and still are, listed in a certain little blue hardback *Cambridge Ruled* book A-6 size pages courtesy of WH Smith's in Newmarket. And, as I flick my way through the now well-thumbed and yellowing pages containing many fading entries (why did I ever use pencil to record some of the details?), I can tell you that on this day - Saturday 29/02/1992, I attended the King George V Playing Field to watch Haughley United take on Walsham-le-Willows in a Suffolk and Ipswich League Premier or Senior fixture which ended in a 2-2 draw. It's all there, written about half-way down the double page spread layout. For some reason it's written in red ink - maybe I was marking some of my student's work at the time. However, unlike Prince Andrew who can remember the precise day and time he ate a deep pan pizza on a family visit to a certain establishment in Woking seemingly off the top of his head, I'm afraid I cannot tell you anything else about my trip to Stowmarket on this particular day, other than what's written down in front of me. It's now over to you, to work out where you went on this particular day.

Fast forward twenty-eight years and back to today. My quest in trying to find a game that is still going to be being played on grass pays off following a positive reply to text I had sent earlier to Craig Benson, the most helpful secretary of Scunthorpe & District League side, Briggensians FC. As I opened the small yellow Envelope App on my smartphone the words in the latest new message read: *'Martin, the game is still on'*. This was music to my ears (or should that be eyes) and instead of heading to another 3/4G pitch at either of my planned/intended matches: Sculcoates FC or Hessle Sporting Club FC (both Humber Premier League sides), it was in fact my back-up game on grass (it's not often you can say that, is it?) that dictated where I was going today. So after pressing the red 'record' button on the live televised *Sky Sports 1 Soccer* channel I temporarily suspended the desperate midday action from Hull City v Leeds United at the KCOM with the half-time score standing only at 0-1, grabbed my gear (including a breaded ham roll - the corned beef had run out) and headed over 'the bridge' to Brigg.

The journey was easily covered in about twenty minutes as I arrived at a windy Brigg Recreation Ground off Wrawby Road (A18) with plenty of time to spare ahead of kick-off. The entrance (on the right) which is marked *'Football Ground'* comes up about 200 yards after passing the main 'Welcome to Brigg' town information sign post. The facilities, dominated by a large modern changing pavilion which spans almost the entire width of the car park here, are excellent. It is a real sporting hub with plenty of signage on the side of the main building. To the left is the (self-contained) Hawthorns home of Brigg Town FC (you can pick out parts of the stands and floodlights appearing over the top of the perimeter fence); behind is a superb new floodlit full-size multi-use 4G cage with its shocking electric blue pitch (used for hockey today) and an adjacent field over to the right is the one where Briggensians FC play. The pitch, marked beyond a smaller junior version, runs parallel to the synthetic playing area. It's a pretty basic set-up bordered by a belt of extremely tall and imposing plane trees on the right with open countryside beyond and some local residential housing behind the goal at the far end. As expected, there's no cover, dug-outs or even perimeter rope in use on what is a public recreation space. Given the exposed location here the strong winds actually helped to dry and drain the pitch which although soft in places looked perfectly playable unlike their neighbours Brigg Town whose NCEL1 game against Worsborough Bridge Athletic had been postponed due to waterlogging earlier in the morning.

Today's game saw the visit of the current league leaders Ashby Bowl FC to the Brigg Recreation Ground. The Scunthorpe-based side representing the family-run bowling alley and complex in Ashby have had a cracking season and remain unbeaten so far this campaign. They appear likely favourites to win the match over a mid-table home side who have won and lost the same number of games since September. It's fairly tight at the top though with plenty still left to play for as only seven points separate the top five teams (out of nine in the division).

Despite scoring the opening goal through Callum Gilbert (27) Briggensians go into the break 2-1 down as a wiry, bald-headed figure in the shape of Steve 'Spud' Broughton, is on hand (not literally) to score twice (both tap ins from inside the six-yard box) in close succession (40 & 42) to give the visitors the lead. Broughton

(48) then scores again with a bullet header just after the break to claim an impressive hat-trick (all in the space of just eight minutes) to make it 1-3. Henry Tindall adds a fourth rifling the ball home from an acute angle shortly after the hour mark. This seems to take deflate the home players who defend well for most of the second half keeping the final score down to 1-4.

During the afternoon I also get into conversation with the ever-enthusiastic Craig who was playing in goal for Briggensians today at the ripe old age of fifty-four (yes, fifty-four!). What a legend. Apart from his other job as first team coach, he is also carries out the duties of club secretary having been a stalwart at the club over many years. He told me that the side was established back in 1984 by a former schoolteacher Adrian Gibbons who was also deputy head at the old Brigg Grammar School before it merged with the Girls High School to become the Sir John Nelthorpe School in 1976. The site is a stone's throw away from here. He was passionate about sport and started to run a wide range of extra-curricular activities including a football team for some of the former pupils or old boys as they are known. He explained that as one of the alumnae of the *Briggensians Association* himself (he has the tie to prove it), the restriction on allowing only former pupils to represent the club has since been waived in more recent times. Although links to the old grammar school and the BA are still very strong with an active diary of events for its members throughout the year (check out the website [here](#) for more), players representing the club don't need to have that allegiance nowadays.

Craig reminded me that too that anyone promoting the grassroots game should be applauded and they will always be made most welcome if they attend a game here. Hoppers should note that this is a good place to come for a game even when its wet and windy. Considering the dreadful weather, we have endured during the last few months, Briggensians have not had one single game called off both home and away all season - that really is some achievement. Indeed, as a result of this they only have three home games left (all league) to play which occur on three of the next four Saturdays in March: 07/03 v Santon; 14/03 v Scotter United Reserves and 28/03 v Crosby Colts Reserves (all scheduled for 3pm kick-offs according to the generic *FA Full Time* site).

Yet another cracking hop made even better by actually watching a game on grass again. That's twice in two weeks now. Whatever next? I really enjoyed my trip to the Brigg Recreation Ground and a visit here to this friendly, welcoming club, is a must for all collectors of playing fields. If you're looking for a game in bad weather a trip to watch Briggensians should be included on your football and global warming radar. What's not to like. Well, Hull City losing 4-0 to Leeds, that certainly isn't! But that's another story...best consigned to the *Sky Q* box in my opinion. The joy of watching *real* grassroots football being played on *real* grass! Have fun wherever you go.

R No.35: WebEd - Saturday 22nd February 2020; **Pelican Rangers** v South Park Rangers; East Riding County League Division Two; Kick-Off: 2pm; Venue: Pelican Park Playing Fields; Lambwath Road off Summergangs Road; Hull; East Yorkshire; HU8 0EE; Result: 5-1; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 11

You really do have to feel some sympathy for all those non-league clubs who are desperately trying to fulfil fixtures in a season ravaged by the dreadful weather conditions. Take my visit to East Riding County League Division Two side, Pelican Rangers, who are today playing only their eighth game of the season so far. The seemingly never-ending rain has battered their pitch at the Pelican Park playing field so much that this is not only their third home game since October but also their first of the new year. To be honest they are looking at a really busy end of season if they are going to get in those fixtures postponed over the last four months. It's been just as bad trying to play matches away from home too. They saw a call-off at Hornsea Town Reserves - when this happened for the third time, the ERCL fixtures committee finally stepped in to award Pelican an 'away walkover' and all three points. To make matters worse their away league fixture at AFC Gulls was cancelled when their opponents resigned from the league just days before the match was due to be played - and that's nothing to do with the elements! in a nutshell the lack of games has left the club in eighth place out of the ten that now make up the division.

After the club's home game against Souths FC was called off here last week, thanks to the menace that was Storm Dennis, I am happy to see the players of both teams already out on the pitch going through their warm up routines upon my arrival. In fact, there's also couple of mixed junior coaching sessions taking place on mini pitches at the side too - an encouraging sign - if under tens can play, then I'm the sure the men's first team can cope! Mind you it's a bit of a battle to get out of the car with a real gale force wind whipping over the playing field. After chasing after my waterproof trousers that have taken flight from the car boot, across the full length of the car park, I eventually manage to get wrapped up, compose myself and walk across the field ready for the game to start. Phew!!

The ground is based in the Sutton Ings area of Hull which is about three miles to the north east of the city. After coming off Clive Sullivan Way (A63 ring road) at the junction with Hedon Road (*Siemans PLC* is on your right) follow Mount Pleasant (A1033) for about half a mile or so before taking the third exit at the second main roundabout (next to A1 Tyre Services) to join James Reckitt Avenue. Continue for another half-mile until reaching the mini-roundabout turning briefly into Summergangs Road, then almost immediately right into Lambwath Road where the park becomes visible on your right (unsurprisingly) just after the Pelican pub. A narrow-gated entrance and driveways bending to the left leads into the large enclosed site with the car park, playing fields, tennis courts and a modern community centre/pavilion with changing facilities and function room with a kitchen area in front of you.

Some readers may be interested to learn that the playing field actually has its roots in a Hull-based cement manufacturing company called Earle's Cement who purchased the recreation ground known as Pelican Park (after the Pelican Brand Cement) in 1925 - it subsequently became the Blue Circle Group in 1966. It was originally 15-acres in size including a cricket pitch, tennis courts and football pitches. There was an area for allotments which was used by employees and their families to produce home grown vegetables and fruit (which is now housing off Cherry Lane). Two years later in 1927 a new pavilion was opened providing

changing rooms (including toilets with showers); storage rooms; kitchen area and community room for all members of the company to use. In the 1950's, a covered veranda was also built, providing a shelter for cricket on match days.

On 1st November 1985 an announcement was made that Blue Circle in Portland Street, would close, thus ending the association with Hull of G&T Earle and its successors after 157 years. The land was eventually sold to Hull City Council (for a £1) who continued to maintain the site until August 2015, when *Pelican Park Community Trust* gained a 25-year lease for 12.9 acres of green space took over. The Charity is now fully responsible for maintaining and improving much needed sport and recreational facilities in the East of the City of Hull. The aim is to increase community participation, creating a safer playing environment for everyone accessing the many activities on offer at Pelican Park. Qualified members of staff provide educational courses and sports coaching for all ages (with Club 55 aimed at the older age group) and abilities covering cricket, tennis, table tennis and of course football with fifteen teams currently represented from under sevens (boys and girls) right up to veterans. It really is a superb facility and well-respected organisation that does such a lot for the community.

When you arrive here, you will notice immediately that football shares the field and its facilities with local cricket. There's a roped off square in the middle and several portable blue covers placed at various points around its perimeter. The football pitch is marked out over on the far side of the field running parallel to residential housing that backs onto it and bordered by trees and hedges. As expected, there are no dug-outs, spectator cover or even rope at pitch-side. If you look back across the field towards the community centre you will notice a very tall thin brick chimney in the distance, Hull's tallest landmark (141m) which, now derelict, belongs to Reckitt & Sons based half a mile away at neighbouring Bankside. Apparently, it has recently gained greater notoriety after being daubed with some large graffiti resembling a man's private parts which (I'm told) becomes clearer when you drive past (for the record and in the words of one Jose Mourinho, *I didn't see it!*).

Moving on swiftly back to the football. Today Pelican Rangers entertain Old Goole-based side South Park Rangers in a league fixture. With the visitors only one place above them in the table a tight game is in prospect. I'm glad I got here in good time as the visitors open the scoring inside the first five minutes through Shane Williams (4) who stabs the ball home from close range following a cross from the right. The hosts soon level though in somewhat bizarre fashion as Dale Bennett's (12) miscued clearance sends the ball up into the air only to be blown back again beyond him into his own net! As Pelican start to dominate proceedings it's nippy Alex Dickinson who gets a clever brace with a tight angled shot beating the stranded keeper (38) before adding his second (43) at the back post five minutes later to give his side a 3-1 lead going into half-time. After the re-start defender Aaron Blagg (57) beats the off-side trap to add a fourth almost on the hour mark before Dickinson (68) claims his hat-trick with a superb lob over the keeper from distance ten minutes later. It really is a peach of a goal. Despite further chances Pelican happily settle for the 5-1 victory as the game deteriorates as an

increasingly strong wind takes hold in the last fifteen minutes. Despite the difficult conditions, it is a superb advert for county league football.

Most of the game, played down one-side of the pitch (due to the gale), attracted a crowd that grew into double figures by the half-time break. With most braving the elements that's how it stayed until the bitterly cold end. It was certainly a challenge not just for those competing but for those taking an interest (and photos) pitch-side! Thankfully the wind dried the playing surface which although soft in places was perfectly playable. The field also attracted dozens of black-headed gulls which constantly flew overhead throughout the game. 'Twitchers' should take note. Neither matchday programmes nor refreshments are available but my tasty *Sainsburys* meal deal certainly went down a treat at half-time. Credit to young Geordie referee Matthew Teasdale who kept his cool (not literally despite the wind-chill) in what was at times a feisty affair - his use of the sin-bin worked well on a couple of occasions particularly when a mass-brawl broke out in the second-half. In the matches I've attended so far this season it seems to be working, what do you think?

During the game I got into conversation with Chris Smith, the super-friendly team manager who told me how the club had been established only three years ago drawing all his players from local Sunday League sides. He went on to explain how most of his squad had grown up in the same area and knew each other very well from their school days which helped him and them to gel as a unit. As far as playing catch up with the fixtures is concerned, Chris smiles knowing that the end of season will be manic squeezing all the games into just a few weeks in April and May. On days like this he'll just be happy to get in a game. The rest can wait. A bit like hopping, then? It goes without saying that a visit to this lovely friendly club in East Hull comes highly recommended to all hoppers. Have fun wherever you go. Even in weather best suited for ducks.

R No.34: WebEd - Saturday 15th February 2020; **Reckitts AFC** v Walkington; Humber Premier League Premier Division; Kick-Off: 2pm; Venue: Hull University 3G pitch; Inglemire Lane; Hull; East Yorkshire; HU6 7TS; Result: 2-4; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 35

With news that Storm Dennis was waiting to make a menace of itself on Saturday afternoon, I thought it was best to start planning my weekend footy fix a bit earlier than normal. By Wednesday I had made a list of local 'hoppertunities, all new grounds, which reached double figures - just to be on the safe side. These included five games in the East Riding County League; two in the Humber Premier League; two in the York League and one in the Northern Counties East League. Fast forward seventy-two hours and as forecast the rain is lashing against our living room window. The Met Office has issued an Amber warning for both heavy rain and strong gale force winds for the afternoon. It's caused havoc in many places up north and I have no reason to complain when I see the flooding and high-water levels that have already taken over some towns and villages judging by the midday *Sky News* bulletin. It's not surprising when I find my hopping fixture list has been decimated big time with just one game (from my selection) still on, with Reckitts

AFC taking on Walkington in the HPL Premier Division league game on one of the 4G pitches at the Hull University Sports Centre. So that's where I'm heading.

Reckitts AFC has its origins in the world-famous Reckitt and Sons Ltd, an internationally renowned company famed for its quality production in household cleaners and pharmaceuticals. A family run business founded by Sir Isaac Reckitt (b.1792) who moved from Boston to Hull where in 1840 he began renting the starch works of Charles Middleton, in Dansom Lane. It took ten years before the company showed any real signs of viability, but it proved immensely successful, and products branched out from starch to laundry blue and blacking. By the mid-1850s Reckitts employed 51 workers, over half of which were women, starting a tradition of large-scale female employment in Hull. The early success of the company can be attributed largely to the work of Isaac's two elder sons, George and Francis, who acted as travelling sales representatives out on the road, advertising the family brand. The company expanded through the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, merging with a major competitor in the starch market, J & J Colman in 1938, to form Reckitt & Colman. It has provided local employment for over 160 years, and is responsible for the manufacture of many famous and familiar household brands including *Dettol*, *Harpic* and *Lemsip*. Now trading as Reckitt Benckiser following a merger in 1999 it operates on a global scale but has never forgotten its hometown roots in Hull where the Reckitts UK pharmaceutical department still stands on its original location down Dansom Lane.

After World War II the company established a sports section for its workforce and with it an organised football team was formed. It competed in the East Riding Amateur League gaining major success in the early 1990's winning the Premier Division title on three consecutive occasions in 1993;1994 and 1995 before leaving to join the newly formed Humber Premier League just after the turn of the millennium in 2000-01. The club was a true force to be reckoned with and made an immediate impact winning the Premier Division title on no fewer than five times in the first six seasons (Hutton Cranswick won it in 2003-04). Since then the club has only taken the title twice up to the present day - in seasons 2008-09 and 2010-11. Although the links to the Reckitts company and brand are still strong in these parts, it is now recognised that the football club no longer operates as a 'works' side these days but like all other teams draws its players from areas in and around the city.

A quick look at the league table before today's game revealed that the visitors (in sixth) were the in-form side having only lost one of their last seven games (5-0 vs current leaders South Cave United on the South Hunsley School 4G a couple of weeks ago) with the hosts down in fourteenth (out of sixteen teams) having experienced a torrid time of late losing five games during the same period. The *Wraybet* odds were clearly in favour of an away win. And that's exactly how it panned out!

Although the visitors took the lead twice, they were pegged back by a young resilient home side with the score standing at 2-2 on the hour mark. It was exciting end to end stuff with plenty of chances created at both penalty areas. Walkington re-took the lead with just over ten minutes remaining, but were still under

pressure as Reckitts continued to press but couldn't find an equaliser. The game was eventually sewn up as the men from Broadgates added another goal deep into stoppage time making it 2-4 to seal the victory and gain three more valuable points to consolidate their sixth place in the table. Reckitts, on the other hand, remain only four points above the relegation zone after both bottom-placed sides, Barton Town Reserves and North Ferriby Reserves also suffered defeats this afternoon. No doubt they will have a nervous run-in to the end of the season if they are to maintain their Premier Division status.

After all the pre-match concern and hype over Storm Dennis, most of us standing pitch-side agreed that we got off rather lightly under the circumstances. Apart from some squally showers at the start of the game and increasing gusts of wind in the last ten minutes, the weather never really played a significant part in deciding the outcome of the game. Young referee William Dodds and his two linos Dom Hawkins and Fares Alharbi worked hard, allowing play to flow at all times despite the sporadic stiff breeze. About forty spectators were in attendance, the majority choosing to stand on the dug-out side of the ground with their backs to the adjoining 4G hockey pitch where matches were also taking place throughout the afternoon. On several occasions it was quite difficult for players and onlookers to judge which game or pitch the referee's (or umpire's) whistling was actually coming from!! Although Reckitts, like all the other clubs in the league, doesn't issue programmes, refreshments such as hot drinks and snacks are available from a couple of vending machines placed at the end of the corridor inside the adjoining pavilion.

I was also joined pitch-side by a couple of local hoppers Stephen and Paul whom I found to be excellent company as we exchanged news about our adventures in the local leagues. Stephen runs a video blog covering his matches and Paul also follows rugby and speedway as well as football. In fact, they told me that they were in two minds about coming here this afternoon when they discovered East Riding Rangers FC had switched their HPL Division One game with Hessle Sporting Club from their normal venue at the Cottingham Pavilion to the 4G pitch at Bishop Burton College on the outskirts of Beverley. This was something I was unaware of and apparently, they did a similar thing back in November when the weather was equally as bad, so it's one worth looking out for in the future. Hoppers may also be interested to learn that another game was taking place immediately after this one between AFC North and Gilberdyke Phoenix in the East Riding County League Division Three. This had been hastily rearranged when the pitch at the RWB playing field in Bransholme was deemed unplayable - readers might recognise this ground after my visit there only couple of weeks back (see R No.32 below for more).

Travellers intending to take in a game at the Hull University Sports Grounds will be impressed by the facilities here. Located off Inglemire Lane about three miles to the west of the city, the ground can be approached from Willerby, Cottingham and Beverley. It was a familiar route having watched a game here last year when I attended Chalk Lane v East Riding Rangers on 16/03/19 - 3-0. I parked up at the Sports Centre (free on a Saturday) which incorporates a superb sports hall, squash courts (a regular venue for the World Squash Championships - sponsored by the Allam family owners of Hull City FC) and a magnificent first floor fitness studio and

weights room. As Hull University offered its site as a training partner for the 2012 Olympic Games, many athletes from all over the world used the facilities as part of their build up to the London Olympics. All the football pitches are found almost side by side on the opposite side of Inglemire Lane (a two-minute walk away, if that). It's a veritable hoppers's paradise.

Reckitts FC play on one of two floodlit pitches found behind the main pavilion (signposted) which provides a central multi changing room block and conference suite. The main central 4G pitch is also used by Chalk Lane FC fellow members of the HPL and on the rare occasion when the two clubs are at scheduled to play at home Reckitts also use the adjoining multi-use pitch (marked out for Rugby League as well as football) over to the left. You can't miss it as its covered in so many colourful lines you have to squint to work it all out. There's also a third 3G pitch over to the right which is predominantly used by both men's and women's hockey clubs playing in local league competitions. Completing the full set is the East Riding County FA HQ ground, which hosts county cup games and finals on a grass pitch which is a found next door (on the right further along Inglemire Lane) - you can easily see it from the changing pavilion. The central pitch has a user-friendly low perimeter fence around it with a dedicated walkway behind that for spectators who can watch the game from all sides of the playing area. Today the players had to use a second entrance gate on the side of the pitch next to the dug-outs (the only cover on site) as the main one next to the changing rooms was still locked. Luckily, I was given access into the cage in order to take photos. Phew.

So, on a day when I didn't really expect to get to a game, I got lucky at the Hull University Sports Ground. In fact, seven games including this one took place this afternoon in the HPL Premier (with Beverley Town and Pocklington both on grass and Hull United; Hessle Rangers; Hedon Rangers and South Cave United, all 3/4G). To be honest as there are very few call-offs here I would recommend a visit even in the worst weather to all hoppers. Furthermore, you'll find that Reckitts Football Club is a lovely well-run club and if you take in one of their games you will definitely be given a warm welcome here. It's also great to see one of the city's oldest non-league football clubs still going strong after all these years. Long may it continue.

R No.33: WebEd - Saturday 8th February 2020; **Consett AFC** v Deal Town; FA Vase Round 5; Kick-Off: 3pm; Venue: Belle View Stadium; Delves Lane; Consett; Durham; DH87BF; Result: 2-0; Admission: £7; Programme: Yes, 32pp, £1.50; Attendance: 866

A bit of background to begin with. If you prefer to skip this section start at paragraph seven (which begins: *The magic of the Vase...*) instead. The club was established on 1 July 1899 as Consett Celtic Football Club. They joined the Northern Alliance in 1919, and were renamed Consett in 1922. They finished bottom of the league in 1922-23, but were runners-up in 1925-26. At the end of the season all the clubs in the league joined the North Eastern League as members of the new Division Two. They were the first Division Two champions in 1926-27, earning promotion to Division One. However, after finishing second-from-bottom of Division One in 1930-31, they were relegated back to Division Two.

After finishing second-from-bottom of Division One in 1934-35, they left to return the Northern Alliance, which had been re-established. However, after two seasons in the Northern Alliance, they re-joined the North Eastern League, which was now running with a single division. When the league was suspended in 1939 following the outbreak of World War II, a competition was run with ten clubs, which Consett won. In 1946-47 they finished seventh in the league and subsequently applied for election to the Football League. However, no vote took place and the four clubs up for re-election retained their places in the Football League. The club went on to win the League Cup in 1950-51 and 1953-54.

When the North Eastern League was disbanded in 1958, Consett spent the 1958-59 and 1959-60 seasons in the Midland League, also reaching the first round of the FA Cup for the first time in 1958-59, losing 5-0 at Doncaster Rovers. In 1960 they were founder members of the Northern Counties League; the club were champions in 1961-62, and the league was renamed the North Eastern League in 1962. They finished bottom of the league in 1963-64, with the league disbanded at the end of the season. The club subsequently joined the Wearside League. They were runners-up in 1968-69 and 1969-70, after which the club joined the Northern League. In 1976-77 they finished joint top of the table with Spennymoor United, but lost the championship play-off 3-0 in a match played at Willington. They were later relegated to Division Two after finishing bottom of Division One in 1987-88.

The 1988-89 season saw Consett win Division Two at the first attempt, earning an immediate return to Division One. They won the League Cup in 1994-95 with a 2-0 win over Whitby Town in the final, and in 1996-97 the club reached the first round of the FA Cup for a second time, losing 4-0 at Mansfield Town. The early 2000s saw the club yo-yo between the divisions, as they were relegated in 2002-03, promoted in 2003-04, relegated again in 2004-05 and promoted again in 2005-06 after winning Division Two. They went on to finish as Division One runners-up in 2007-08, 2008-09 and again in 2010-11.

The club originally played at Vicarage Field, which was owned by the Consett Iron Company. Spectator facilities were restricted to a small stand, with an army hut used for changing rooms. However, in 1948 the site was needed for expansion of the steelworks. They spent two seasons at Eden Colliery Welfare's Leadgate ground before returning to Consett to play at the new Belle Vue Park ground on Ashdale Road. Built largely by volunteers, the new ground had banking around the pitch made from mine workings, with two stands erected, one of which was paid for by the £1,150 transfer fee received from Charlton Athletic for Tommy Lumley. The first match at Belle Vue Park was played in August 1950, attracting a record attendance of 7,000 to see a game against Sunderland reserves. One of the stands was later closed, although the steel structure was left in place. The remaining stand consisted of covered bench seating and a small terraced area in front.

The club played at Belle Vue Park until 2013, when they moved to a new ground on Delves Lane, named Belle View Stadium. The new ground only a mile away included an artificial pitch after the 2012-13 season had seen 18 matches at Belle Vue Park postponed due to the weather. The first match was played on 22

November, with Newcastle United the visitors; a crowd of 3,054 saw Newcastle win 2-1.

The magic of the Vase. Today were heading towards Durham for the much-awaited FA Vase tie between Consett AFC and opponents Deal Town. With a couple of comfort stops along the route to break up the journey we arrive at Consett town centre with plenty of time to spare ahead of kick-off. Fran and Steph are well placed for some retail therapy as I drop them off before making my way half-a-mile back down the road to watch the football.

The ground entrance (signposted) is easy to spot and all the main club buildings are found at the end of a narrow driveway over on the far side of a large landscaped car park. Two visiting supporters club coaches were already in place having made the long journey from deepest Kent. There's plenty of signage on the outer perimeter wooden panelled fencing which soon comes into view. A rush of excitement takes hold as you spot the top of a floodlight pylon behind the tiled roof. There's no mistaking where you are with the club name and impressive colourful logo proudly displayed on the outer red-brick walls of the pavilion, next to the payment turnstile at the end. Access through the modern bar (packed already on my arrival) with neatly labelled doors leads to the playing area as you come out midway between the half-way line and the edge of the eighteen-yard box through the back door. You will notice immediately that the playing area is not set inside a cage (like most 3G multi-use facilities these days) but is surrounded by a regular metal fence you would expect to find at any ground. There are two seated covered areas at Belle View with one just beyond half-way on the nearside and another on the opposite side close to half-way. Both ends are open standing with large string netting sheets supported on tall green posts immediately behind both goals stretching from corner to corner. This doesn't affect viewing the game in any way as the mesh is wide enough to see through when you stand behind it - it's all to do with perspective I believe. My wife nods in agreement and being an Art teacher, I can't really argue with that. Two very modern dug outs each displaying the club name on the back are positioned level with the half-way line on the nearside. From here you can easily spot the tall TV mast (149m) from the Pontop Pike transmitting station situated on a 312-metre (1,024-ft) high hill of the same name between Stanley and Consett. Look out too for the vast array of home flags and banners attached to the outer perimeter fencing - I think there was one which read: *Consett Seaside - BFC!*

To reach this stage of the competition (last sixteen) Consett had beaten Lutterworth (UCL) 2-1 in the last round in a game that kicked off an hour late due to strong winds whilst Deal were forced into a marathon-long tie against Binfield following a 1-1 draw (after extra-time) at The Charles Ground and then beating them a week later in a replay at Stubb's Lane which finished 2-2 at full-time; 3-3 after extra-time and 7-6 on penalties! Phew! Although today's game was made more challenging by the stiff breeze it looked at one stage as if it was heading into a stalemate and possibly extra time before finally coming to life in the last twenty minutes. Following increasing pressure in the second half Consett made the breakthrough when Luke Carr (75) turned in Ali Ashabeeb's cross from close range. The result was put beyond doubt when captain Arjun Purewal (85) met Jake

Orrell's corner and headed past the stranded keeper James Tonkin. Dale Pearson thought he had given Consett their third when he slotted home at the back post only for it to be ruled out by the eagle-eyed lino for offside. Deal Town accepted defeat graciously with boss Derek Hayes admitting: *'In the first half particularly we had to do a lot of defending but it's what we were expecting. The first goal was always going to be crucial they got it and, in the end, they deserved to win'*.

The match played in mostly dull, windy and by the end very cold conditions on what appeared to be a rather fading 3G pitch, attracted a superb crowd of 866 (the second highest attendance after 1041 attended Wroxham v Stowmarket) in this round of the eight Vase games played today. Incredibly over a hundred fans had made the long 356-mile journey from Deal, setting off from Kent at 6am from the football club car park. What time must their alarms have gone off at? As I made my way around the ground, I managed to have a chat with quite a few of the travelling supporters who made it clear just how much this cup run meant since their heroics twenty years ago winning the final 1-0 against Chippenham Town in 2000 at the old Wembley Stadium. One very vocal character called Harry proved very popular watching the game from the far stand with his small band of fellow fans dressed in their black and white scarves - what set him apart though was the fact he was wearing shorts even though the temperature was dipping below zero. Believe me it was bitterly cold. I had several layers on and it still wasn't enough - what a wimp! But not to be outdone one of the home fans could be heard making his way around the ground ringing a large bell town crier style! After ten minutes the novelty starting to wear off amongst those standing next to him.

The club issued a cracking 32-page programme (available at the turnstile) entitled the *Steelman* with plenty of stuff to read inside including excellent coverage of this week's opponents and their FA Vase results so far in the competition. The tea bar was also doing a roaring trade dispensing a range of hot drinks and food as well as the usual snacks from the hatch next to the main bar. On a day like this it was worth the extra effort, I'm sure.

Travellers intending to make a visit to Belle View should find it an easy ground to reach using the A691 from Durham. As you approach the outskirts of the town take a left turn down Stockerley Lane and continue along this road for about a mile before it becomes Delves Lane. The ground is found on the right-hand side of the road just before you get to the crossroads with the A692 on the edge of town. It is in quite an elevated spot so bring plenty of warm layers when you come to watch a game!

This had been another superb afternoon's entertainment that will no doubt stick in the memory for some time. A trip to this lovely part of the world with its well-appointed ground and really friendly club comes with my highest recommendation. The long drive home suddenly didn't seem so bad after all particularly when you consider that the majority of those loyal visiting fans were travelling back down to Kent soon after the final whistle, with only a six-hour journey ahead of them. Ouch! Now, isn't that what makes non-league football so enjoyable? The magic of the FA Vase continues - especially for those eight clubs left in the competition. I

wonder who'll be lucky in Monday's draw for the sixth round? Have fun wherever you go, be it near or far...

R No.32: WebEd - Saturday 1st February 2020; **AFC North** v St George AFC; East Riding County FA Intermediate Cup Quarter-Final; Kick-Off: 2pm; Venue: RWB Playing Field; Lothian Way; Bransholme; Hull; East Yorkshire; HU75BN; Result: 3-3 (4-1pens); Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 16

It was exactly four years ago today that young Bransholme mum of two Rebecca Waller-Beecham passed away after a short battle with stomach cancer. Aged only twenty-five at the time of her death on the 1st February 2016 Becky had been a popular and loving character amongst her peers living on the North Hull estate where she had grown up from being a small toddler. During her short life she was also a keen fan of the local football club AFC North.

Some eighteen months since her passing the club felt that it would be appropriate to remember her in some tangible way. Her touching story was covered at the time by Helen Whitehouse reporter for the *Hull Live* website who wrote: *'Tragic Bransholme mum, 25, will be remembered on the estate forever as football team names ground after her'*. The article written on 23/08/17 continued: *'Her dad, Colin Beecham, 51, said: 'We thought naming the ground after her would be a fitting tribute for her because she always supported us when we played there. Various members of the family have played there over the years and she always came down when she could, when she wasn't working. It used to be a playing field and Becky played on there when she was a child too. It's something that that will be there long after I've gone and a good way to remember her. She was diagnosed with the devastating disease in December 2015 and died in February 2016. As a family we are so proud of Becky and the way she dealt with her cancer'*.

Today I'm attending the RWB Playing Fields for the East Riding County FA Intermediate Cup tie between AFC North and St George AFC which has reached the quarter-final (last eight) stage of the competition. It's an intriguing fixture as both sides are having a decent season in their respective divisions of the East Riding County League. Although it looks a bit like a David v Goliath affair on paper, AFC North, who currently sit at the top of Division Three having lost only once all season (at home 1-3 v Malt Shovel) must fancy their chances this afternoon against their mid-table Premier Division opponents who have only won one of their last five games. There's also plenty of local rivalry to add into the mix with the visitors making the short trip from the neighbouring Kingswood estate which is literally just up the road.

The game which turned out to be a real belter went right down to the hopping wire. Despite going a goal down just after the half-hour mark, when the visitors' Luke Martin (34) followed up a blocked shot from close range, the hosts were soon level through Harry Bennett (42) who turned quickly in the six-yard box to steer the ball home. In the space of just two minutes AFC North then took the lead through Josh Thompson (44) who tapped the ball in at the back post following a deep cross from the left, moments before half-time. Shortly after the break it was Thompson (52) again who then added a third to put his side firmly in control of the game and a possible place in the semi-final. Their lead was reduced on the half-

hour though as the visitors pulled one back through a calamitous header made by Ellis Edmonds (61) who put the ball through his own goal to make it 3-2. AFC North's hearts were broken with only seconds of the match remaining as St George snatched a late equaliser from the penalty spot, calmly taken by Liam Acton (89), after a foul was committed just inside the box. In order to decide the winner, the referee indicated that the game would go straight to penalties (rather than play extra-time): with AFC North scoring all four of their spot kicks and St George missing two of theirs, it was the hosts who were declared the winner by 4-1 to progress into the last four of the competition. It had been a terrific game of cup football and a great advert for the ERCFL.

The match played in mainly bright but very windy conditions on a very bumpy, unmown pitch, attracted a dozen or more spectators many of whom gathered to enjoy their cans of *Carlsberg Special Brew* in the stand. As expected, neither paper nor refreshments featured on the hopper's radar for this game. A word must go to affable match referee Dave Lawley from Anlaby who controlled the game expertly having a great rapport with all the players of both teams - even when he had to stop the game on no less than three occasions shortly after the start to request the removal of dog poo from the pitch!!

Colin, co-founder (along with his nephew) who adopted the name AFC North (after its location in North Bransholme, in case you were still wondering), told me just how far the club has come in the last few years. The club was established back in 2011 (as shown on the embroidered shirt badge) when a group of local youngsters were invited for a kick-about on their recreation ground. It was seen not only as a way to develop their sporting and social skills, but also a chance to promote a positive culture on the estate rather the norm of 'hanging about on street corners'. So, from humble beginnings the group of young footballers that had numbered just a handful at the start soon grew big enough to play competitively. Within months AFC North entered a couple of teams in the ERCL. He also explained, with a slight break in his voice, how the club now creates its own funds, by organising an annual *Summer Fun Day* (see the club's dedicated *Facebook* page). Held on the playing fields each year it has helped to raise enough money to build a new stand which now sits proudly behind the near-side touchline close to the half-way. His wife Lesley re-iterated the fact that they are definitely a proactive family-run club with everyone on the North Bransholme estate helping out in some way or another to make improvements both on and off the field.

The name Bransholme is derived from an old Scandinavian word meaning Brand's water meadow - *brand* or *brandt* meant 'wild boar'. Its history goes at least as far back as the Domesday Book of 1086 where Bransholme is marked as a little hill surrounded by water. At this time the settlement known as *Sudtone* (now Sutton) occupied a strip of high ground forming a connecting link between *Wagene* (later becoming Wawne village). Built back in the 1950's and 1960's, the council aimed to create more housing for young families living in Hull. The overflow from the city has made this into one of Britain's largest such developments of pre-fabricated houses to form a vast sprawling council estate. A growing number of the houses are now boarded up, in particular many of the bungalows which were intended for occupation by the estate's older residents. The quality of the houses on the estate

has been in question ever since their construction. Many of the houses have only small windows on the front, being small horizontal slits and, although these have proved efficient in maintaining security, many residents have complained their houses lack light and are unpleasant to live in. The houses have had condensation problems and the heating systems have often been described as being inadequate.

Despite its labyrinth-style appearance and layout, the ground itself is quite easy to find off Cumbrian Way (rather than Lothian Way as suggested on the *FA Full-Time* site) with plenty of parking along this outer ring-road which runs alongside the pitch. You could say you are almost in the sticks here as this is the most northerly road in Hull with mile upon mile of open fields and countryside continuing beyond this. The field is visible after passing the adjoining Highlands School (also) on the left hand-side of the road. The RWB Playing field previously known as the Lemon Tree Sports Field (after the local adjoining day nursery) is bordered on the road side by a long brown three barred wooden fence (coming up to waist height) running along the near side, a couple of industrial units at one end and (mostly) by local housing which makes for a terrific back-drop to the action behind the right-hand side (furthest) touchline. There's certainly an enclosed feel about the place.

Access to the field is gained through a narrow pedestrian entrance close to the corner flag where a neat welcome sign with a cream background displaying the name of the club and (more poignantly) carrying a small photo of Becky printed on the top left-hand corner is positioned in the ground just behind the fence. The main (albeit fairly modest at present) facilities are found along this side of the field where there is a new small covered breeze-block stand with sloping roof, central dividing wall and bench seating at the back, enough to provide shelter for up to twenty fans. In the corner beyond is a long blue painted shipping storage container (set at an angle to the pitch) used by both teams for changing purposes (via two separate doors built into it). On the far side there is an angular Perspex covered stand positioned close to half-way. Sadly, this was lying flat on its front on the grass when I got there - possibly as a safety precaution fearing it might not be secure enough to withstand strong winds (especially on a blustery day like this). At the moment there are no permanent pitch side dug outs.

So, at the end of what was quite an emotional day, this had been a special ground tick. I can strongly recommend a visit to AFC North at the RWB playing fields in North Bransholme to all football travellers. Next up for the lads will be the small matter of travelling into West Hull next Saturday for the ERCL Division Three league game against Malt Shovel (to be played on the Sirius Academy 3G) - it's an important game as they are still the only team to have beaten the league leaders so far this season. *Wraybet* HQ wouldn't like to call the odds on this one. Like all non-league football trips, you never quite know what you're going to get until you arrive - just like today. It will certainly be one to live in the memory. RIP Becky.

R No.31: *WebEd* - Saturday 25th January 2020; **Hull City** v Chelsea; FA Cup Fourth Round; Kick-Off: 5.30pm; Venue: KCOM Stadium; West Park; Hull; East Yorkshire; HU36HU; Result: 1-2; Admission: £18; Programme: Yes, 68pp, £3; Attendance: 24109

There was a momentary pause as the famous numbered balls were about to be drawn out of the legendary velvet bag. It would decide the fate of the thirty-two sides that would be competing in the forthcoming FA Cup Fourth round. The Tigers was the third ball (no.25) to be pulled out, giving them a home draw (for only the third time in the last twenty cup-draws) against Premier League side Chelsea. In the following days when all the match details had been finalised, it was revealed that tickets would go on general sale after the season ticket holders and match ticket subscribers had been allocated their initial share. So, after a nervous wait, news came through on the club site that a limited number of tickets had become available - once you logged in as a member, you would have a chance to purchase them on-line. With the prices slashed by half-price to £18 it was a no-brainer and too good an 'hoppertunity to miss. Luckily my one-finger speed-typing proved successful and I was able to get three tickets for seats situated in the West Stand (Upper). Phew!

No sooner had the first part of my Saturday Double Hop (at ERCL-side Costello FC - see *R No.30* below) concluded, it was then just a case of picking up Fran and Steph from *FGIF* HQ before continuing the short distance over to the Park & Ride at Priory Park, less than a mile away from home. The *Wray-mobile* and the other road users behaved themselves as we made good time (within the speed limit) and it wasn't long before we were heading on the dedicated Tigers Travel double-decker bus sporting a really snazzy tiger-themed paint job to the KCOM. Having already been advised about traffic congestion due to continuing road works along Walton Street (next to the ground), we thought it would be easier and less stressful to let the bus take the strain and so it proved as the driver dropped us off at West Park, a good hour ahead of kick-off. Game on!!

No doubt many of you will have read the continuing battle between the fans and the club's owners over the last few years. Much animosity directed at the Allam's has been due to their failure to sell the club on to new owners (it's been up for sale since 2016). There has also be great consternation among home fans about the pricing structure here with the club waiving concessions to juniors and OAPs in its poorly planned Membership Scheme model. As a result, many regulars have simply voted with their feet and attendances have dropped to an all-time low at the KCOM this season; who can forget the paltry 9826 who turned up for the Preston North End FL Championship game in November?! The upshot of all this means that some sections of the ground have been closed as the demand has fallen.

So, for the first time in many months and with a full capacity crowd expected for the visit of Chelsea the club has decided to re-open those areas including the West Upper section where we take up our seats for tonight's match. To be honest, it's a bit of a climb up there but it's a cracking view from our elevated position (between the edge of the box and the half-way line). As kick-off approaches the atmosphere intensifies with plenty of pyrotechnics and a light show thrown in to mark the arrival of the players onto the pitch. As the team line-ups and subs for both teams are relayed over the PA by an excited announcer (a bit like the guy who introduces the acts on *X-Factor*), it seems that the Tigers have put out a young side (including three new signings in the current Transfer Window) with Chelsea holding back some of their big names. Steph is happy though because

Willian is named in their squad with a chance that he might come on as a sub later in the game.

For the record it was goals from Michy Batshuayi (6) and Fikayo Tomori (64) that helped Chelsea hold off a late Hull City fightback to earn a 2-1 win in this intriguing tie. Batshuayi's sixth-minute deflected opener set Chelsea on their way to a dominant opening half where they passed up a number of chances to add to their lead, and found home goalkeeper George Long on top of his game. Hull improved after half-time but a sucker-punch second looked to have sealed Chelsea's path when ex-Hull loanee Tomori headed in Ross Barkley's free-kick just after the hour mark. But with 12 minutes to go, substitute Kamil Grosicki's (78) free-kick took a massive deflection off Mateo Kovacic's boot to find the far corner and give the hosts a lifeline. The Sky Bet Championship side pushed for a late equaliser in front of a sell-out home crowd but could not test Willy Caballero any further, as Chelsea progressed to round five for the fifth season in a row.

Although Jarrod Bowen was awarded *Man of the Match*, many felt that keeper George Long had made a greater impact on the game. Without him being in such inspired form, Hull would have been dead and buried by half-time but the quality of Long's performance kept them in the game, with two excellent saves from Mount and Barkley - the second a wonderful instinctive left-handed stop which denied Chelsea a more comfortable half-time lead. As match referee Craig Pawson blew the final whistle, we were left wondering whether this was going to be one of the last few games that we would see the likes of star players Jarrod Bowen and Kamil Grosicki playing in a Tigers shirt amid rumoured exits from the KCOM. With the January Transfer Window about to close firmly in just over a week's time, it remains to be seen if this is in fact the case. Watch this space, as they say.

The match played on a superbly manicured playing surface in cold conditions (well, it is January, after all) attracted 24109 spectators, making it a record crowd for an FA Cup tie at the KCOM (since 20993 turned up here for the visit of Arsenal on 8th March 2016). A terrific full-colour 68-page glossy programme containing plenty of reading material and stats was priced at £3. I was pleased that it was designed in a regular A5 format, so much easier to read, fit in the rucksack and store in a loft-bound shoe-box later! It was also interesting to read the about Chelsea's last appearance here (for a PL fixture back in 2016, 0-2) in the *Last Time at the KCOM* section. The double page spread on pages 50-51 complete with old photos was poignant: I wonder how many readers will remember the FA Cup Fifth round tie(s) between the two club's back in April 1966 when the Tigers drew 2-2 at Stamford Bridge before losing the replay at Boothferry Park 3-1 in front of 45328 a week later - I've still got both programmes from these games today). A poor range of very expensive snacks and drinks was available from the many food kiosks spread throughout the concourses in each stand.

Despite the result it had been another great (second of the day) hop for obvious reasons. Although I love watching non-league football it makes a welcome change to attend a professional game once in a while. With the chance to watch your boyhood team play for a fraction of the normal admission price, against quality opposition, in a full stadium with a terrific atmosphere, what is there, not to like!?

We managed to arrive home just in time to watch the *Voice UK* on ITV - how fitting it was then that Tom Jones, one of the judges, sang the classy 'Green, Green, Grass of Home' all those years ago. The dreams of FA Cup glory and the joys of watching professional football is temporarily re-kindled. Have fun wherever you go.

R No.30: WebEd - Saturday 25th January 2020; **Costello** v Little Driffield; East Riding County League Division Five; Kick-Off: 2pm; Venue: Costello Playing Field; Anlaby Park Road North; Hull; East Yorkshire; HU46XQ; Result: 4-1; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 15

With tickets already purchased for Hull City's forthcoming FA Cup Fourth Round tie against Chelsea (via the general sale allocation), the question was not could my beloved Tigers spring a surprise on their Premier League opponents but could I get in another game before the action started at the KCOM Stadium on Saturday evening. With the cup tie being scheduled for a 5.30pm kick-off time to meet live broadcasting coverage on *BT Sport*, it was also a case of matchday logistics to find a game that would allow plenty of time to reach West Park later. A quick check on the local fixtures revealed that west Hull-based side Costello FC were playing at home to Little Driffield in a county league match that started at 2pm. Thankyou Hopping Gods! This fitted the bill perfectly - it was only a mile and a half around the corner (within an easy five-minute drive of *FGIF* HQ) meaning I could get back in plenty of time to pick up Fran and Steph who were also coming with me on the dedicated *Tigers Travel* supporters bus to the KCOM afterwards. In truth, as the ground was so close to home I thought it might be better to leave it as a last resort (maybe on a day when the car was out of action and I could walk there) or on a day when I was running short for time - and this certainly was one of those!

Costello Football Club is an established FA Chartered standard club that has played football since the year 2000 participating in local junior leagues (with 27 boys' and girls' teams) for a number of seasons. They have for the first time in their history entered a new men's team to play at the lowest level of the ERCL this season. After a really shaky start, the club found itself at the bottom of the Division Five table for several weeks. Affable and hard-working first team coach Phil Peters told me that it was a bit of a learning curve at first for many of the young players who found it difficult to make the step up from youth football and having to compete with essentially more physical adult players and teams. But fair play (pardon the pun) to them as they have stuck with it and are now starting to win games (three out of the last four) to lift themselves away from the relegation zone and climb towards mid table (of the fourteen-teams competing in this division) security. Today's game would be an intriguing contest with the Costello (now up to fifth) entertaining Little Driffield (themselves re-entering the league after a year's break in 2018-19), who have made an encouraging start to the campaign winning two of their last three games and sitting just one place above their hosts, in fourth.

For the record it was Costello who opened the scoring when Jacob Moon-Dunn (10) lobbed the ball over the keeper from 25-yards out following a terrible goal-kick to give the hosts a 1-0 lead going into the break. Ellis Clayton (52) was on hand to add a second through a cheeky close-range lob just after the interval before Cailean

Hutchinson (59) and Felix Frost (68) added two more (both identical tap-ins at the back post) to make it 4-0. The visitors managed to pull one back when Adam Parker (70) beat the off-side trap to slot the ball home from a tight angle moments later. With several chances missed by both sides the score remained 4-1 to give Costello all three points and see them move up to fourth leap-frogging their opponents who dropped down into the bottom half of the table. The match played in mainly dull conditions on a bumpy tacky pitch attracted a dozen or so spectators. It was great to see the Little Driffield FC lads wearing their woolly bobble hats during the warm up, a great cause in supporting the *Oddballs Foundation* in raising awareness of testicular cancer.

It was by a stroke of luck that match referee Andy Revell from Hornsea was also heading to the KCOM after this afternoon's game today. Knowing this ahead of kick-off was a real relief I can tell you - he certainly wasn't in the mood to waste any time as evidenced by: starting the game slightly early; having a shorter than normal half-time break and not holding play up unnecessarily meant that the final whistle sounded at 3.35pm. It was just the ticket (pardon the pun) for a time-crunched hopper! Neither programmes nor refreshments were available for the match as you would expect at this level.

The club plays its games at the Costello Playing Fields, a vast green landscaped recreation space (popular with young families and dog walkers). Bordered by residential housing and tall trees on all sides it is located next to the city's prestigious athletics stadium of the same name which appears on many of brown visitor direction signs on the major roads leading into Hull. It is easy to reach from the Humber Bridge roundabout (A15 and A164 interchange) by taking the main Boothferry Road dual carriageway heading towards the city. As the vast playing fields are sandwiched in between two separate parallel roads (which run on either side of the park) you can use either junction (both marked by traffic lights): firstly, by turning left down Anlaby Park Road North (the ground address used on *FA Full-Time*) which leads to the athletics club or secondly, by following Pickering Road (the next major turning on the left) as far as the *Warner's Health & Fitness Club* (next to the police station) with ample car parking at both.

As the main pitch on site (one of five marked out) is found slightly nearer to the Pickering Road entrance, I decided to park at the sports club park (in view of my next game it was also better placed for a quick getaway afterwards). From here a narrow path on the edge of the park takes you to one of the main changing pavilions (there are three on site) which is about 100 yards from here - this one with bricked sides, boarded up windows and low angled tiled roof is situated next to a mini concrete practice court/pitch and some smart floodlit tennis courts the pylons from which help to make it a useful landmark. The main (un-rope) pitch (on the right) is closest to the changing rooms and runs parallel to the housing backing onto it from Pickering Road. As you would expect its quite basic here with no spectator facilities or dug-outs at pitch-side. From the far side of the field it is possible to pick out the tower from the north side of the distant Humber Bridge peeking out above the athletics grandstand in the foreground. The sight of the track also brought back many fond memories of my teenage years training and

competing here for cross-country and middle-distance competitions running as a member of the City of Hull AC (now called Kingston upon Hull AC).

It had been a lovely hop (buoyed no doubt by the anticipation of heading to the KCOM). I found everyone associated with the Costello Football Club to be most friendly and welcoming and would definitely recommend a visit here to all grounds' collectors. And so, with half an eye on the watch I made my way briskly along the path to the edge of the field and gone back in car making a pretty quick getaway (in true hopping style)...with the second part of my hopping double just around the corner (literally) I couldn't contain my excitement...

R No.29: WebEd - Saturday 18th January 2020; **Cherry Burton** v Hutton Cranswick RSA; East Riding County League Premier Division; Kick-Off: 2pm; Venue: Cherry Burton Sports Field; The Meadows (off Bishop Burton Road); Cherry Burton; Beverley; East Yorkshire; HU177SH; Result: 0-0; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 12

Cherry Burton Football Club is a new club competing in the East Riding County League this season. Formed as recently as six months ago following an alleged fall-out between players, management and the committee members at Beverley Town Reserves FC (also ERCL) and the demise of Beverley Town Academy FC (former ERCL) with the exodus of players leaving to create a new club. The team has performed exceptionally well during its first season in the top flight of the county league. A quick glimpse at the current *FA Full-Time* league table highlights this fine form as the Cherries (see the new club logo) currently sit proudly in top spot, four points clear over second placed West Hull Amateurs FC (and with a superior plus twenty goal-difference). Indeed, they have only lost once in the league all season when suffering a 0-3 defeat at the hands of Kingswood-based St George FC here, back in November.

Today's game sees the visit of Hutton Cranswick RSA to the Cherry Burton Sports Field off Bishop Burton Road. With only eight miles separating the villages there's plenty of local rivalry between both clubs. Having only lost once themselves all season, Cranswick have unfortunately thrown away needless points on too many occasions throughout this campaign, with a run that includes four drawn matches (out of the last six league games), a scenario that has seen them drop down into fourth place in the eleven-team table. Although the stats don't lie as they say, a tight and hard-fought contest is still expected this afternoon. On the day before the match a message was posted on the hosts *twitter* page which read: '*We welcome @CranswickSra to Cherry Burton this week as we look to carry on our fine form in the league! Always an entertaining game between the two sides! Why not come down and support the lads, and support local football!*'.

Despite great endeavour from the players of both sides neither could break the deadlock today and the game ended in a frustrating 0-0 draw. Based on the amount of overall possession and chances created, Cranswick had the edge and looked the more likely to win the game. The Cherries' performance was below par today and they certainly didn't look like the side that I had seen back in October when they beat West Hull Amateurs 8-2 in a league game played at the Kelvin Hall School 3G on a very cold and wet afternoon- see R No.26 below. For the record this

was my first 0-0 draw since attending Hessle Rangers (v North Ferriby United) in the goalless Humber Premier League Premier Division fixture played on the Wolfreton 3G in Willerby on 31/03/18 (according to my little blue stats book, that's eighty-eight games ago!).

The match played in cold, bright sunny conditions on a sticky but firm playing surface attracted a dozen or so spectators. As expected, neither paper nor refreshments were forthcoming on my visit. A minor concern. I was fortunate to have a chat with highly regarded local press photographer Paul Linton who (with his customary giant f2.8 telephoto zoom lens) was attending the early stages of the game as part of his afternoon itinerary which featured staggered visits to Middleton Rovers FC (who play in this division of the ERCL) and Driffield RUFC both on his schedule after leaving here. He's a lovely guy whom I've had the pleasuring of chatting to on many of my local hops watching games in the surrounding area over the last two-and-a-bit seasons since relocating to East Yorkshire. In fact, the last time we bumped into each other was over at Driffield Junior FC in a Humber Premier League game played at Allotment Lane back in December. It's also encouraging to see his excellent photos appear next to a weekly non-league football round up section in the *Driffield & Wolds Weekly*, one of few papers out there to devote such an in-depth coverage to the grass roots game. Long may this continue!

The village itself is mentioned in the Domesday Book as *Burtone*, belonging to the then Archbishop of York. The name derives from a combination of Old and Middle English; *Burh-tūn* and *Chiri*, which means a fort enclosure; a farm with a palisade and a cherry tree. Due to its location, about a mile north of Bishop Burton, the village was sometimes known as *North Burton* (or even rarer, as *Sheriff Burton*). The village is also one of a few in the UK to be awarded *Fairtrade Village* status for promoting fair-trade and local produce. It gained this status in July 2003 and was the second village to do so. Like many other places in the East Riding of Yorkshire, Cherry Burton was also subject to severe flooding in the 2007 floods.

The ground, located only a couple of miles from Beverley town centre (and the racecourse) can easily be reached as you enter the southern fringes of the village. The main entrance found off The Meadows can be accessed from one of two approaches: either from the main Bishop Burton Road at one end or Main Street at the other end. After leaving the A1079 (York road) I turned right onto Bishop Burton Road and continued along this for about a mile when the ground soon becomes visible through a belt of trees upon a rolling hill to the right. The main entrance to the sports field is clearly sign posted just before you reach the first row of houses. From here bear right and follow a long straight gradual incline which leads you to a small car park just inside the entrance.

The beautiful picturesque tree-lined site, which looks lovely on such a bright crisp sunny day like today, shares its facilities with cricket (and other sports). It is found in quite a remote setting with rolling open countryside backing onto two of its sides. The red brick (ended) and wooden side-panelled pavilion (incredibly first opened in 1984, it looks a lotter newer) runs lengthways from the car park over to the immediate left-hand side of the field. Built into gently rising land at the far

end, where the long building appears to be partly set below ground level, it houses changing rooms/toilets, an equipment store and a function room used by local clubs including the Scouts and Guides - at the far end. Adjacent to this is a really smart floodlit caged multi-use games area adapted for playing tennis (three courts) and basketball. Alongside is a unique outdoor gym area incorporating an Air Skier, Air Walker, Bicycle, Seated Chest Press and Pull-Down Challenger all laid out on a rubber safety surface base. Apparently, the project completed three years ago cost £13.5 with funding from the Big lottery - £9996; ERYC - £2000; Parish Council - £750 and Sportsfield Committee - £750.

The main (un-roped) football pitch is found beyond the centrally positioned cricket square at the very top of a sloping plateau on the far side of the field. This is bordered by trees and a neatly (almost perfectly) cut hedge which run behind the furthest touchline. As expected, there is no dedicated pitch-side furniture for spectators or playing squads. For the avid 'twitchers' amongst you, look out for an assorted range of birdboxes affixed at varying heights to the trees behind you. The elevated location on what is the highest point on the field affords the visitor some excellent views of the surrounding countryside that forms part of the East Yorkshire Wolds. Considering the remote and exposed position of the ground it would be more appropriate for travellers to make a visit here in better weather. But you probably worked that out for yourself already, right?

It had been another enjoyable hop. I found everyone at the new club to be really friendly and most welcoming and would definitely recommend a visit here to all travellers. For details about the club and ERCL check out the *FA Full-Time* website and the regularly updated club *twitter* feed - it is definitely a most valuable hopping resource. I also hope that I have as much fun at the KCOM next Saturday when I shall be attending the FA Cup Fourth round tie vs Premier League side Chelsea kick-off at 5.30pm. It would be rude not to snap up some half-price tickets (at £18) wouldn't it? The question now is not whether the Tigers will win but more will I be able to squeeze in another game before getting there?! Now where's that fixture list? Until then have fun wherever you go...even if the game ends 0-0!!

R No.28: *WebEd* - Saturday 11th January 2020; **Osbalwick** v Strensall Tigers; York Football League Division One; Kick-Off: 1.45pm; Venue: The Osbalwick Sports Club; The Leys; Osbalwick; North Yorkshire; YO103PR; Result: 2-2; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 50

After watching an absolute belter of a game on the recreation ground at Cliffe Football Club (*see R No.25 below*) only two weeks ago, I was inspired to pick another game in the same league today. And what a great decision it proved to be. My first-choice game (also in Division One) between Osbalwick and league leaders Strensall Tigers was even better and turned out to be right up there with the very best (including those at a higher level) matches I have attended so far this season. It certainly was a superb advert for the York Football League, that's for sure.

Today's match started fifteen minutes earlier than the normal scheduled 2pm kick-off time following a request by both teams to bring the game forward (sadly, I never did find out why). That just emphasises why it's so important to get to a game early (which I don't normally do, to be honest). Hosts Osbalwick were

playing their second consecutive home game of the new year after losing here at Leyes Road only last Saturday to Marston Green 2-4. In truth, the club has struggled to find some decent form this campaign since relegation from the Premier Division at the end of last season. In fact, they have only won once in their last six matches and that was back in December when they beat Malton & Norton 6-0 at home on 07/12/19. Before play they sat in mid-table (seventh out of the fourteen teams). By contrast opponents Strensall Tigers have had a superb season to date currently sitting in top spot, a full eight points clear of second placed Pocklington Town (reserves/second team) having won ten, drawn three and lost only one of their opening fourteen games. Interestingly, the only team to beat them was, by a sheer quirk of fate, Osbaldwick, who beat them 2-1 in the reverse league fixture over at New Earswick (their new home after leaving Strensall Camp), back in September. Even more remarkable (and maybe of interest to the statistical anorak in you) was the fact that Osbaldwick played most of the match with only ten men after their 'keeper Tom Young was sent off inside the first five minutes! Some of the home fans who missed the start that day, relayed the tale (ahead of today's match), not quite believing their eyes to see ten players on the field and three subs on the bench, when they belatedly arrived pitch-side.

This was a feisty but never bad-tempered affair, featuring two fully committed sides who wanted to play attacking football. Just the ticket for the enthusiastic goal-hungry hopper. From the first whistle to the last, the game was played at a high tempo with the action continuously changing ends as both sides created loads of chances. For the record it was the Tigers (great nickname, don't you think?) who opened the scoring in the first ten minutes when Joe Davison (7) weaved his way past three defenders to slip the ball past keeper Tom Young to give his side a 1-0 lead going into the break. Osbaldwick levelled matters moments after the restart when Jack Brimmell (48) nipped in at the back post to slide the ball home making it 1-1. This was only short-lived though as the visitors regained the lead ten minutes later when Kieran Harris (58) converted from the spot after being awarded a penalty following a dangerous tackle in the box. Despite futile protests from the home bench, the referee definitely made the correct decision - from my vantage point it looked a clear penalty (and I have photographic evidence to prove it but don't say anything. With less than ten minutes of normal time remaining, the hosts got back in the game for the second time as Alfie Atkinson (81) grabbed an equaliser from his direct free-kick taken way outside the box. Incredibly all the players just stood and watched on as the ball sailed over the line just inside the back post. It was almost like a slow-motion replay. And that's how it ended 2-2. Phew! The game, by co-incidence, was refereed once again by Norman Elliot, who was in charge when I attended my game at Cliffe (v Stamford Bridge) a couple of weeks back - thankfully I can report that both sides managed to reach full-time with a full complement of players!

The match played on a really heavy, tacky pitch in mostly dull and overcast conditions, attracted fifty spectators, with just about the same number of fans representing each team on the respective touch-lines. Although the club doesn't issue programmes (none do in this league, as far as I am aware), it is possible to view a fully downloadable statistical summary of the player line-ups, scorers, cards

(for every game in the YFL) from the results section of the superb competition website. A range of cold drinks and snacks was available from well-appointed the sports club bar throughout the afternoon.

Osballdwick is a small suburb of York and lies about two miles to the east of the city. It is mentioned three times in the Domesday Book as *Osboldewic* and named after Osbald, an earl in the kingdom of Northumbria. It is also home to Osballdwick Hall, a Grade II Listed Building and to the beautiful 12th century St. Thomas's church in neighbouring Osballdwick Lane. Travellers intending to make a visit to the Osballdwick Sports Club can reach the venue from several different directions using major routes including the A1079, A64 and A19. I picked up the Hull Road (A1079) at Market Weighton and followed this towards York for about fifteen or so miles to the city's eastern ring road (where it joins the A64). After crossing this intersection turn right (third exit) at the next smaller roundabout down the narrow-looking Tranby Avenue into the village. Follow this before turning (third) left down Farndale Avenue passing a small parade of shops (including a *Sainsbury's Local* store - handy for snacks). Don't get confused when this road then becomes The Leyes and continues after turning right at the T-junction - bear with it as you're almost there. Continue along here for about 200 metres until you spot the ground entrance on the right hand-side of the road.

You will notice immediately that the Sports Club and enclosed playing field shares its facilities with the village cricket club (formed in the 1880's). Space is at a premium here as the site is literally squeezed in by residential housing which backs closely onto three sides of the field. Some large sturdy practise nets with an artificial grass base and a long mobile pitch cover frame stand close to the nearside of the field and main entrances (yes, there are two small car parks alongside each other). A smart club pavilion to the left (with access at the end) comprises of a bar, lounge (with widescreen TV) and separate games room at the back. The club itself organises teams covering bowls, darts and netball as well as football and cricket and other functions such as wedding receptions, parties and live music events. It also holds various charity fund raising events throughout the year for its members. An adjacent building with two floors contains a large integrated cricket scoreboard (facing the field at the back) with the changing rooms (for football use) at the far end - you get a better idea of the layout when you walk further out onto the field. The main and only football pitch is marked out over on the far side (right) of the playing field and runs parallel to the hedge (beyond the cricket square) - a rope separating the two protects the hallowed batting creases. As expected, there are no spectator facilities or dug outs at pitch side - it's just flat grass standing around the perimeter, and that's it.

It had been another memorable hop. I found everyone at the club to be really friendly and most welcoming and would recommend a visit here to all hoppers. You'll love it. With the match starting early I was back home in time to check out all the final scores on *Sky Sports Gillette Soccer Special*. Whilst settling down with a lovely cuppa and tasty cheese salad sandwich courtesy of Mrs W I discovered on *twitter* that the FA Vase Fourth round tie at Consett AFC (v Lutterworth) - a game I had seriously considered attending earlier before setting out - had been delayed by over an hour due to very strong winds and heavy rain. Phew! Some days you just

get lucky, don't you? This certainly was one of those! Have fun wherever you decide to go...

R No.27: WebEd - Saturday 4th January 2020; **Swanland Rangers** v Holme Rovers; East Riding County League Premier Division; Kick-Off: 2pm; Venue: The Swanland Playing Field; West Wold; West Leys Road; Swanland; North Ferriby; East Yorkshire; HU143PT; Result: 2-1; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 12

Get In!! What a great start to the New Year. Not wanting to travel too far today I was rewarded with my first-choice game, a local visit to East Riding County League new boys Swanland Rangers FC. It was quite a memorable (four mile) trip as the hosts won their first game of the season by beating local rivals Holme Rovers 2-1 in a thrilling Premier Division encounter at the Swanland Playing Field. After a goalless first half it was the visitors who opened the scoring when Nick Cage (52) tapped the ball home from six yards out to give his side a 1-0 lead. After some resolute defending the Gers' equalised mid-way through the half through Matty Smith (71) who converted a spot kick (awarded after he had been brought down following a poor challenge in the area) sending the visiting keeper the wrong way. When the hosts were briefly reduced to ten men moments later (after Tom Young sustained a nasty-looking ankle injury), heads on the home side dropped and it seemed like the league debutants would succumb once again to a late defeat (which has happened all too often this season). But with time running out Rangers countered with one last attack and it paid off as tricky midfielder Chris Wells calmly tucked the ball into the net from close range following a spirited move from the back. The last five minutes was one-way traffic as Rovers piled the pressure on hosts goal; with three corners in quick succession which even saw the visiting keeper running the full length of the field to join the attack, the ball bobbed agonisingly on the line before being cleared. As the final whistle sounded there was evident joy in the Swanland ranks - no doubt a mixture of both immense relief and sheer enjoyment after recording what was also the club's first ever league victory as a new team. This was pure grass roots football at its very best. You could see the pleasure etched on all the faces of those standing pitch-side too, myself included. The game refereed expertly by Kevin Pick and played on a sticky well grassed pitch in mainly sunny conditions, attracted a dozen spectators. As expected, neither programmes or refreshments are made available.

The club was only formed during the Summer of last year. It was ex-Hall Road Rangers FC and North Ferriby FC player Fraser Robertson who got the ball rolling (pardon the pun) when he and a group of fellow players from Humber Premier League sides South Cave United FC and North Ferriby Athletic FC decided to come together a create a new club. An application was made to the East Riding County Football League to join the competition and the club was successfully (and surprisingly) accepted into the league's top (Premier) Division. One of the main reasons for this (other than the response to a hefty bribe - I'm only joking here) may have rested on the fact that the club has access to its own pitch and facilities (avoiding the need to groundshare with another club) in the village.

Swanland, one of the most affluent places to live in East Yorkshire, is situated some seven or so miles to the west of Hull city centre. Properties commanding (in

excess of) six-figure sums are commonplace here and along with adjacent developments in North Ferriby and Westella (referred to as the golden mile) is the home to the wealthy professional classes including several pro footballers. Although the football ground can be tricky to find (when you reach the village) it is easily accessible from both the A15 and A63 and can be reached by taking the A614 (towards Beverley) at the major Humber Bridge roundabout (next to the *Wingfield Farm* pub). Follow this for about a mile and take a left turn (B1231) into Tranby Lane at the next (smaller) roundabout. Continue past the delightful village signs (which aptly depict a beautifully painted Swan) to the very end, turn right at the T-junction (with Kemp Road) and then left into Manor Road (next to the tennis club). Take the next left into West Leys Road and then immediately right into West Wold where you will find the entrance to the playing field on your left. The directions make it sound more difficult than it is. At the moment the adjacent area resembles a building site (because that's what it is) as a new residential development is quickly taking shape.

The large enclosed playing fields are surrounded by a mixture of local housing and open fields. A brick-built pavilion (complete with unusual satellite dish on the roof) hosting changing rooms and toilets is situated close to the car park on the near-side of the field. To the left is a children's play ground and some tennis courts/multi-use basketball play area. The site which shares with cricket accommodates three grass pitches including mini-football and rugby to the right with the main pitch marked furthest away on the far left-hand side of the field. Two permanent wooden dug outs with bench-seating on three sides are in place at pitch-side - one (for the home team) stands along the far touchline (parallel to the hedge) and the other, unusually, is positioned behind and to the right of the top goal (also next to the hedge). I initially thought upon arrival that this dug out hadn't been moved over to the opposite touchline yet but on closer inspection and having seen the concrete base realised that it was in fact in its permanent place behind the goal. As the coach and subs from the visiting side chose to stand along the touchline at half-way, this offset ad-hoc stand offered some temporary shelter for the hopping neutral! From this side of the ground it is also possible to pick out the tall concrete supports and thick wound steel cables from the Humber Bridge, in the near distance, some three miles away.

Before kick-off I managed to have a quick chat with Fraser, the new club secretary, whilst he was busy checking his possible team line up for the afternoon. He explained that today's game was only the side's fourth home league game since the season started back in September having suffered with a few postponements due to waterlogging and a cancellation following a county cup fixture clash. Although the 'Gers had only managed to gain one point so far in their league campaign (3-3 vs Hutton Cranswick), Fraser was encouraged by their team performances in recent weeks - the main problem wasn't scoring goals (despite their top marksman being side-lined today) but failing to hold onto leads. Take last week as a case in point when they were beating high-flying West Hull Amateurs 2-0 only to collapse late on to lose 3-2. Based on what I saw myself today there is plenty of optimism and hope that the lads can soon start to pick up points and climb the league table. I for one, certainly hope so!

For more details about the club you check out the East Riding County League pages at *FA Full-Time* site (use our new *pyramid links* page to help you!). With only a short 12-minute drive home afterwards, I was back indoors just after 4pm - plenty of time to watch the closing stages of the FA Cup third round games on *Sky Sports* (with Jeff and the boys) and to tuck into a tasty fish and chip supper. Ah, if only all Saturdays were this relaxing. The joys of hopping locally continue...have fun no matter how far you travel for your fix...

R No.26: WebEd - Wednesday 1st January 2020; **Gainsborough Trinity v Matlock Town**; Northern Premier League Premier Division; Kick-Off: 3pm; Venue: The Northolme; Gainsborough; Lincs; DN212QW; Result: 2-1; Admission: £12; Programme: Yes, 44p, £2; Attendance: 613

It's New Year's Day and I'm heading into Lincolnshire for my first footy fix of the decade (did I really say that?). Fran and Steph are accompanying me on what is a relatively short 40-minute journey over the river Humber (taking the road bridge of course) to Gainsborough where they will spend a couple of hours doing a bit of shopping in the town whilst I attend an eagerly-anticipated Northern Premier League game at The Northolme. For me this is a much-awaited re-visit since my last hop here back on 27th December 1999. It was on that day, along with Newmarket based travelling companion Martin Alsop, that I took in the club's home match vs Worksop Town in the *Unibond* NPL Premier Division fixture. We arrived two minutes late and had sadly missed the opening goal of the game as the Holy Blues (relating to the club's early religious identity) went on to eventually concede another and lose the game 0-2. From that time on this has been on my must visit again list - one of my self-imposed hopping rules is that I must see the whole game (from kick-off to the final whistle) - in order to satiate my obsessive-compulsive tendencies. I have tried to think this out rationally over the years and wrangled with the idea that although I missed only two minutes it doesn't matter, but it does and here I am today...

This has to be right up there in my favourite all-time list of grounds visited. What is there not to like here. It quite simply ticks all the boxes for the avid grounds' collector. The welcome central location of the stadium shoe-horned in between the residential housing backing onto it; the bowl-like nature of the pitch with terrific sweeping full-length terraces enclosing it; the unique large 250-seater stand; six tall free-standing floodlight pylons and the views of All Saints Church appearing in all its full glory behind the stand on the kop side. Everything here just grabs your attention and gets your hopping juices flowing. The Northolme is steeped in history too - as the legend on one of the outer stand walls states: '*The OLDEST single team ground in the WORLD*'. I will let the photos in the *FGIF* album gallery paint a far better picture of the ground and its layout than making any attempt to convey it to you in words.

Whilst taking pictures during my customary pre-match lap of the ground I bumped (not literally) into busy pro-active Trinity Chairman Richard Kane. He was keen to tell me a few bits of interesting information and confirm some historical facts about his beloved club which: was formed as Trinity Recreationists FC in 1873 by the vicar of Holy Trinity Church for young parishioners; played its first ever game

at The Northolme in 1884; played in the Football League Division Two for nineteen seasons (between 1893-1912); created a record attendance of 9,760 for a Midland League match against local rivals Scunthorpe United in 1948 and has the distinction of playing on the same ground for 136 years. For more in depth information readers should go to the club's informative *Wikipedia* page - it certainly makes for interesting reading.

Today's game against Matlock was an absolute belter. The hosts have struggled to find form this season and have languished at the foot of the table. However, since the appointment of Curtis Woodhouse former manager of Brighouse Town FC and Bridlington Town FC (and ex-Hull City player) things on the pitch have improved. During his short reign at the helm Woodhouse (coincidentally an ex-pro boxer) has steered the club to an unbeaten run in their last three matches picking up points at Hyde United (1-1 on 14/12); at home to Nantwich Town (0-0 on 21/12) and a resounding victory at Grantham (5-1 on Boxing Day). His fighting qualities were certainly tested today with the visit of mid-table opponents Matlock Town.

In cold and blustery conditions, the hosts opened the scoring following a corner when captain Simon Russell re-cycled the ball for Gregg Smith (25) to head home giving Jon Stewart in the Matlock goal no chance with his close-range header. With only ten minutes of the game remaining Trinity were pegged back. Adam Yates surged forward from right back and delivered a high hanging ball to the back post, which former Everton youngster Dan Bramall (80), on as a first half substitute, guided the ball past the exposed Allinson. Three minutes later the Holy Blues re-established the lead when Gregg Smith slid the ball into substitute Mitchell Dunne (82) who rifled home to the joy of the home crowd, his fierce effort this time, giving Stewart no chance. The Gladiators rallied, but with keeper Nathan Stainfield and defender Will Thornton imperious at the back, Trinity weathered the storm to take all three points and a big step towards safety. The match played in dull conditions on a heavy playing surface attracted an encouraging 613 spectators including ever-sociable local Scunthorpe-based hoppers Tony and Martyn Girdham with whom I chatted to briefly during the game. For the record, a newsy 44-page, neatly laid out programme (featuring a double issue covering the previous home game against Nantwich) was produced for the game. Refreshments including a rather tasty cheeseburger (from tea bar next to the main turnstile) and an assorted bag of white chocolate mice (part of a sweet deal from *Fergal's Sweet Shack*) are to be recommended to the hungry and sweet-toothed hopper.

It had been another cracking afternoon's entertainment. It goes without saying that a visit (or even a re-visit in my case) to the tidy and well-appointed Northolme which has been home to Gainsborough Trinity FC for so many years is to be highly recommended. With the Holy Blues ghost finally being laid to rest (with a brand-new tick); Fran treating herself to a new pair of winter boots, and Steph, the latest trainers, it had been a wonderful start to the new year. On behalf of everyone at *FGIF* HQ may I wish you all a very Happy Hopping New Year wherever you go!

R No.25: *WebEd* - Saturday 28th December 2019; **Cliffe** v Stamford Bridge; York Football League Division One; Kick-Off: 2pm; Venue: Cliffe PF; Oxen Lane; Cliffe;

North Yorkshire; YO86NS; Result: 3-3; Admission: Free; Programme: No;
Attendance: 16 -

For my last game of the year (and decade, come to think of it) I headed to the outskirts of Selby for my footy fix. There was a bit of method in my madness today as the two games on my very short-list of 'hoppertunities, both in the York Football League, were taking place within a couple of miles of each other. How unusual is that? I had checked that both were on before setting off from FGIF HQ but was still undecided as to which game I preferred to watch. After coming off the eerily quiet (for a change) M62 at junction 37, I soon (within ten minutes at a guess) arrived at the village of Hemingborough where local side Hemingborough United FC was entertaining Poppleton United in a Premier Division fixture. As I passed the ground on my left, I noticed that both sets of players were already warming up on the Hull Road-based playing field. Always a good sign. As it was still only 1.30pm I continued the short distance (five minutes tops) up the road into Cliffe village and arrived at the Oxen Lane playing field where the players once again were out doing their pre-match routines on the field. After a couple of minutes, I decided it would be better to stay put, take a break and use the remaining twenty minutes before the 2pm kick-off to have a quick bite to eat (courtesy of a *Sainsbury's Meal Deal*). The pre-packed cheese and tomato sandwich, cheese and onion crisps and bottle of *Tropicana* to wash it all down with was just the ticket for the hungry hopper.

Today struggling hosts Cliffe FC welcomed mid-table visitors Stamford Bridge to the playing field for a Division One fixture. Having picked up only four points in their games so far this season, it wasn't surprising to see the club rooted firmly at the bottom of the fourteen team league table and in urgent need of further points if they were going to avoid the drop into the third tier of football in the York League. However, as the action unfolded this turned out to be a cracking contest and one that (almost) turned the form book upside down. The visitors from Pocklington settled quickly to open up a comfortable two goal lead inside the first twenty minutes of the game: it was John Willmoth (14) who lobbed the keeper following a one on one before Terry Taylor (19) doubled his side's lead when he took advantage of a rebounded shot (off a defender) to slot the ball home from two yards out. Despite this early setback Cliffe incredibly fought back, scoring twice before the break through Tom Ellwood's (35) unstoppable shot which went under the keeper's body and Connor Gigg (44) who fired home through a group of players following a goal mouth scramble, to make it 2-2 at half-time. In a pulsating second half (which started in the same way as the first had finished) Cliffe did the unthinkable just before the hour mark, by taking the lead when Kieran Gallagher's (58) fierce long-range shot found the back of the net to make it 3-2. No sooner had play re-started from the resultant kick-off though when the visitors went back down the other end and scored. Unbelievable stuff. The equaliser came through Dan Price (59) who bundled the ball over the line after it had rebounded off the cross-bar. Despite calls for an offside (and it looked like one from where I was standing) from the home bench - the referee allowed the goal to stand making it 3-3. To be fair though he did not have the benefit of VAR or even a monitor at pitch-side. Thank goodness!! Despite another thirty minutes of end to end football where

both sides came close to snatching a winner late on, the score remained deadlocked at the final whistle. This was probably the right result and one the hosts would no doubt have taken this result before kick-off. Needless to say, this had been a superb entertaining game of football and a great advert for the York Football League.

The game played on a very bumpy, wet and tacky surface during an afternoon of sunny spells attracted sixteen spectators. At several stages during the afternoon I got into conversation with affable club secretary and media officer Malcolm Bryce who joined me at pitch side with his camera. He told me that although his team had only played two league games here since the second week in October due to the poor weather conditions, they had done better than some clubs in the area in completing most of their fixtures. Compared to last season the playing surface has greatly improved after completing remedial drainage work on the pitch which saw Cliffe having to play first team games away from home for a short time. If you have a *twitter* account take a look at Malcolm's photos both for the club and on the pro circuit covering Premier and Football League matches. Top notch stuff.

Travellers intending to make a visit here can easily reach the ground from the M62 by taking junction 37 at Howden. Follow the A63 Hull Road (for Selby) for about seven miles passing through the villages of Newsholme, Babthorpe and Hemingborough until you pick up signs for Cliffe village. Take a right turn into York Road at the crossroads and then the first right after the gated railway crossing into Oxen Lane. The ground is on the left opposite a new housing development where the road narrows becoming an unmade track at the end. As you would expect the facilities here are extremely basic with the players using a small changing room block partly obscured behind some tennis courts over on the right-hand side of the playing field. A small length of tape passed through some plastic stakes makes a for a temporary pitch barrier (ten metres long, if that) close to the halfway line behind the right touchline. There is no pitch-side cover for spectators on site. A word of warning here to visitors - be careful where you walk! On a couple of occasions, I almost stood in and at one stage nearly knelt down (whilst taking photos) on dog poo which took me by complete surprise - yuk!! Why can't all dog owners be responsible for their pets!! After doubling checking my steps around the pitch, I began to enjoy the local scenery including views of the imposing giant chimneys from the neighbouring Drax power station (some 2 miles away) appearing between and above the roof tops on houses along Oxen Lane.

Another enjoyable hop within a comfortable driving distance of home. A visit to the village of Cliffe and the friendly local football club comes highly recommended. For more details about the club and other valuable information covering the league (including a vast range of player and team stats, fixtures, results and tables) check out the terrific and ever-resourceful York Football League website - you can now go to the *FGIF* Pyramid Links page for more). A lovely way to end the year and decade. Have fun wherever you go.

R No.24: WebEd - Thursday 26th December 2019; **Darlington** v Spennymoor Town; National League North Division; Kick-Off: 3pm; Venue: Blackwell Meadows; Grange

Road; Darlington; Teesside; DL15NR; Result: 2-1; Admission: £14; Programme: Yes, 40pp, £2.50; Attendance: 2204

A bit of background reading to start with. According to the club's history, Darlington FC first began playing football at Feethams (remember that?) which was originally used by Darlington Cricket Club, when they were formed in 1863. With growing crowd figures, the ground was expanded with the construction of the West stand at the turn of the century and the Polam Lane end in 1905. In 1913, a pair of towers were built at the entrance to the ground, and in 1920, offices and changing rooms were built underneath the East stand. Floodlights were installed in September 1960, but an electrical fault gutted the West stand in a fire, prompting its rebuilding. In 1997, the East stand was demolished and rebuilt as an all-seater stand, but its cost had a major negative effect on the club's finances. George Reynolds came into the club, paid its debts and initiated construction of a new stadium. The last match played at Feethams was a 2-2 draw with Leyton Orient on 3 May 2003. Following the closure of the ground, the floodlights were sold to Workington AFC and the stadium demolished. A housing estate was planned for the cleared site.

The 25,000-seat Reynolds Arena was opened in 2003, at a cost of £18 million. The first match at the new stadium was a 2-0 loss to Kidderminster Harriers on 16 August 2003. The attendance of 11,600 still stands as a record for the ground. After Reynolds left the club, the stadium had a variety of sponsored names, but it is generally known as the Darlington Arena. The capacity was restricted to just 10,000 because of county and local planning regulations, but attendances rarely reached 3,000, and in 2011, the club's receivers put it up for sale. In May 2012, Darlington confirmed they would no longer play at the Arena and later that year, it was bought by Darlington Mowden Park RFC.

Plans had originally been laid down to groundshare with Shildon FC, but arrangements were eventually made for Darlington to share at Bishop Auckland's Heritage Park ground from the start of the 2012-13 season. In December 2013, it was confirmed that a deal had been reached in principle for the football team to share Darlington RFC's ground at Blackwell Meadows ground, and thus return to the town of Darlington. It was in March 2016, it was confirmed that Darlington aimed to relocate by the start of the 2016-17 season, with expansion plans in place to increase the capacity to 3,000, as required for promotion to the National League. In the event, they played their first match at Blackwell Meadows on 26 December 2016, a 3-2 National League North win against FC Halifax Town in front of 3,000 spectators. Darlington expanded the seated stand at Blackwell Meadows to seat 588 in 2018, after a successful funding drive by their fans, allowing for the club to be promoted to the Conference National. This was built following the 2016-17 season, where Darlington finished the season in the play-off places, but were disqualified from playing due to the inadequate number of seats at Blackwell Meadows. The club continues to explore further ways to improve Blackwell Meadows, including a stand at the currently empty west end of the ground.

The second part of my North East Double saw the *Wray-mobile* head the short distance down the A66 towards Darlington. The twenty or so mile journey from

Stockton was fairly straightforward and covered comfortably in less than thirty minutes. The ground at Blackwell Meadows is easy to find being just off the main carriageway and based away from the town centre. It was interesting to pass the Quakers former home at the Reynolds Arena (now used by Darlington Mowden Park Rugby Club) located only half a mile away on the previous roundabout at Hurworth Moor.

Although it is possible to park at the expansive ground itself, I decided to keep the £5 fee firmly in my anorak pocket (for the time being at any rate) and continued along Grange Road taking the next right turn into Parkside where there are plenty of spaces along the local roads to leave the car safely for a couple of hours. It's only a ten-minute walk back from here to the main entrance which is marked by a wooden sign and one of those tall narrow bendy flags. The ground which shares with Darlington Rugby Club is completely enclosed by high wooden fence panelling is set down a narrow driveway. This soon opens out with the large brick pavilion to the right and the main manned pay hut/gate where you can also buy your matchday programme to the left. Another small wooden building over to the left is the main Club Shop which contains a limited stock of club merchandise.

With time to spare ahead of kick-off, I took a leisurely stroll around (most of) the ground taking photos - check out the album in the gallery to get a better picture (pardon the pun) of the facilities. Despite the negative opinion of those Blyth Town FC fans I had met at Stockton a couple of hours ago, I really do like the ground at Blackwell Meadows. It certainly ticked all the boxes for me: there is plenty of cover - behind the goal to the right is an impressive long covered stand with eight steps of terracing stretching across the entire width of the pitch and a 500+-seater covered stand extending most of the opposite side of the ground. The (segregated) far end which is used by the away fans is completely uncovered flat standing and out of bounds to other spectators (I gave up asking at least two stewards if I could nip past the barrier take a couple of photos). The near side pavilion complete with wide balcony and ornate clock also houses a bar and lounge (open well ahead of kick-off) offers plenty of adjacent standing room too. Other hoppers I chatted to also agreed that the large playing surface was superb, especially after the recent long spell of bad weather leading up to Christmas.

Today's game saw the visit of local rivals Spennymoor Town for this eagerly-awaited Boxing Day fixture (the reverse match at Brewery Field is due to be played on New Year's Day). The current league table showed that the visitors had fared slightly better in the league to date sitting six places higher (inside the play-offs) than the mid-table hosts - last time out (the preceding Saturday 21/12) The Quakers hit the *Non-League Paper* headlines by beating title favourites York City 2-1 at Bootham Crescent whilst the Moors were taking all three points beating Bradford Park Avenue 3-0 at home. After a fairly even opening twenty minutes Adam Campbell (25) scored the afternoon's opening goal when he waltzed through Moors' defence before firing into the bottom corner past Matt Gould. Moments later Spennymoor were back in the game when tricky winger Ben McKenna beat two defenders before delivering a pinpoint cross which found the head of Spennymoor's top scorer Glen Taylor (29) with his effort clipping the post before nestling in. With the game hanging in the balance Sean Reid went down in the area

under a challenge from Nathan Buddle. Stephen Thompson (82), so often a thorn in Spennymoor's side over the years, stepped up and hammered the ball down the middle of the goal to make it 2-1 from the penalty spot. The crowd was ecstatic. There was special reason to celebrate as this turned not only to be the match winner but was also the striker's one hundredth goal for the Quakers.

The match played in mostly dull conditions (the floodlights were on well before the game started) on a superb flat, well-grassed surface attracted in excess of 2000 spectators (of which only 200 away fans had travelled the short distance from Durham) making it the second highest attendance this season since 3006 were crammed in here for the visit of Walsall for an FA Cup First round replay back in November. In fact, from my slightly uncomfortable (and claustrophobic) vantage point at the back of the stand (behind the goal), I noticed that there were still long queues trying to come into the ground well after kick-off: '*They're squeezed in like sardines today*' quipped one of the regulars standing alongside me. A superb glossy but overly-priced (typical Yorkshireman I hear you say) programme containing 40 packed pages was issued for the game, priced £2.50 and available at the pay hut. A wide range of hot and cold foot drinks were dispensed by some cheerful youngsters (each wearing red *DRFC* tops) from a couple of kiosks in the ground. I must admit the cheeseburger (£3) was one of the best I've tasted at a football match for a long time- saving that parking charge came in handy after all!!

It had been a terrific Boxing Day double-hop in the North East. Despite the early start from *FGIF* HQ, my 230-mile round trip had been worth it. Two new grounds, two cracking games of football and a wonderful 'hoppertunity to meet up with some lovely people who love grass roots football. With clear carriageways on the A1 and M62 I got home just in time to enjoy some more turkey and mince-pies (not on the same plate). The joys of festive hopping continue. Have fun wherever you go this Christmas!

R No.23: WebEd - Thursday 26th December 2019; **Stockton Town** v Thornaby; Northern League Division One; Kick-Off: 11am; Venue: The Coverall Stadium; Bishopton Road West; Stockton on Tees; Teesside; TS190QD; Result: 1-0; Admission: £5; Programme: Yes, 20pp, £1; Attendance: 940

After eating and drinking too much (mostly in front of the TV) over the last few days (or should that be weeks), it was time to blow the excess calorie cobwebs away and get in some festive footy action. Well that's what Boxing Day was invented for, isn't it? In the days leading up to Christmas I had planned to take in a National League North game at Guiseley (v Farsley Celtic), until I spotted a tasty double up in the North-East featuring matches at Stockton and Darlington. With staggered kick-offs and only a few miles separating the two grounds, it was an 'hoppertunity too good to miss. With an early start - leaving *FGIF* HQ at 8.30am - it meant that the roads heading up to Teesside were almost empty and the journey was completed in very good time ahead of my first game.

Stockton Town FC was formed as recently as 1979 under its original name Hartburn Juniors. Throughout the eighties and nineties, the club continued to grow and operate as a junior football club competing in the Teesside Junior Football Alliance. In the early years of the new millennium they moved to a permanent

base at Our Lady of St Bedes School on Bishopton Road West. It was felt by many members that the club name didn't reflect the area where most players came from and its name was changed to Stockton Town FC. There was also a strong desire to resurrect a senior football team to represent the town. A radical change came in April 2008 when the club underwent a massive investment totalling £1.4 million pounds which saw a partnership with Stockton Borough Council, Stockton Sixth Form College and Our Lady of St Bedes School, to develop the facilities on the site with the construction of a new clubhouse and changing rooms. Wanting to give the current youngsters an opportunity to stay with the club (rather than leaving to join other non-league sides in the area), Stockton entered a team in the Teesside League Division Two in 2009-10. The club and players were keen to progress and a successful application was made to enter the Wearside League a competition they went on to win, clinching the league title following a spectacular run-in gaining maximum points from their last twelve matches in 2012-13. Greater success came in 2014-15 when the young and quickly maturing squad completed a clean sweep taking of the League title, League Cup Shipowners Cup and Monkwearmouth Cup. During this period the club also worked tirelessly to build facilities to meet the standard required to meet promotion to the Northern League, finally achieving this in the spring of 2016, opening its 3G Stadium facility with a league match against Horden. Unprecedented success quickly followed as the club won the Northern League Division Two championship in 2016-17 - having risen from an U18's team to NL Division One in only eight years. Although the first season in the top Division started disastrously (by losing eight consecutive league games) it turned out eventually to be the season of a lifetime - winning nineteen and drawing one of the next twenty- three matches. It not only saw the Anchors climb to safety out of the relegation zone but set up an exciting run in the FA Vase beating competition favourites West Auckland Town (in round 5), then reaching Wembley after beating fellow NL side Marske United 3-2 on aggregate in the Semi-Finals (both played at home). Despite losing the final (0-1 to Hellenic League side Thatcham Town FC), it certainly created a bit history and a day to remember for the for the club as well as putting Stockton FC on the footballing map.

The ground known as The Coverall Stadium (to give it the full sponsor's title) is located over to the north west of the town centre and can easily be reached from both the A19 and A66 major ring-roads. Close to the *Sainsbury's* supermarket on Bishopton Road West, it occupies part of the landscaped Stockton Sixth Form College site. The main club buildings fashioned with cream-coloured bricks are found over to the right-hand side of the campus with a thriving social club including smart bar and lounge contained inside. Check out the superb *Welcome* mural above your head in the foyer - depicting the club's logo of an anchor in what is a prominent work of art. The playing area is found over to the far left of the school and accessed along some narrow pathways running between the trees. You'll notice it when you first arrive at the school, I'm sure. A small turnstile outside the perimeter cage takes you into the ground with a range of souvenirs including programmes and prize draw tickets on sale from a table just inside the entrance. All the club matchday facilities are found on this side of the ground too: there are two almost identical covered stands in place (less than five metres apart), set back from the playing area- with four rows of plastic seating in the

stand to the left and six steps of terracing for standing room only in the one to the right. Further along is a tea bar and toilet block with the changing rooms for both teams and officials housed together in a cream coloured building at the far end. Two rather futuristic blue moulded plastic dug-outs with yellow bench seating positioned either side of a tall TV gantry used by the club media team. As you walk around the far perimeter, you'll also notice the imposing school buildings towering behind the main stands and the array of wonderful club banners attached for all to see on the outer fencing - apparently, I'm told that these are a regular feature at all STFC matches, both home and away.

I was really looking forward to this game having seen Stockton play once already in a terrific FA Vase First round tie over at Knaresborough Town back in October (which ended 2-3AET). They are still in the competition having beaten Barnoldswick Town (2-0) and Bridlington Town (4-1) in the last two rounds respectively and now await the visit of Midland Football League side Atherstone Town in the fourth-round tie to be played here on 11/01/20. Their league form has also been excellent and The Anchors currently sit top of the table, one point clear of second placed Hebburn Town with four games in hand. Although four clubs have scored more goals than their current and impressive total of forty-nine, no side has conceded fewer than what is an incredible and rather miserly sum of just eleven (with West Auckland Town next best on 27). In contrast to visitors Thornaby who have really struggled to find their best form so far, languishing in twentieth place (in the twenty-two team Division One table) and only two points clear of bottom-placed Northallerton Town.

Despite the respective league positions of both sides, The Anchors didn't dominate the game as many had expected beforehand and were in truth made to fight all the way by a strong, resilient Thornaby side to earn the three points, winning 1-0. The deadlock was broken when a lone late goal from full back Lewis King was enough for the Anchors to collect another win and extend the unbeaten run. It wasn't a classic though. The defining moment of the game came on 78 minutes when a corner from Kevin Hayes was cleared and Lewis King collected the loose ball and drifted inside. Moving it onto his left foot he used the defenders in front of him as a screen and curled it towards the far post, unbelievably 'keeper James Dawson got a hand to it but he couldn't stop it and it went in off the post for the young defenders first ever goal for the club. The match played in mostly dull and, towards the end, very cold conditions, attracted an impressive attendance of 940 (a new club record being the highest league attendance for a home game since 618 turned up here in November for the league match vs. Hebburn Town - ending 3-1). The place was literally packed with every bit of space taken in both stands and around the entire pitch perimeter fence. I was lucky enough though to find a few gaps between the spectators in order to lean across and get in some photos for our album gallery.

A colourful and neatly laid out 20 glossy page programme entitled *The Anchor* was issued for the game, priced reasonably at £1. A wide range of hot and cold food was on sale from a busy tea bar throughout the morning. During the final stages of the match I bumped into (not literally) several other hoppers who were also standing close to the exit gates and readying themselves to make swift dash out of

the ground en-route to their second game of the day. Two lads (both Blyth fans) were heading to the International Stadium to watch their beloved team take on Gateshead in a National League North fixture. They didn't sound too impressed that I was going to Darlington after this and weren't really too complimentary about the Blackwell Meadows ground. It certainly didn't put me off though as we said our farewells crossing the club car park after the final whistle had been blown - to be honest I couldn't wait for my next game, only twenty or miles down the road - bring it on!!

Incidentally, travellers attending matches here won't have much difficulty in finding the ground. After leaving the main A19, join the A66 travelling west at the Whiney Banks interchange next to the Teesside Shopping Park. Follow this for a couple of miles before turning right towards Yarm and then take the right slip road at Hartburn Lane continuing north to join Hartburn Avenue and then Oxbridge Avenue. Take the left filter lane at the traffic lights (next to *Sainsbury's*) and turn left into Bishopton Road West where the ground will soon appear on the left. As you approach the school (signed Stockton Sixth Form) turn into the main drive and park up in one of the designated spaces at the front of the school. Needless to say, this is a terrific club and one that is well worth a visit. You'll certainly be made to feel welcome by both committee members and fans alike. For more details about the club go to the superb club website, *twitter* feed and dedicated Northern League site - to save time you can now use our pyramid league links page to get you started. What more could you want!?

R No.22: WebEd - Saturday 21st December 2019; **Kingfields** v Brandesburton; Humber Premier League Premier Division; Kick-Off: 2pm; Venue: The Marvell College; Barham Road; East Hull; East Yorkshire; HU94EE; Result: 5-0; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 35

With many leagues in the area closing down their fixture programmes (temporarily) over the festive period until after the new year, it was refreshing to find that the Humber Premier League had planned a full schedule of games on both Saturdays (21/12 and 28/12) either side of the busy Christmas period, hence my choice of game today. With the game also being played on a 4G pitch it lessened the hassle of recent weeks in looking for games on grass. East Hull side Kingfields Football Club has made a promising start to life in the HPL this season. Since gaining promotion (along with Beverley Town Reserves) from the East Riding County League they have adapted extremely well to the step up in standard and find themselves at the top of the Division One table (second tier of the competition). Before today's eagerly awaited game against fifth-placed (out of thirteen teams) Brandesburton, the stats show that Kingfields have only lost three of their opening thirteen matches to set up a four-point gap over Cottingham-based East Riding Rangers who sit in second place.

I set off from *FGIF* Towers a little bit earlier than normal today in order to avoid the expected hordes of festive shoppers heading for the city centre to complete their final purchases. Thankfully the A63 (Clive Sullivan Way) and the roads coming off it were not as busy as I had first imagined, meaning I arrived at my destination in a stress-free state, well almost. It was shortly after my arrival that I noticed a

convoy of cars was forming in, what appeared to be, an ever-growing queue outside the main entrance to the school (ground) on Barham Road. Not sure quite what was happening at this point, I decided to join them and sit tight and wait. One thing was certain though - the gates to the school were firmly locked. With the festive holidays having started and the school site being closed down for at least a couple of weeks, I began to wonder whether the game had maybe been re-arranged for a later date. As my heart started to race, it was then I spotted someone arriving on foot at the entrance. Thankfully it was the caretaker who (I later found out) had forgotten about the booking and had arrived late to open the place up. Phew! I followed the now moving cars down the road and turned left into the school car park. With a great sigh of hopping relief and the colour coming back to my cheeks, a little voice in my head excitedly exclaimed: *Game On!!*

The Marvell College is a relatively new establishment that acquired Academy status in 2016. Before this time, it had been known as the Andrew Marvell College moving into brand new buildings on the present site in 2014. It is administered by Hull Collaborative Academy Trust and offers GCSEs, BTECs and Cambridge Nationals as programmes of study for pupils. Since restructuring, the school, a mixed comprehensive for boys and girls aged 11-18 years, in a socially poor area, has gained a superb reputation achieving some of the best academic results (as highlighted in a recent *Ofsted* report) in the city. As the school website reveals: *an eye-watering £27m has been invested into state-of-the-art amenities making it one of the best in the region.* It is also highly regarded in promoting teacher training opportunities for students having links with the Hull University Education faculty. During the last few years the school has also made its facilities (mainly for sporting activities) available to the local community outside of school hours - including for use by local grass-roots clubs.

The school was originally named after Andrew Marvell, a 17th century metaphysical poet, satirist and politician who sat in the House of Commons at various times between 1659 and 1678. He was born in Winestead-in-Holderness, a village near to Hull and was the son of a Church of England clergyman, also named Andrew Marvell. The family moved to the East Riding when his father was appointed Lecturer at Holy Trinity Church there, and Marvell was educated at Hull Grammar School. The futuristic building is literally a work of art both architecturally and aesthetically - look out for the giant red-painted girders supporting part of the façade. The interior of the four storey-building is equally impressive with a brightly coloured layout, clear signage and beautiful artwork. Just inside the foyer is a large installation showing *HMS Barham*, a former Royal Navy war ship, from which the founding school on this site, the Barham High School (opened in 1953), derived its title. Another mural depicting some very well-known former residents of the city including Amy Johnson, William Wilberforce and pop star Mick Ronson (my wife tells me he was lead guitarist with Davie Bowie and one her favourite all-time performers - have a listen to his album entitled *Heaven And Hull* if you get chance) as well as Marvell, can also be seen in situ, hanging proudly and prominently on one of the walls. With the floodlit caged 4G pitch located around the back of the site, it is mandatory for visitors to sign the register at reception as per school safeguarding rules before going through the long main

corridor to reach it, via a dedicated entry/exit door, at the end. From here you cross a courtyard before arriving at the side of the cage and the entrance to get inside.

On a crisp but bright afternoon it was Kingfields who took all three points to consolidate their position at the top of the table. Despite the comfortable victory, the 5-0 score-line didn't tell the whole story as a resilient Brandesburton side contributed to an absorbing end to end contest for much of the game. It was only in the last twenty minutes when the result was no longer in doubt that the visitors' heads dropped - especially the keeper who was feeling the after effects of a heavy (accidental) collision sustained during the first half. After this he was basically rendered a passenger but wanted to continue playing - what a star. Some of the spectators hadn't taken their places along the touchline when tricky Steve McLaughlin (1) opened the scoring for the hosts - his deft lob over the advancing keeper from ten yards out was sublime. Kingfields added two more before the break through Lewis Nadgy's (23) superb direct free-kick and Alex Thomas (40) who headed in from a corner to make it 3-0 going into the break. Star striker McLaughlin (72) added a fourth when he slid the ball under the keeper from close range and completed his hat-trick fifteen minutes before the end (77) tapping the ball home after following up a rebounded shot.

A decent crowd including many who had travelled over from Brandesburton (near to Beverley) was in attendance. Maybe they had already done their Christmas shopping in time, hmmm. With unlimited access along the side of the cage it is definitely what I would call a user-friendly place in which to watch football. For the keen snapper like myself, it made life easy being able to point the lens from different angles at pitch-side and avoid the low sun in the later stages of the game. The magnificent school building running parallel to and behind the cage, makes for a terrific backdrop to the action. As you've spotted in the header above neither programmes nor refreshments are available for the hopping neutral.

Travellers may also be interested to know that Kingfields FC have only played at this 4G venue for a few weeks since re-locating from their former base at the Steve Prescott Centre (home to HPL Premier side Hull United FC) on Beverley Road. When I asked a member of the coaching staff about this, he told me that the decision to move was a financial one: apparently this wasn't anything to do with the hire charges or pitch fees but more due to the fact it was costing the club quite a bit of money to replace balls lost after being kicked over the perimeter fence!! Considering the price of a new *mitre* leather football (other brands are also available) this could cost anything from £50 upwards per game which adds up to a big unwanted expense during the course of a season. He also revealed that the new 3G pitch is much bigger and tends to suit their overlapping style of play much better. On this evidence you couldn't really argue with that.

As this was the shortest day of the year, the closing stages of the game finished in near darkness (as the floodlights are not used here). At the final whistle it was time to go back through the school and make my way to the car park again. On the plus side it was lovely to drive home through the residential side roads displaying a vast array of trees decorated with colourful Christmas lights in the windows and

gardens. At one point I think I even spotted a modern Father Christmas dressed in full gear driving past me his car laden with wrapped presents on the back seat as he (or maybe she) made their way along the ring road. I did honestly. And there I was thinking he was still using a sleigh? It just remains for me to say Have a Happy Hopping Christmas!!

R No.21: WebEd - Saturday 14th December 2019; **Epworth Town Colts** v Woodhouse Colts; Central Midlands League President's Cup Conferences Round; Kick-Off: 2pm; Venue: Atech Arena; Carrside; Wroot Road; Epworth; Gainsborough; Lincs; DN91DX; Result: 4-0; Admission: Free; Programme: Yes, 12pp, £1.50; Attendance: 15

After a couple of postponements here in recent weeks, I'm pleased to read a positive tweet posted by the club to say that their cup game against Woodhouse Colts at Carrside (or the Atech Arena, as it is also known), is definitely going ahead this afternoon. I'm also chuffed that I will finally be able to pick up a new much-publicised match programme from the club, not just for myself but also for *FGIF's* finest contributor and one of the country's most prominent paper-chasing gurus, that is Steve Hardy. What he doesn't know about the art of collecting programmes, isn't really worth contemplating. Indeed, his encyclopaedic knowledge and written reviews, gathered over many years about his hobby, have appeared in almost every non-league football publication out there: *Programme Monthly*; *The Football Traveller* and his very own *A to Z of Non-League Programmes*, just to name a few. We are really very lucky to have Steve working on board with us, I can tell you. Indeed, testament to his life's work can also be found on this very site - check out his monumental *Non-League Programme Database* via the Programmes menu tab on *FGIF*, the contents of which will simply take your breath away. Think of any club that has issued a bit of paper in the past, be it a club playing in men's; women's; junior; Scottish; Welsh and Northern Irish football - you name it, it's all on there - if it isn't, then make it your business to get in touch and tell him about it straight away. There is no other list like it anywhere, believe me. Take a look now...you'll be really impressed!

Within three-quarters of an hour I've covered the thirty or so mile journey in decent time arriving at Carrside well ahead of the 2pm kick-off. It's a bit of a dodgy turn as you approach the main entrance being awkwardly situated on the crown of a tight sharp S-bend in the road but I manage it. As I pull up into the narrow drive (passing the smart 'welcome' sign), the weather has worsened significantly enough to cause a few knots to develop in my stomach. The rain is hammering it down so much that it starts to fill the many pot-holes dotted about in the un-made car park. The wind has grown in strength too and the tall hedge I've parked alongside appears to be buckling in the gale. But this soon abates and as if by some divine hopping intervention things start to improve. Within ten minutes the mini storm eases, the sun comes out and the wind dies down. At the same time some of the players who've been monitoring the elements within the dry confines of the changing rooms emerge to commence their pre-match warm-up routine on a separate, somewhat muddy, patch of grass behind the nearest goal. With renewed optimism I can now start to relax a bit more - it suddenly looks more likely that the game will beat the elements and take place after all. Phew! There's

just time to add a few extra layers of extra clothing, pick up a couple of programmes from the pavilion, before finally moving pitch-side in readiness for the game to start.

The club moved here from their base at the South Axholme Academy (still used by junior sides) at the start of this season when a lease on this site became available. I went to their other ground in February last season for a high-scoring but instantly forgettable league match against Nottingham FC - see R No.33 for a report from my visit. Carrside has always been used as a recreation ground in the past although it has become overgrown and unloved in more recent times. Since acquiring the land much work has been undertaken during the summer months to bring it up to a reasonable standard and one acceptable to the CML for hosting matches.

The enclosed site bordered by houses and fields contains a long narrow playing field with two almost identical pitches running end to end in what is quite a rustic setting. The first team use the one nearest to the entrance and the second team, the furthest. A brick-built pavilion with its tiled roof is set back against the outer hedge is found closest to the first team pitch. This contains changing rooms (for all teams) at one end and a kitchen area/tea bar at the other. Also, along this side, just beyond the pavilion, is a long clear Perspex panelled plastic cover with blue supporting struts which is used as a stand. This is currently out of use and turned on its side facing away from the pitch. I forgot to ask whether it's temporarily out of action due to the recent high winds. A rope guided through bright yellow plastic stakes runs partway along this side of the pitch close to the pavilion. Two Perspex dug outs set apart are placed either side of half-way on the opposite touchline. It clearly looks as though the ground is a work in progress at the moment. There are plans, I am told, for the club to add a more permanent perimeter post and rail fence, a more robust covered stand and some much-needed hardstanding, hopefully at some point in the future.

Today's game sees the visit of Mansfield-based Woodhouse Colts FC (who incidentally play at the Forest Town Arena). I hadn't come across this side before but their coach told me that the club has been going for over forty years, founded back in 1977. They played initially in junior and youth football (where the club still run seventeen sides) before entering a men's team in the CML this season. There's no worry about this cup tie requiring extra-time or penalties (even if there was enough light to fit that in) as the President's Cup Conferences round is organised on a mini league basis in the early stages before entering a knock-out phase later on. Look out Champions League, you've got competition! For the record Borrowash Victoria Development and Cromford & Wirksworth Town are the other sides that make up this group of four. It's an intriguing fixture too as neither side has met the other with Woodhouse playing in the CML Division One South division of the CML. They are having a decent debut season currently sitting in mid-table (out of twelve teams).

After a fairly even first-half display in which both sides create chances, Epworth take control of the game and in the end prove too strong for their opponents today. The Colts open the scoring deep into added time at the end of the first half when Harrison Coley (45+3) gets on the end of a low cross from the left to stab the

ball home making it 1-0 at the break. Moments (possibly seconds) after the re-start the hosts immediately make it 2-0 through Dan Taylor (46) who guides the ball into the bottom corner from a shot inside the box. Matt Fowler (65) scores the goal of the match, possibly season, when spotting the keeper is off his line, shoots from a full 35-yards to lob the ball over him and into the net to give his side a 3-0 lead. Coley (71) then wraps up the scoring with his second of the game, turning quickly to drill the ball home from close range. The 4-0 victory sends them to the top of the group with maximum points (having already beaten Borrowash Victoria Development 5-0 in October).

The game, played in both a mixture of sunshine and showers as well as a strong side wind on a bumpy pitch (that hadn't been rolled for a bit because of the bad weather), attracts less than twenty spectators. I am told that number is lower than they normally get here maybe due to Scunthorpe United FC being at home and, with Christmas fast approaching, some may have even gone shopping (banish that thought from your mind now please!). Hot drinks and snacks are available from the hatch in the kitchen at area of the pavilion at half-time. Incidentally the ETC Development side go down 0-2 to Crosby Colts Reserves in a Scunthorpe & District League Division Two fixture on the other pitch.

Epworth, based midway between Goole and Gainsborough in the Isle of Axholme, is easy to reach from the M180 motorway, by-passing Scunthorpe. I came off at junction two heading south along the A161 for about three miles passing Belton before reaching the outskirts of the town. After turning off the main Belton Road into Tottermire Lane continue until you reach the main High Street and then turn almost immediately again into Battle Green which then becomes Wroot Road in about a quarter of a mile. As you get into more open countryside, look out for a large white house on the left which provides a useful landmark as you approach the main entrance off Carrside. The ground quickly appears in front of you on the right-hand side where the road begins to narrow. It seems a bit of a footballing outpost here and I'm not sure whether it would be that easy to get to and from for those using public transport.

Now let me tell you more about that club programme I was referring to earlier. Like some other teams in the CML Epworth Town Colts are issuing for the first time this season. I was first alerted to this when the ever-helpful hopping supremo Martyn Girdham from Winterton sent me an E-Mail containing details and a copy of the cover (in an attached scan) when he visited the club back in September last year (see PR No.6 in this season's review section). All the production is outsourced to *Footie Print* a company from Oswestry in Shropshire who publish bespoke matchday magazines for a host of sports, predominantly football, with clubs including Bradford Park Avenue, Truro City, Kennington and Haywards Heath, currently on their books. Check out their website for more. Apparently, it costs about £50 per match to print something like fifty to sixty programmes. It's in a superb glossy format predominantly in yellow, the club's colours, consisting of 12-pages of content with welcome, previous match reports, and loads of stats including a table which shows that the hosts are in fourth behind leaders Boynton Sports FC in CML 1N. All the match details are on the front and each cover picture is different for every home game. Even though a cover price of £1.50 is printed on

the front page, the club incredibly doesn't make a charge or accept a donation (as far as I am aware) to recoup some of their costs and no effort is made to distribute them or tell patrons they can have one, before or at any stage during the game. A pile is usually left inside the tea bar from which you can help yourself. Don't tell anyone but I greedily took four copies. I can't help wondering why no charge is made as the club must be losing quite a bit money this way. It all seems quite odd to be honest.

As with many other non-league clubs up and down the country there is always a driving force behind them. Take young Scott Barlow whom I met for a chat before the game - he has been the life-blood of the side for many years. Formerly a player and now first team coach, Paul also doubles up with the junior section of ETC over at their base at the South Axholme Academy where he is employed as a teacher. He's a lovely bloke and is always keen to see groundhoppers attend games at Carrside. He was happy to give me the line ups and confirm the scorers during the game. He told me that the club is now establishing itself in the CML and hopes to be challenging for honours come the end of the season. On this performance, he could well be right. Watch this space.

Despite the dire weather, this had been a wonderful afternoon's entertainment at another Lincolnshire football outpost. This is a friendly and pro-active club which is always keen to welcome ground collectors. They also publish a regularly updated *twitter* feed to advertise games - extremely helpful in view of the present changeable climate. So, if you are looking to tick off a new ground and get your hands on a much coveted matchday programme, a visit to Carrside, home of Epworth Town Colts Football Club comes highly recommended. Finally, thanks to Martyn for first giving me the lowdown on the club and to let Steve know that his much-awaited programme will be in the post shortly - now where have we heard that before? The joys of hopping in remote places continue, have fun finding them.

R No.20: *WebEd* - Saturday 7th December 2019; **South Kirkby Colliery** v Ecclesfield Red Rose 1915; Sheffield County Senior League J&B Bradley Memorial Cup Round 2; Kick-Off: 1.30pm; Venue: South Kirkby MW; Millars Walk; South Kirkby; West Yorkshire; WF93UZ; Result: 2-1; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 21 - REPORT TO FOLLOW

R No.19: *WebEd* - Saturday 30th November 2019; **Driffield Junior** v Westella & Willerby; Humber Premier League Premier Division; Kick-Off: 2pm; Venue: Allotment Lane; Driffield; East Yorkshire; YO255UR; Result: 2-4; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 21 - REPORT TO FOLLOW

R No.18: *WebEd* - Saturday 23rd November 2019; **Bedricks Worth** v Ufford Sports; Suffolk & Ipswich League Division Two; Kick-Off: 2pm; Venue: Great Whelnetham Community Centre; Stanningfield Road; Great Whelnetham; Bury St Edmunds; Suffolk; IP300TY; Result: 4-0; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 21

This weekend we are making a trip down to East Anglia so that we can visit my sister-in-law Jane who lives in the village of Exning just outside Newmarket. It's always lovely to spend some time back in horse racing HQ since we re-located from here to the Banks of the Humber a couple of years ago now. Whilst Fran and her

sister head to the shops for some retail therapy, I have the hoppertunity to take in a game in one of the many local leagues in the area. My choice today is the tasty top of the table Suffolk & Ipswich League Division Two game featuring Bedricks Worth Football Club (v Ufford Sports) based at the Great Whelnetham Community Centre. This was the first game I picked, prompted by hopping legend and regular *FGIF* scribe Brian Buck who visited the club himself back in September for a league fixture. Indeed, my last taste of football in this competition was on 02/09/17 when I watched Bardwell Sports take on AFC Orwell in a SIL Division 4 match played at the Bardwell Cricket Club. With the hosts winning by a resounding 18-0 score-line, it was a most memorable hop to say the least!

As Brian rightly points out in his excellent review (*2019/20 - TT No.36*), the name Bedicks Worth derives from the Anglo-Saxon *Beodericsworth* which is an old name for Bury St Edmunds. The football club was formed only five years ago with players coming from various junior sides participating in youth football. Coached by the affable Stuart Codd (a diamond geezer), they made the first step up to adult football in 2015 by joining the St Edmundsbury League (sadly now folded) where they remained for three years before moving up to the Suffolk & Ipswich League only last season. They achieved instant success not only in taking the Division Three title by storm, winning eighteen out of twenty games and securing a positive goal difference of sixty-six, but also in reaching the Semi-Final of the Suffolk Primary Cup (losing 2-0 to AFC Sudbury A). The club has continued to make fine progress since gaining promotion to Division Two this season and before play currently sit in third place behind leaders Tattingstone United and today's opponents Ufford Sports (from Woodbridge) who have a slightly better goal difference (+2) than them. On paper an exciting and close fought match is in prospect for the travelling ground collecting obsessive.

Before the game starts young established referee, James Tebbit, who has been drafted in to officiate at the eleventh hour, gathers the players around the centre circle to observe a minute's silence as a mark of respect for long-serving Suffolk FA president Gordon Blake who passed away only a few days earlier. After missing a number of early chances, it's the hosts who open the scoring when Callum Smith (17) drives forward powerfully into the area before slipping the ball under the advancing keeper. The course of the game changes just after the break when the visitors are reduced to ten men following a dangerous tackle by one of their players in the middle of the pitch. Bedricks Worth capitalise when Brown (60) bundles the ball over from close range to net his second just after the hour mark. Charlie French (70) comes off the subs bench to add a third tapping in at the back post before Brown (85) claims a well-deserved hat-trick five minutes before the final whistle. The result sees the hosts leapfrog their opponents and move into second place, three points behind Tattingstone who also win by beating Cockfield United 4-2 at Green Lane this afternoon. The match played in mostly dull and overcast conditions on a superbly manicured surface (albeit a bit soggy in some places) attracts just over twenty fans. As expected, neither programmes nor refreshments are available on my visit.

Travellers will be impressed by the excellent facilities at the Great Whelnetham Community Centre. Based about four miles from Bury it can be reached by taking

the third exit to the town (BSE East) and following the ring road past the town's rugby club before taking the A134 Sudbury Road at the next roundabout. After passing the Victory Sports Ground (home to SIL side Sporting 87 FC who are incidentally also at home today) and Nowton Park on the right-hand side continue to the village of Sicklesmere (with the Rushbrook Arms pub on the left) taking the next right turn into Stanningfield Road where signs for the Community Centre can be seen at the junction. Continue through the village for about a quarter of a mile before turning left at the entrance into the car park which also doubles as a mini recycling centre. The football changing rooms are accessed through a door on the side of the main building close to the playing field. From here the pitch (which runs lengthways) is found on the top of a gently rising plateau - a small set of concrete steps built into the grass banking brings you out behind the goal. You'll also notice that the goal nets and corner flags are decked out in green and white (matching the club colours) which adds a neat touch to proceedings.

The playing field is fully enclosed by hedges (on both sides) and tall trees at the far end. Pride of place goes to a cracking stand built on a further bank over on the right-hand side of the field. It's a lovely structure with bricked sides and a moss-covered wooden roof, offering standing shelter for up to thirty spectators. It also has a wide sloping concrete path with supporting handrails suitable for wheelchair access and children's buggies. The panoramic views from this high vantage point (and further along the bank to the right) are incredible - although it was fairly dull with mist in the air, it was still possible to appreciate the wonderful country vista for miles around. If you look directly over the roof tops belonging to the houses on the far side of the ground you can see the factory buildings and plumes of thick smoke billowing into the air from the chimneys at the distant British Sugar beet factory (on the next junction of the A14). If you get chance you might spot the beacon located on the field near to the main entrance.

Before kick-off team coach Stuart explained how lucky the club has been to re-locate here this season since leaving their old Oakes Road playing field base in the town centre. It was the landowner who chose the club over others (including Bury Town Youth FC) preferring that the site be used by a more local grass-roots club instead. With the added promise that the pitches will be maintained to a high standard for a couple of years, has also proved to be an added bonus. Special mention must also go to club secretary Debbie Reynolds (yes, there is another one!) for confirming the match details at mid-day - with her mum and auntie also on the committee (and at the game) this is certainly a friendly family run club. There really is a great team ethic here too judging by the number of members proudly wearing the club's green training tops with their initials and club badge embroidered on the front.

It had been another excellent hop to what is a wonderful Suffolk footballing outpost. I found Bedricks Worth Football Club to be a lovely, friendly and well-organised group with a great team ethic and a visit to their Whelnetham Community Centre ground is to be highly recommended to all hoppers. Details of the club and its matches can be found on the generic *FA Full-Time* site covering the Suffolk & Ipswich League and the regularly updated *twitter* feed. Thanks to everyone at the club for their warm welcome and to one of hopping's finest

ambassadors Brian Buck who first pointed me in the direction of this gem of a ground. Hopping heaven indeed!

R No.17: WebEd - Saturday 16th November 2019; **Newark Town v Appleby Frodingham**; Central Midlands League North Division; Kick-Off: 3pm; Venue: YMCA Activity Village; Lord Hawke Way; Newark; Nottinghamshire; NG244FH; Result: 7-0; Admission: £4; Programme: Yes, 24pp, £1; Attendance: 73

Many of you, like myself no doubt, tend to keep a close watch on the weather forecast, particularly as the weekend fast approaches. Its compulsory viewing as we plan our next footy fix. At this time of year, it almost becomes another hobby as we train our eyes to follow the predicted course of the rainclouds at a set time as they move across the weather chart, hoping for a micro-climate to suddenly appear in the direction we are heading. At best, just some relief from the incessant rainfall, would be nice. But for us there is an element of choice as to where we go. Spare a thought then for those caught up with the recent heavy floods, all too familiar in some parts of South Yorkshire at the moment. It's a heart-breaking story.

It's certainly not a place you'd want to be, is it? Well today, I am. In fact, I'm in Doncaster (one of the worst hit areas Fishlake, is just a few miles up the road) taking my daughter to the railway station as she heads off to visit her twin in London for a few days. After seeing her off at mid-day my mind soon turns to the next task in hand - finding a game for the afternoon. Any hope of watching a match close-by on grass is a non-starter, so I look for the obvious 3/4G plastic options, a staple for most hoppers in the last few weeks. Apart from a few games that I've already highlighted closer to *FGIF* HQ, my attention is quickly drawn to the CML fixture a bit further south at Newark Town FC who now play at their new base, the YMCA Activity Village. This destination has already appeared on the *Travellers Tale* pages courtesy of hopping sleuth and one of *FGIF*'s finest scribes Sir Keith Aslan, who wrote about his matchday experience there back in September. In fact, he gave it a most favourable and glowing report. So, following a quick check phone call with helpful club secretary Dave Roberts (who is in the middle of hosting one of the club's junior games at the time of my enquiry), I'm soon following Keith's lead and heading down the to M18 and A1 (exit at Coddington) for some plastic action myself.

The original Newark Town was formed in 1868 and played for much of the time in the Midland Counties League. The club disbanded at the start of the Second World War but the club had tasted FA Cup success during the early 1930s. They reached the second round of the FA Cup in the 1930-31 season and made the first-round proper in three out of four seasons between 1929-30 and 1933-34. For a brief period in the 1970s a group of players played under the Newark Town banner but it was not until the late 1980s that the club properly reformed. Initially the club only fielded junior teams but the decision was taken in 1994 to start an adult's side and joined the Nottinghamshire Alliance in 1997. Newark progressed in that league, winning the Division One championship in 2003-04, earning the club promotion to the Central Midlands League. 2011 saw a re-organisation of the League and the

club was placed in the South Division. They have since been transferred to the North Division.

Today's game sees high-flying and unbeaten Newark take on a struggling (only one off the bottom of the league) Appleby Frodingham. Things don't look too good for the visitors from Scunthorpe when they arrive in a disjointed convoy of cars with only a scratch side just a few minutes ahead of the scheduled 3pm kick-off. The league table doesn't lie either as Newark completely dominate the match beating their opponents by a resounding 7-0 score-line. At least three of the goals are absolute belters especially the fifth one scored from a full thirty-yard volley by top marksmen Craig Bridge who netted a hat-trick - it could have been more had the woodwork not intervened! Interestingly according to the club's *twitter* site some of players are currently taking part in a 21-day 'Vegan Challenge', a plant-based diet trial (sponsored by local company @vegoutlincoln and Gusto Group Ltd) and on this performance it seems to be working well!

It was a superb afternoon's entertainment (albeit a one-sided contest) played on a wonderful surface in front of seventy plus spectators including a small contingent of hoppers who had come down from Leeds. It was great to meet up with regular northern-based travellers Hedley and Gordon especially during the early stages of the game. Paper-chasers will be pleased to know that the club issue regularly for home matches. Indeed, editor Richard Lane pens a cracking 24-page, photocopied colour programme priced £1 which comes complete with all the usual stats and plenty of reading material (including colour action photos) to peruse over your half-time cuppa. Talking of which, a range of hot drinks (dispensed in environmentally friendly card cups) and cold snacks are available from the dedicated refreshment kiosk.

The club are naturally proud to be playing football back in Newark after their lengthy stay (almost fifteen years as far as I know) at neighbouring club, Collingham FC. The new ground (three years in the making) found off the Bowbridge Lane, is part of a £20m large sporting hub and is grandiosely entitled the *YMCA Newark & Sherwood Community and Activity Village*. Money for the project was funded by local council grants and the national Playing Fields Association, amongst others (a site map close to the entrance highlights all the sponsors). It covers land previously used for football where former team *Ransome & Marles* (Midland League) used to play post World War II. After turning into the complex on Lord Hawke Way you pass a modern colourful housing development on the right before reaching a vast car park at the bottom of the drive. To the right is a new (well, reasonably new) sports centre with angled roof which incorporates a fitness studio, gym and swimming pool. Further to the left and partly hidden is a modern all-weather 8-lane running track built on the site of a former cricket ground - in fact the pavilion is still in situ. Another new floodlit cage running parallel is often used by the club on training nights.

To reach the floodlit football ground spectators should take the entrance over to the right (not easy to spot at first sight being obscured behind the sports centre) where a wooden pay hut (and programme collection point!) allows access coming out behind the goal. The changing rooms, hospitality and refreshment facilities are

housed in a series of portacabins (all with unique signage on the front) at the end of a neatly fenced path which is some 70 yards from the pitch and has a separate entrance for players and officials. What sets this 4G caged ground apart from others is the open access (without restrictions) to all sides of the ground - great if you want to take photos. A large banner attached to the side of the furthest fence displays the full ground title. Two modern Perspex dug outs are found to the right-hand side of the half-way line on the entrance side. Although there is no dedicated spectator cover here at present, I am led to believe that the club plan to erect a stand at the far end of the ground where there is more space than along the sides. In fact, there are further plans to develop the site with the addition of a new climbing wall, gym and food outlet all to be completed at some point in the near future.

Hoppers will not only be impressed by the superb facilities but also the warm welcome they will receive on a visit here. I had the pleasure of chatting to many of the officials (and fans) before and during the game and it soon becomes clear what a pro-active club this is: if you get chance have a word with helpful club secretary Dave (in the refreshment hut); Joe a much-travelled England supporter (on the gate) and Dave who also promotes the club with *Newark Radio* - check out the latest football podcasts. They are only too pleased to help and couldn't have been more friendly during my short stay. It goes without saying that a visit to this ambitious club comes highly recommended to all travellers. A most enjoyable trip which will live long in the memory. It's definitely worth a stay at the YMCA (sorry, I just couldn't resist!!!). And finally, it's a big thankyou to Keith once again for giving me the thumbs up on this one.

R No.16: WebEd - Saturday 9th November 2019; **Nostell Miners Welfare** v Skegness Town; Northern Counties East League Division One; Kick-Off: 3pm; Venue: The Welfare Ground; Crofton Community Centre; Middle Lane; New Crofton; Wakefield; South Yorkshire; WF41LB; Result: 4-2; Admission: £6; Programme: Yes, 24pp, £1; Attendance: 80

Another wet Saturday. Another morning spent looking for a game that has beaten the weather. Despite having already found five 3/4G back-up games on my doorstep, I persevere and am rewarded by finding a game on grass that's still on having passed an early inspection. My head says don't bother, stay local but my heart decides that I'm off to Wakefield for my fix today. It's not logical is it? But that's the nature of groundhopping I suppose.

Nostell is a village in the city of Wakefield in West Yorkshire, located near to Hemsworth. It's famed for the beautiful *Nostell Priory*, an 18th-century Palladian historic house, with interiors completed by Robert Adam and furniture designed by Thomas Chippendale. The house was owned by the Winn family and is now in the care of the *National Trust*. Coal mining at Nostell began in the 9th century and continued until 1987. Nostell Colliery was known locally as '*the family pit*' due to the welfare schemes introduced by the Winn family far in advance of similar schemes prior to nationalisation. In 1880, terraced houses were built close to the colliery and the settlement was nicknamed '*Cribbins Lump*' attributed to the builder by the inhabitants. The settlement was later renamed '*New Crofton*' by

Lord St Oswald but the nickname remained until the houses were demolished in the 1980s. Sadly Nostell Colliery closed in 1987. As with the other closed pits in the Wakefield area, many of the miners took transfers to the new Selby Coalfield on closure. A full history was written in the same year by the pit's manager at the time: *A History of Over 850 Years of Mining at Nostell* by Bryan Fraser.

Prior to the current club, a team under the name of Nostell Colliery Football Club played in the village during the 1890s and early 1900s; the team won the Wakefield and District League during this period. The current club Nostell Miners Welfare Football Club was founded in 1928, after the purchase of a plot of land to play on for £400, the location which they remain at today. The club won the Wakefield and District League during the 1937-1938 season. Play was halted for World War II, but when the club returned, they were successful in several colliery football competitions. In the late 1960s, Nostell Miners Welfare continued their success in the West Yorkshire League taking the West Yorkshire League and cup double. By the early 1970s, they were once again playing in the Wakefield and District League where they remained for a decade before gaining promotion back to the West Yorkshire League in 1982. The club worked their way up to the West Yorkshire League Premier Division to begin a successful period in their history - becoming champions in 2004-05. The following season along with AFC Emley were promoted (over champions Leeds Metropolitan Carnegie who did not meet the criteria) to the Northern Counties East Football League Division One and won promotion to the Premier Division the following season. This is the highest level the club has ever played at in their history. On 28 April 2009, Nostell won the Northern Counties East Football League Presidents Cup final against Scarborough Athletic, away at Bridlington, winning 3-2 on aggregate.

I digress. Within an hour of leaving home I'm turning into Middle Lane and down the narrow driveway leading towards The Welfare Ground, home of Nostell Miners Welfare Football. As I pull into the small car park (passing an old replica mining wheel in situ), I also notice that another game on an outer pitch (The Sidings) is already underway. I'm not sure but it could be Crofton Sports FC (Wakefield & District League) who are playing. The facilities here are based in the Crofton Community Centre, an old building decked out with a new lick of paint acts as a sports hub in the village with access through a covered porch and couple of glass doors that form an entrance at the front. It's a bit of a maze in here to be honest. Although there is low lighting inside the foyer, I soon pass a couple of displays proudly mounted (museum style) on the walls dedicated to the former Nostell mine and its workers - although the site has been closed for some time now (32 years ago) it still makes fascinating reading. A long narrow corridor leads past a bar and function room to the right and a kitchen to the left. A right turn beyond the toilets and changing rooms brings you to another door at the back from where you can see the ground entrance and floodlights to the immediate left.

As you pass through the turnstile you find yourself on the top of a long grass embankment high above the pitch which is set down in a dip below. It's a unique set up - a long low roof stand provides plenty of seating to the right. To the left there is open standing behind a metal barrier which continues along the full length of the Community Centre behind. The players must walk down a couple of steep

flights of steps in order to reach the pitch (level with the edge of the eighteen-yard box) at the bottom. It's a cracking vantage point at the top from which to view the action and appreciate the rural nature of the ground which is enclosed by trees on three sides. At this time of year, the colourful golden-brown shades certainly make a heart-warming impression. From pitch level you can walk to the open standing sections behind both goals. Access to and along the far side is generally restricted with a couple of no entry signs preventing your passage near to each corner - although you can get there by climbing over a low chicken wire fence placed alongside the path, the section behind the dug outs is rather overgrown with weeds and thistles in most places - as I found to my cost by getting wet feet.

This was my second consecutive Saturday spent watching Skegness Town. After last week's home victory (2-1) over a dogged Brigg Town side the Lilywhites arrived at The Welfare ground sitting in first place in the Division One table with the hosts just a few points and places behind them. The game started according to the form book with the visitors taking the lead when a long looping header directed by Liam Parker (11) from the edge of the box found the back of the net. Within ten minutes the hosts levelled through Callum Ward (25) who neatly slid the ball under advancing keeper to make it 1-1 going into half-time. The turning point in the game came just before the hour mark when Nostell were awarded a penalty expertly despatched by Rhys Meynell (57) to give his side the lead. With increasing confidence, the hosts took control of matters by adding two further goals with strikes from Luke McCrum (73) and Jack Owen (78) - the latter from a superbly struck free-kick to put the game beyond doubt. Although the visitors managed to reduce the deficit through Gary King (85) the hosts had done enough to win a most memorable game by 4-2, a result that moves them up to fifth place.

The game contested on a wet but perfectly playable surface in very dull overcast conditions attracted a decent crowd some of whom had come here after their first-choice games had fallen victim to the weather. I got chatting to a local hopper Tony and his wife who had driven over from Scunthorpe for the game. His detailed knowledge of northern non-league football (and other matters) was a law unto itself and certainly nothing to be scoffed at, I can tell you?! A neat 24-page programme priced £1.50 was issued for the game. Although all the pages (apart from the yellow outer cover) had been photocopied (in black and white) just before kick-off (in fact my copy was still warm), it nevertheless made for a cracking read. A range of hot food and drinks were cheerfully dispensed by two bubbly young girls from the kitchen area back in the Community Centre. I went for the cholesterol induced burger which was very tasty and worth every penny of the ridiculously cheap £2 price-tag.

This had been another wonderful hop, particularly on a day when I was pretty lucky to find a game on grass. A visit to The Welfare Ground and Crofton Community Centre is highly recommended and possibly one to bear in mind during times of wet weather. Details of the club can be found on its website and *twitter* feed. The joys being a grass hopper continue...it's definitely the real deal!

R No.15: WebEd - Saturday 2nd November 2019; **Skegness Town v Brigg Town CIC**; Northern Counties East League Division One; Kick-Off: 3pm; Venue: Vertigo

Stadium; Wainfleet Road; Skegness; Lincolnshire; PE252EL; Result: 2-1; Admission: £5; Programme: Yes, 12pp, £1; Attendance: 104

I'll start my review with a little look at the club history but if you prefer to ignore this pre-ramble then go to paragraph five! The football club was founded in 1947, as a successor to the town's two pre-war clubs Skegness United and Skegness Blue Rovers. The latter having played for one season in the Lincoln & District League (1937-38). After a season in the Boston & District League (using Wainfleet Road Recreation Ground) and then the East Lincs Combination (at the former ground of United in Richmond Drive), the club moved to Burgh Road to become a founder member of the Lincolnshire League in 1948. After two successful seasons in the Central Alliance (South), the club were, (1960-61 apart, when the League was in abeyance), members of the Midland Counties League from 1958 to 1982, finishing as runners-up in 1978-79, missing out on the title on goal difference. The club had a season in its successor, the North Counties (East) League, before returning to the Lincolnshire League in 1983. During the 1977-78 pre-season, Skegness Town played a pre-season match against Brian Clough's Nottingham Forest and nine months later Forest became champions of England.

Until 1985 the club regularly entered the FA Cup but only once reached the First Round Proper, in 1955-56, when they were defeated 4-0 at home to Worksop Town after beating Barton Town in the first qualifying round, Brigg Town in the second, Grantham in the third and finally Gainsborough Trinity in the fourth. The club's last participation in the FA Cup was in 1985 and a 1st Qualifying Round trip to face local rivals Goole Town where they lost 3-2. Skegness Town entered the first ever FA Trophy competition in 1969-70 and competed until 1976-77, never getting past the qualifying rounds. They switched to the FA Vase, reaching the 4th round in 1978-79 where they lost to Shepshed Charterhouse and the 5th round in 1981-82, losing to Rainworth Miners Welfare. Changes in the ground grading regulations for national competitions ended the club's participation in 1990-91.

Since the Lincolnshire FA restructured its cup competitions in 2006, the club competed in its Junior Cup losing the 2007-08 final on penalties. Previously, with some success, the club participated in the Senior 'B' Cup, becoming its first winners and adding three further titles. For 1956-57 they were promoted to the Senior 'A' Cup winning at their first attempt going on to six wins including a hat-trick between 1968 and 1971. The club were champions of the Lincolnshire League in 2006-07 and 2007-08, thus winning their third and fourth county league titles. The Lilywhites also won the league in the 2015-16 and 2016-17 seasons.

In early 2016, it was announced that Skegness Town would be moving from Burgh Road to the new Vertigo Stadium. The site of The Lilywhites' old ground Burgh Road was demolished to make way for a small shopping centre and the new location was to be here on Wainfleet Road. The ground was completed by mid-2017 for the start of the 2017/18 season. The stadium was officially opened on 21 July 2017 by Mayor Danny Brookes and the occasion was marked by a friendly between Skegness Town and the Lincoln City U18 squad. The game ended with a 3-1 victory to The Lilywhites.

Moving onto today's game. Despite the best efforts of a slow-moving horse box trailer, the impending threat of running out of petrol at any moment and the worsening weather, I am fortunate to get to the Louth in a fit state I can tell you. The services at Fotherby offer some welcome respite though as I manage to lose the horse transit vehicle whose tail lights I have been following (very slowly) for the last ten or so miles, fill up the tank with fuel just in the nick of time and take a break from driving through some seriously flooded roads. Apart from this there is the small matter of a game of football to attend, that's if it's still on, of course. A quick phone call to check whether the game at the Vertigo (how fitting!) Stadium has survived is met with some incredulity and surprise by an elderly-sounding gentleman with a strong accent at the other end of the line. He seems puzzled that I have even doubted it. So, it's game on and time to get back on the road to Skegness! With time at a premium I decide not to go for a pre-match paddle on the golden sands.

Now into their third season of playing here, I really do like the Lilywhite's new stadium. From first impressions, its very pleasing to the eye. A large sign displaying the club logo welcomes visitors to Skegness Town Football Club. Today there are several other banners tied to the fence all advertising local bonfire night parties in the area. The car park is pretty big and I just about manage to find an empty space outside the two new main club buildings on site. Facilities are contained within separate areas - the angled roofing which forms a V in the middle looks pretty stylish too. From here access is through a tall turnstile (where you can also buy the Lilywhites matchday programme) which brings you out near the corner of the field. The floodlit site is fully enclosed from the adjoining sports complex (including the town's rugby club) by a wooden panelled fence supported by a tall outer green wire mesh boundary fence. To the right a long, covered walkway leads to the clubhouse where there is a modern bar and refreshment room (with windows facing the pitch). An adjoining corridor takes you to changing rooms which are situated further along the building. Players come out onto the pitch at this end through a portable plastic collapsing tunnel (complete with embossed club logos). Outside a couple of smart DIY kit stands both combining standing at one end with seating (alternate rows in red and white) at the other on four steps of terracing, are situated along the far touch line (either side of halfway) and these provide plenty of spectator cover. The stand to the left has been named The John Woodward OBE stand in memory of a local businessman who had links with the club. Two dug-outs are in place on the opposite side of the pitch. In between is a scaffolding tower used by the club's media officer who stands on the gantry to video club matches. Interestingly the reserve team use a separate pitch (enclosed) accessed by a dedicated entrance and path, in the adjoining field behind the goal at the far end.

Today's game sees the current league leaders entertain (bottom half) Brigg Town to the Vertigo Stadium. With only the width of a fag paper separating the two teams, its Skegness who take the lead when Elliot Broughton finds Ben Davison (6) in the box and he tucks it away to make it 1-0. It's the visitors who level when a pin-point free-kick into the box is nodded in by Stuart Longbone (32) to make it 1-1 going into the break. Despite having a goal disallowed for offside the Lilywhites

finally manage to break the deadlock and snatch the winner moments later when a flick on finds Gary King (83) in space and he pokes the ball home to make it 2-1. The result helps Skegness to consolidate their place at the top of the table and a possible push for promotion come the end of the season. Considering the amount of wet weather in the area the playing surface holds up very well with only a few sticky patches visible by the end of the game which is played in mainly cloudy conditions. The crowd which just peaks over the hundred mark attracts a fair number of travelling fans who have come down from North Lincolnshire to watch the Zebras (that's their nickname, not a tourist attraction!). I'm not sure where the referee find the six minutes of added time from at the end but a couple of old boys who have been following the club for over fifty years cause a stir when one looks at his watch and quips: *'Come on ref, I've got to get home to cook the wife's tea!!'*.

At the start of the second-half I manage to take some aerial pictures from the TV gantry (thanks to Mark Bradbrook for letting me share his lofty perch) where it is possible to see the second team pitch behind the fence over to the right - complete with perimeter fence it's a tidy set-up. They were playing local rivals Spilsby Town, 3-1, in the NLC1. After the game the crowd (as big as the one here) could be seen walking along the path behind the perimeter fence as they made their way to the exit. A neat 12-page glossy programme with all the basics but little real content, is sold for £1. Refreshments are also available in the clubhouse with orders for both hot and cold food and drinks being taken from behind the bar. Judging by the length of the queue the chips were the certainly a big hit with the locals.

Although my journey back home in the dark is a fairly long and arduous one, it is certainly worth the effort. Despite its fairly remote location, a visit to the Vertigo Stadium is to be recommended to all football travellers who will be assured of a warm welcome when they get there. For more details log onto the club's website, *twitter* feed or the superb NCEL site edited by dedicated webmaster Jason Harrison. The joys of hopping in seaside towns continues. You just can't beat the four S's: sun, sea, sand and...soccer! Have fun wherever you go.

R No.14: WebEd - Saturday 26th October 2019; **West Hull Amateurs** v Cherry Burton; East Riding County League Premier Division; Kick-Off: 2pm; Venue: Kelvin Hall School 3G; Bricknell Avenue; Hull; East Yorkshire; HU54QH; Result: 2-8; Admission: No; Programme: No; Attendance: 6

Despite the heavy rain falling along the banks of the Humber during the last few days, I am still hopeful of finding a game that has survived the awful weather today. By mid-morning it's not surprising there have been so many local postponements in the area considering the amount of wet stuff that has dropped from the sky in such a short space of time. The forecast for the afternoon looks just as grim and it's fair to say that most (sane) people would be more than happy to stay indoors but for the obsessive ground collector this is just not an option. My initial list of possible games has been halved but I am pleased to say there are five clubs* (for info see list below) whose games are still on. You've guessed it - each play their matches on artificial pitches, a fallback for the intrepid football

traveller who has been keeping their 3G (or 4G) card up their anorak sleeve for days just like this. The added bonus too is that all my backup games are within a short twenty-minute drive from *FGIF* HQ. So, it's game on, literally!

After much deliberation I finally pick the East Riding County League Premier Division fixture between West Hull Amateurs and Cherry Burton which is being played on the 3G pitch at the Kelvin Hall School. The large 1200 pupil mixed secondary school which caters for those aged 11-16, is situated on the north western outskirts of the city (between Hull and Cottingham) and is easily reached using the outer ring-roads. After reaching the main entrance (located off Bricknell Avenue) visitors should use the large car park immediately in front of the imposing school buildings to the left and not the one belonging to the adjoining Wyke Sixth Form College which also shares the vast site. Although this is actually much closer to the sports facilities, I'm told the barrier in their adjacent car park is often locked during the afternoon making any speedy exit afterwards virtually impossible!

To reach the sports ground you will need to walk instead through the modern angled-roofed PE Department Building (the one with the word *actiVezone* emblazoned in large letters on the side). Go through the main glass door and along the corridors passing the changing rooms, en-route to the floodlit 3G MUGA around the back. The cage (with access in the nearest corner) is positioned lengthways with the surrounding school buildings backing onto two of its sides. On the far side a parallel rugby pitch used by Wyke College provides a stark reminder of the poor weather conditions - the playing surface appears to be heavily waterlogged in many places with flocks of low flying seagulls taking advantage of the surface puddles. Anyone for water polo?! Although the plastic pitch here looks similar to many others I've been in over the years, the goal posts seemed quite unique having an unusual rectangular stanchion frame supporting the attached nets behind - almost resembling those continental *Subbuteo* table-football goals from the 1980's! Remember placing those at opposite ends of the hallowed green baize playing cloth? A couple of purpose built dug-outs used by the respective team squads are positioned close to half-way on your immediate left. Apart from that, there is no other dedicated cover for spectators at pitch-side.

Today's game is an intriguing one with newly promoted West Hull Amateurs FC (last season's ERCL Division One champions and Senior League Cup Winners) entertaining brand-new club Cherry Burton FC from Beverley. The visitors were formed in pre-season out of the old Beverley Town Academy FC side who parted company with the manager (and many of the players) at the end of 2018-19. Before play the hosts find themselves in fourth place (out of eleven teams) in the table with the visitors, currently in second, only on goal difference (behind Hessle Rangers Juniors) after making an impressive unbeaten start to the campaign. A mouth-watering contest is in prospect.

Despite the heavy rain which falls incessantly before, during and after the game, both sides give it their all and create plenty of chances on what is a soggy but playable surface. For the record Cherry Burton win the game by an impressive 8-2 score-line played in very dull conditions which made taking photos a challenge: for

brevity the ten-goal sequence is shown below. Notably it is diminutive young striker Craig Muirhead who scores five of his side's goals to help them take all three points and leapfrog rivals HRJ FC (who coincidentally beat Hutton Cranswick 2-0 in the division's only other game staged on the Wolfreton School 3G in Willerby) to go back on top with a superior goal difference. A word of praise must also go to referee Ian McLane from East Hull who officiates with great presence and humility throughout making light of the dreadful conditions. A handful of spectators (each sporting their own colourful umbrella) attend the game which they watch from inside the confines of the cage. As expected, the club doesn't issue programmes (like all of the clubs in the ERCL as far as I am aware) and there is no sign of refreshments either (I couldn't see a vending machine in the school concourse).

A trip to the Kelvin Hall School 3G, home of West Hull Amateurs FC comes highly recommended to all football travellers. Although I didn't particularly like getting drenched pitch-side (that's what happens when you leave your umbrella at home!), I did enjoy my footy fix and found everyone at the club to be most welcoming. On wet days like this I was just grateful to be honest to get to a game even when Hull City had offered a tempting half-price admission fee to all home fans attending the KCOM for their FL Championship game against Derby County (2-0). The joys of watching non-league football in wet weather continue. Have fun whichever plastic pitch and wire cage you choose for your football entertainment.

*other matches played on 3/4G today: ERCL- *AFC Bilton* (D1) - at Andrew Marvel School - HU94EE; *Hessle SC Res* (D1) - Sirius Academy - HU47AE; *Bridlington Rovers FC* (D2) - at Brid SC - YO164AY; *National Amateurs FC* (D5) - at Hull Uni 3G - HU67TS; *Hornsea Town 3rds* (D5) - Hornsea School - HU181DW; HPL - *Hull United FC* (P) - Steve Prescott Centre - HU51HZ; and *Sculcoates Amateurs FC* (P) - St Marys College - HU67TN

Score-line: 0-1; 0-2; 1-2; 1-3; 1-4; 2-4; 2-5; 2-6; 2-7; 2-8.

R No.13: *WebEd* - Saturday 19th October 2019; **Louth Town** v Horncastle Town; Lincolnshire League; Kick-Off: 3pm; Venue: Marshlands; Main Road; Saltfleetby; Louth; Lincs; LN17SS; Result: 3-3; Admission: £2; Programme: No; Attendance: 35

It was only a few months after Louth United Football Club ran into financial difficulties that they were forced to leave their Park Avenue Stadium. Just when it seemed football in the town had been lost forever there was a glimmer of hope when local businessman Kerry Coggle with the backing of Steve Appleby managed to secure a short-term lease on the ground. With the support of a willing group of helpers, a new club Louth Town FC was formed in 2007.

Known as the White Wolves, they played in the Central Midlands League, achieving great success in their second season (2009-10) winning the Supreme Division (by eight clear points), the CMFL Floodlit Cup and were finalists in both the CMFL Challenge Cup and the Lincs FA Senior Trophy. They were also awarded the CMFL "*Team of the Season*" for the second year running. Promotion to the Northern Counties East League (NCEL) came at the end of the season. It was a busy time for the club fielding no less than nine teams under the LTFC banner: with a Reserve

side playing in the Lincolnshire League; the introduction of an 'A' team in the East Lincs Combination; a team in Division 3 of the Grimsby & Cleethorpes Sunday League as well as junior teams at U18, U13, U12 and two at U11 level. There was great excitement at Park Avenue in July 2011 when it was announced that as well as securing a further lease on the stadium the club had also been accepted into the 2011-12 FA Cup for the first time in their history. The team's first run in the FA Cup brought further joy as both Gedling Miners Welfare and Holbrook Sports were beaten before the White Wolves bowed out with a 2-0 defeat to *Evo-Stik* League side Buxton in front of 335 supporters at Park Avenue.

Following the retirement of popular long-serving manager Paul Walden, it was former football league pro Daryl Clare who took over at the helm for season 2012-13. The ex-striker (between 1996 - 2016) with Grimsby Town FC and Northampton Town FC (to name just a couple of clubs on his CV), led the team to their highest ever finish in the football pyramid, finishing third in the NCEL Division One table and also reaching the final of the NCEL League Cup. Season 2013-14 proved to be a major disappointment though as the team struggled at the bottom end of the NCEL league table for the whole campaign, winning just six league matches out of a possible 42 and ending the season with just 20 points. Clare left the club by mutual consent midway through the season, to be replaced once more by "Mr Louth Town", Paul Walden who was coaxed out of retirement for a third spell in charge. Although the White Wolves ended the season in an automatic relegation place, the team were reprieved after the unfortunate demise of Dinnington Town allowing them to compete for one more season. This was only short-lived though as the club officially resigned from the NCEL at the end of the 2014-15. A post on the excellent NCEL website read: *'The Toolstation NCEL has this weekend accepted the resignation of Louth Town from the competition'*. As a result, they formally joined the Lincolnshire Football League, taking the place previously occupied by their reserve team who moved into the East Lincs Combination League.

Events took a turn for the worst in 2016. In June of that year, Louth Town FC received devastating news that they had been blocked access to the Park Avenue Stadium after the landlord group gave them immediate notice (three weeks to be precise!) to leave with the intention of using the land for alternative development. Without any other playing space available in the town itself the club had to look elsewhere and were fortunate to reach an agreement with the landowner at the Marshlands facility in the neighbouring village of Saltfleetby (some six miles out of town). This new deal allowed the club to take ownership of the land (already used by local football teams) but (and it was a big but) on the proviso that it didn't install floodlights as part of any future development. Although this prevented the club from using the site for training in the (winter) evenings and would be a major stumbling block in gaining promotion, they would nevertheless have somewhere permanent to play football and to call home. Things finally came to a head in the sorry saga a few weeks later when a regional TV news bulletin reported that a fire had just destroyed the main stand and social club at their former ground. At its height, 40 firefighters tackled the blaze at the Park Avenue site in the early hours of Monday 1st August 2016. Apparently two local men, aged 21 and 37, were arrested in connection with the incident which shook everyone at the club.

Travellers planning a visit to Marshlands should follow signs for Louth which takes a rather hilly and circuitous route by-passing the main town centre along the main A16. After leaving this carriageway continue to the third roundabout taking the smaller B1200, a long straight road which leads directly to Saltfleetby village (signed). After negotiating a couple of sharp bends (on either side of the village sign post) the ground quickly comes into view on the left-hand side (next to the Saltfleetby Fisheries). A wide car park fronts the main club buildings (adorned in the club colours of blue and white) which are arranged side-by-side in a line - it's possible to see the playing fields at the back through the wire fence to the left. Look out too for the club emblems displayed on the outer walls. Spectator access is gained through a smart glass door in the centre which leads directly into an open foyer (where admission is taken at a pay table) en-route to the fields. The club has invested in a wall mounted TV monitor which has a dedicated feed showing details covering the latest match, future games and match sponsors. A door to the right takes you into the bar lounge complete with comfortable leather sofas, pool table and a large team flag entitled affixed to the wall opposite the bar.

The large site (occupying two fields) is fully enclosed by a number of trees, hedges and ditches. The first team and reserves play on separate pitches in the nearest field with the club's junior sides using pitches in the adjoining one behind the hedge to the right. The main first team pitch (marked lengthways) is immediately in front of the club buildings (which incorporate the changing rooms) and a small patio area with picnic tables in situ. A high black net fence supported by poles runs behind and along most of the side-line on the far side to the left where a couple of dug-outs are placed close to half-way. With space at a premium most spectators choose to stand on the opposite side where a small Perspex stand with a couple of benches inside (painted in blue) provides cover for a dozen or so spectators. The popular area close to the changing rooms seems cluttered with a number of old out buildings and a couple of caravans left there from days gone by. Look out too for the stationery warm-up exercise bike behind the dug-outs and a couple of long poles (with attached rings) used to by committee members to scoop the ball from out of the water-filled ditches.

Today's game saw the visit of Horncastle Town to Marshlands for a Lincolnshire League fixture, the first game I have attended in this competition this season. Ironically the sides had already met just a few days earlier in a Lincs League Challenge cup match played under lights at The Wong. By all accounts the match which ended 3-2 was an absolute belter. Louth currently in tenth place (out of thirteen teams in the division) and in desperate need of points would have to be at their very best if they were to overcome their opponents (in sixth).

Neither side disappointed in what was a terrific, hard-fought, competitive game for the football travelling neutral. By the break Louth looked down and out trailing by two goals (with a brace from Luke Blondell coming after 5 and 35 mins) to give the visitors a well-earned lead. But the second half was a different story as the White Wolves made a spirited fightback to get back in the game and draw level (with goals from Alex Carter - 48 and Joe Marshall - 61) by the hour mark. Moments later Ellis Barker (74) beat the offside trap to lob the ball over the keeper to give his side an incredible lead (and what looked a likely winner with the Horncastle

players tiring quickly). Just when they thought they grabbed all three points the visitors struck deep into stoppage time when sub Michael Stones stepped up to make it 3-3 and deny Louth victory! Naturally the locals were gutted but on later reflection will be pleased with a point, no doubt.

The match played on an immaculate award-winning surface (it was voted the best pitch in the county by the *Lincolnshire FA* Last season) in mostly dull overcast conditions attracted just over 30 spectators. Indeed, with a number away fans making the journey from Horncastle helped to make this a larger than average home gate here and added much needed revenue particularly with increased bar takings. Although the club no longer issues programmes (not since its NCEL days at Park Avenue - there's still an old boxful behind the bar apparently!), hot drinks and snacks provided some refreshment in the clubhouse during the afternoon.

So, what of the future for Louth Town FC? As long-serving committee member Barry Clark rightly acknowledges the club has gradually re-established itself after experiencing many years of uncertainty. Despite the initial short-comings of playing its games out of town now and facing the realisation that climbing the pyramid may no longer be possible (without access to floodlights), it has nobly survived difficult times and continues to represent the town as a football club. Bearing in mind the demise of Louth United and the loss of the Park Avenue ground, many would say that Louth Town FC has risen from the ashes - literally!

It had been another terrific afternoon's entertainment for the ground collecting obsessive. A trip to the Marshlands home of Louth Town FC comes heartily recommended for all travellers who will definitely receive a lovely warm welcome on a visit to the Saltfleetby-based ground. Not counting Reserve or Development clubs this now leaves only Hykeham Town FC on my grounds still left 'to do' in the Lincolnshire League. All roads now lead to Lincoln as they say...the joys of watching county league football continue...have fun wherever you go.

R No. 12: *WebEd* - Saturday 12th October 2019; **Knaresborough Town** v Stockton Town; FA Vase Round 1; Kick-Off: 3pm; Venue: Manse Lane; Knaresborough; North Yorkshire; HG5 8LF; Result: 2-3aet; Admission: £5; Programme: Yes, 28pp, £1.50; Attendance: 503

I'll start my review by taking a brief look at the club history but if you want to skip it go straight to paragraph four! Knaresborough Town Football Club was established in 1902. They joined the York League and were champions in their first season, going on to retain the title for the next two seasons. The club were champions again in 1907-08, and moved up to the Northern League in 1909. In 1910 they were founder members of the Yorkshire Combination, also continuing to play in the Northern League. However, they left the Northern League after finishing bottom of the table in 1910-11, at which point they re-joined Division One of the York League. The club withdrew its team from the Yorkshire Combination at the end of the 1912-13 season, continuing only in the York League; however, after finishing bottom of Division One in 1912-13 they were suspended from the league for the 1913-14 season.

After World War I Knaresborough were readmitted to Division One. They were Division One champions in 1924-25 and retained the title the following season. The club won the Division One championship again in 1928-29, but resigned from the league after finishing second-from-bottom in 1930-31. They re-joined Division One in 1932 and won back-to-back league titles in 1933-34 and 1934-35. However, the club left the league again in 1938. They returned in 1951, joining Division Three B, which they won at the first attempt. The following season saw them win Division Two B, earning promotion to Division One. The club left the league again in 1956 and joined the West Yorkshire League. They were promoted to Division One at the end of the 1956-57 season, but relegated the following season. After finishing as runners-up in Division Two North in 1960-61, they were promoted to Division One. However, they finished bottom of Division One the following season and were relegated again.

Knaresborough subsequently dropped into the Harrogate & District League, winning the Premier Division in 1964-65 and the Premier Division and League Cup double in 1965-66. After a third successive league title in 1966-67, the club won the League Cup again in 1967-68. They returned to the West Yorkshire League, winning the Division Two in 1969-70 and the League Cup the following season. However, the club then dropped back into the Harrogate & District League until re-joining the West Yorkshire League in 1993. They were Premier Division champions in 2008-09 and runners-up in 2010-11. After finishing third in the Premier Division in 2011-12, the club were promoted to Division One of the Northern Counties East League. In 2017-18 they were Division One champions, earning promotion to the Premier Division.

The club plays its games at Manse Lane which is easily reached from the A1(M) and A59. Located about five miles from Harrogate, the leafy, tree-lined ground is enclosed by a mix of residential housing and several local business units which back onto it. There is no on-site parking so travellers taking in a game here need to find alternatives in the surrounding area - I got lucky today as the home club had pre-booked extra parking spaces with the owners of a neighbouring industrial unit. This was primarily for the five coach loads of visiting fans who had come down from the north-east to cheer on their team but I (along with a few others) managed to sneak in and grab a private space for myself making it only a short walk to the main entrance.

The only access here is through a dedicated pay turn-stile around the back of and just beyond the main ornately decorated gates which bring you out into the one corner of the ground. A path to your left leads to a new modern kit stand (behind and to the right of the goal) which offers covered standing on three steps of terracing built into it. Immediately to the right is the main red brick clubhouse set back in the corner incorporating changing rooms at one end and a lounge, bar and separate tea bar serving both hot and cold food at the other. Access along this side of the ground is restricted beyond the two dug-outs (fashioned from breeze block and timber) which are positioned near the half-way line. On the opposite site of the ground is another small and relatively new 100-seater stand (decked out in red and black plastic seats to match the club colours) which is found set back (on a grassed area) from the perimeter path level or close to the half-way line. The

remainder of the ground (and behind the top goal) is flat standing. To finish things off a neat white post and rail fence adorned with a vast array of colourful adverts (mostly on the clubhouse side) surrounds the pitch perimeter. Bearing in mind the access restriction you could almost describe this as a three and a half-sided ground!

Today's eagerly-awaited game which fell on the much-publicised annual Non-League Day (now celebrating its tenth anniversary) was rightly dubbed as one of the biggest matches in the history of Knaresborough Town Football Club. With former Vase finalists (in 2017-18) Stockton Town FC visiting Manse Lane there was plenty of pre-match excitement in the North-Yorkshire market town. Indeed, the larger than anticipated crowd certainly witnessed what was a cracking tie and one certainly which lived up to all the expectations. Barely had the teams taken to the field when the home side made the perfect start through Andrew Cooper (2) who fired them into a shock lead. Kevin Hayes (21) levelled from close range but Knaresborough regained their advantage just before the break through Will Lenehan (45). Stockton Vase front-runner Jamie Owens got his side back in the game once again equalising mid-way through the second half (69) before going on to grab the winner (114) in the second half of extra-time much to delight of the travelling fans.

The match was played on a well grassed but tacky surface (the result of several consecutive days of heavy rain leading up to the game) in mainly bright and sunny conditions. Remarkably a bumper crowd of 503 was in attendance. This was the second biggest Vase crowd of the day behind the huge 689 which crammed into Kellaway Park for Helston Athletic v Falmouth (2-3). Officials for the league will be very pleased to hear that 493 were at Church View Road to watch Penistone Church v Bridlington (1-2) in the all NCEL tie. One notable attendee was Mr Football himself - *Talksport* and *Sky TV* reporter, QPR mega-fan, super *Tweeter* (with 65k followers no less) and non-league aficionado that is Tony Incenzo with whom I chatted to briefly ahead of kick-off. Thanks for supporting *FGIF*!

A neat stiff card 28-page programme containing all the basics (although a bit short on reading material) with a neat layout was issued for the game priced £1.50. It was interesting to read an article by Jonny Tattersall, wicketkeeper of the Yorkshire County Cricket team. Jonny was born in Knaresborough and wanted to support his local team in this big game in the Buildbase FA Vase. A wide menu including hot and cold food was dispensed from the tea bar in the clubhouse with the hot meat and potato pie, mushy peas and gravy going down particularly well amongst the visiting supporters.

This was without doubt one of the best games I have attended for quite some time. Praise must go to everyone at the club including those so often un-sung heroes who work tirelessly behind the scenes - from gateman to programme seller, from 50/50 promotions officer to the busy lady in the tea bar all of whom provided a lovely warm welcome to the neutrals (of which there were many) who turned up for their footy fix today. A visit to Manse Lane and Knaresborough Town FC comes highly recommended to all travellers. The magic of the Vase continues. On days like this you just can't beat it, can you?!

R No.11: WebEd - Saturday 5th October 2019; **Holton-le-Clay** v Pointon; Lincolnshire Junior Cup Round 1; Kick-Off: 2.15pm; Venue: Holton-le-Clay Junior School; Picksley Crescent; Holton-le-Clay; Grimsby; North Lincs; DN36 5DR; Result: 6-3aet; Admission: No; Programme: No; Attendance: 6

It's all about the game today. At this time of the season there's nothing I love more than taking in a county cup tie to satisfy my footy fix. It not only gives me the chance to tick off a new ground but to watch a game involving clubs competing in different leagues, something I always find adds a bit of extra excitement to proceedings. With matches in the first round of the Lincolnshire County FA Junior Cup taking place this afternoon I am spoiled for choice with several 'hoppertunities' to choose from the available fixtures on offer. I narrow it down to two games involving East Lincs Combination sides Ludford Rovers FC (v Fishtoft) and Holton-le-Clay (v Pointon) which take my fancy. So, after much deliberation, I finally pick the latter. My journey towards the outskirts of Grimsby driving through part of the lovely Lincolnshire Wolds takes about forty-five minutes to reach from *FGIF* HQ.

The club, a relatively young one founded in 2013 (confirmed by the embroidered logo on the team shirts) plays its games on a pitch at the rear of the Holton-le-Clay Junior School. It's found off Picksley Crescent in a desirable area of the village which is easily approached from the main A16 carriageway (Boston to Grimsby road). There's plenty of parking inside the school grounds which incorporate the community centre, a building around the back which also doubles up as changing rooms for the players on matchdays. The football club plays its games on a pitch marked out on the far side of an adjoining field (beyond the school field) used as a public recreation space by residents. Bordered by trees along one side and an old crumbling, weed-covered set of tennis courts behind the goal to the right, the venue is, as you would expect, very basic indeed. Without any pitch-side furniture for players and spectators it's not the sort of place you would come to watch a game in bad weather. Spare a thought for the Sleaford-based visitors who after completing a long trip from the south of the county to get here found themselves arriving late and having to get changed beside the pitch just ahead of kick-off. I'm not sure whether they couldn't find the community centre but an amusing tweet posted just before the game on the club's *twitter* page says it all!

A quick glimpse of the relative team stats on *FA-Full Time* pages before setting out at midday provides a useful comparison of the two clubs in action today. Notably both sides had experienced similar starts to the new season: Holton-le-Clay currently sat in second place (out of only eight teams) in the East Lincs Combination Division One (top tier) having won two of their opening four matches with Pointon from the Boston & District League Premier Division (4th/13) winning three of their first six games played so far. As you know, it's always difficult to compare the relative strength of two contrasting competitions and as cup ties are literally one-off fixtures, I nevertheless thought that a close game was in prospect this afternoon. And for the footy obsessed neutral, that's just how it turned out.

Barely had the game started when the home side took the lead through Nathan Elford (1) who tapped the ball home from close range. He followed this up with his second (20) mid-way through the half only for the visitors to pull one back through

Tom Buckberry (23) who headed home at the back-post moments later. Carson Kemp (28) levelled for Pointon curling the ball home from a cracking direct free-kick making it 2-2. Alford (44) completed his hat-trick before the break when his low shot found the back of the net. The second half was just as exciting as the first with plenty of chances created at both ends. Just when it looked as though the hosts would hang on to win the contest, the visitors equalised for the second time when Levi Gianassi (82) got his boot on the end of a low cross to direct the ball agonisingly past the keeper who was rooted to the spot.

As per Lincs Junior Cup rules two periods of 15 minutes was the allotted extra-time for this one - thankfully the referee was only one (of a few out on the field) who actually knew this! I didn't. With so many different competitions taking place and each having their own rules about deciding the outcome of a game that ends level on 90 minutes, it's not surprising really, is it? Holton soon regained the lead through Joe Gale (107) before the first period of extra-time ended in a melee as tempers started to flare. With players from both sides tiring, the result was put beyond doubt when Gale added his second (112) only for Mike Smith (117) to score with a terrific shot executed from a tight angle late on to make it 6-3 and send Holton into the next round.

It had been a superb game of county cup football as the goal-scoring sequence summary shows (see Note 1 below). A quick mention must also go to referee Sid Cowley who displayed the fitness and presence typical of a much younger matchday official - it was hard to believe from his youthful looks that he was a mere 74 years of age! The match played in mostly sunny conditions attracted only six spectators. As you've probably guessed neither programmes nor refreshments were available.

Without a doubt, this had been another terrific afternoon's entertainment for the football neutral. It goes without saying too that Holton-le-Clay FC is a smashing club and certainly one that makes hoppers more than welcome (like other teams I've been to so far in the ELC). If you get chance to watch a county cup game in this competition, you won't be disappointed. Finally, here's a note for the anorak in you - just when I thought I'd seen plenty of goals today I was really shocked to read one particular result which stood out from all the others. I imagine those watching the game at Moulton Seas End v Hykeham Town were kept more than busy recording the action in a tie that ended in a resounding 0-20 score-line! Now where's the draw for the next round?

Note 1 - 1-0(1); 2-0(20); 2-1(23); 3-2(44); 3-3(82); 4-3(97); 5-3(112) and 6-3(117).

R No. 10: *WebEd* - Saturday 28th September 2019; **Otley Town** v Oxenhope Recreation; West Yorkshire Football League Cup Round 1; Kick-Off: 2pm; Venue: The Old Showground; Pool Road; Otley; West Yorkshire; LS21 1DY; Result: 1-6; Admission: No; Programme: No; Attendance: 46

This was the only place to be today. With the much anticipated UCI World Cycling Championships elite women's road race (149.5K) taking place in the area, it was just a case of finding a game that would be somewhere close to the route. With the cyclists (starting in Bradford) passing through the town of Otley just after

midday this seemed an ideal place to watch the action unfold. It was not only a great chance to see the peloton at close quarters but it also left plenty time for me to take in a game after watching the race move through the town centre, on its way to the finish later in Harrogate. Thankfully I got there just before the enforced road block came into place and managed to park up and walk the mile or so into town to grab a suitable viewing place on the crown of a double bend (always easier to watch the competitors as they temporarily slow down).

For the first time this week the sun came out momentarily which of course was great news for all the riders and spectators many of whom had got soaked during events earlier in the week. Incredibly local lass Lizzie Deignan (nee Armitstead) was up near the front as the peloton roared past much to the delight of the townsfolk who had turned out in their droves to watch the spectacle at this, the 10k point in the race. Having grown up here and joined the Otley Road Cycling Club at a young age she is an absolute legend in these 'ere parts. If you get chance read her book *Stead Fast* (Blink publishing, 2017) to find out more. As is usual at big events like this you can be standing at road side for ages only for the peloton to whizz past in the space of thirty seconds. It is literally all over in the blink of an eye!

So with the race done and dusted I managed to stop off for a quick bite to eat (thanks to the reasonably priced meal deal at *Asda* next door to the town's rugby club) before heading back up the Pool Road (A659) and over to the football. Otley Town Football Club, members of the West Yorkshire Football League, play at the Old Showground which is found next to the wonderfully named Stephen H Smith Garden & Leisure Centre. The club, one of the oldest established amateur football clubs in the Wharfedale area, is able to trace its early roots back to the inter-war years. Recent history in fact shows that the current club was formed after a merger of works' side *Dawson Payne & Elliot* and Otley FC which took place in or around 1972. The *FA Charter* club now runs numerous junior teams from under 7's up to under 17's, an academy team which plays open age in the West Yorkshire Alliance Division 2 (acting as a link to the two senior teams). Incidentally the OT reserves side currently play in the Harrogate & District League.

The club has played here since moving from a former ground/pitch nearer the town centre on a site which is now unsurprisingly occupied by a *Waitrose PLC* supermarket. The Old Showground occupies a large enclosed green field site bordered by tall trees at both ends and affording beautiful views of the surrounding countryside which climbs up gradually into the distance. With numerous club-name signage dotted about the place, there's definitely no way you could forget where you are. The venue caters for first team, reserves and junior football clubs who play on three separate adjoining pitches. The main pitch surrounded by a neat post and rail perimeter fence with dug-outs to the right runs lengthways and parallel to the reserve team pitch (also railed with dug-outs). Visitors here will be impressed by the standard of all of the playing areas which are lovingly maintained by a full-time groundsman who I am told devotes lots of his free (retirement) time to maintain the well-manicured surfaces and it shows. The main facilities which are housed in two individual brick buildings to the left of the main entrance beyond the grass car park (and behind the nearest goal) have a rather worn but homely

appearance about them. The club pavilion, decked out with plenty of club memorabilia (including a bijou orange coloured analogue clock), provides a function room and bar facilities for patrons with a patio area comprising of picnic tables outside. The changing rooms are situated in the taller of the two buildings beyond with a separate entrance around the back for players and officials. A pitch equipment storage container unit stands alongside this. Look out too for the cracking low-roofed mini wooden stand behind the goaline on the smaller junior pitch.

Today's game in the opening round of the WYFL cup sees the visit of fellow Division One (second tier of the WYFL) side Oxenhope Recreation to The Old Showground. With the hosts going well in the league (currently in second place) a home win definitely looks to be on the cards especially as their opponents prop up the sixteen team league table before play starts. Not a bit of it! From the opening minute you would be forgiven for getting the teams mixed up as Oxenhope look a much more organised side. Although Otley (dressed in their Holland look-a-like kit) did manage to get on the scoresheet following a converted penalty (for handball) on the half hour mark (to make it 1-2), this is the only time they looked up for it. From here on and following a rampant second half display the visitors from the outskirts of Bradford totally dominate play (with Thomas Marshall and Craig Morris scoring a brace each). Indeed there could have been more goals than the terrific 1-6 victory suggests. Notably diminutive referee Darren De Souza from Pudsey has a superb game acting firmly and fairly with the players throughout. Considering the amount of rain that had fallen in these parts in the days leading up to the game, the pitch holds up very well - indeed several fans in attendance have turned up to watch the match after their own games have been called off earlier in the day due to waterlogging - at Wyke FC and Field FC (both WYFL) and neighbouring side Athrington FC (Craven & District League) to name a few. Although the club doesn't issue programmes both hot and cold food and drink is available from a well stocked tea bar in the clubhouse during the afternoon.

In hindsight I just wonder whether I would have come here so soon had the cycling world champs not been taking place in the area? I'm not really sure but it's a good job they did as I thoroughly enjoyed my hop to The Old Showground today. A visit to this cracking little club in a lovely part of Yorkshire comes highly recommended to all football travellers. When I returned home I discovered from the excellent BBC2 TV footage that Lizzie had finished in 31st place only a few minutes behind Dutch rider Anna Van Fleuton who managed to hang on to her breakaway lead to claim the gold medal. It had been a 'wheelie' memorable day all-round! Have fun wherever you go.

R No.09: WebEd - Saturday 21st September 2019; **Hornsea Town** v Walkington AFC; Humber Premier League Premier Division; Kick-Off: 2pm; Venue: Hollis Recreation Ground; Westwood Avenue; Hornsea; East Yorkshire; HU18 1EE; Result: 2-4; Admission: No; Programme: No; Attendance: 51

It's another beautiful sunny day in East Yorkshire and I've got two local matchday 'hoppertunities (both in the Humber Premier League) on the drawing board before setting out from *FGIF* HQ. With some of the World Para-Cycling Road Event races

taking place in Beverley at mid-day (finishing in Harrogate) I decide to avoid the busy roads in and around the popular town centre and leave my first-choice game at Driffield Juniors FC for another day. Instead I opt for Plan B and take the A63 Hull by-pass before combing the outskirts of the city and head out towards the coast for my game at Hornsea.

The lovely seaside town located some fifteen or so miles from Hull is a popular resort for holiday-makers and day trippers alike. In fact, since coming here with my mum and dad as a skinny little kid many, many years (well, nearly fifty) ago, the place has hardly changed at all. Like other small North Sea coastal resorts Hornsea has a promenade, laid out gardens, hotels, fish and chip shops, gift shops and so on. Gone has the once popular Hornsea Pottery (in 2000) famed for exporting its niche craft wares, now replaced on the same site by a shopping centre known as Hornsea *Freeport* - the Freeport adapted some of the original theme park set up by Hornsea Pottery. Also prominent are the hi-tech wind turbines visible far out to sea on the horizon all harnessing alternative energy. Apparently, this new industry is said to be one of the cleanest, fastest growing renewable resources in the local area.

Established in 1904, Hornsea Town FC is an *FA Charter Standard* club, providing grassroots football for all ages in the local community. It was founder member of the East Riding County League before moving up to the newly formed Humber Premier League established back in 2004-05. According to the excellent *Football Club History Database* it has achieved success finishing as runners-up in 2009-10. Although the club was relegated (in bottom place out of fourteen teams) to Division One at the end of 2014-15, it bounced back immediately as champions the following season returning to the Premier Division where it has remained ever since.

Hornsea Town FC is a veritable footballing outpost. Located about half a mile from the sea front, the club is reached by taking the A1035 (Seaton Road) into the town and by turning left into Mount Pleasant (just before the mini-roundabout) which becomes the B1242 Atwick Road. Take the second left down the leafy Westwood Avenue (a private round) which leads to the main entrance at the superb Hollis Sports Ground (sign posted). It is named after John Hollis, a respected and established local business man, who gifted the Recreation Ground to the community in 1928 with a view to improving cricket and rugby opportunities in the area. The football club shares the expansive site here with the well-established cricket club, members of the York & District league. As expected, the cricket facilities dominate proceedings with a large impressive pavilion (complete with gabled clock and balcony area) situated over to the right of the large beautifully manicured square and outfield.

Upon arrival you will see a separate football pitch immediately opposite over on the far side of the field - however as I discovered before kick-off this is used by the club's second team (Hornsea operate four adult sides playing in local leagues). The first team use another pitch over to the left of the field which is not immediately easy for visitors to spot when they come here. Almost hidden from view by a belt of trees and the bijou cricket scoreboard carrying an advert for Whitehead Fish &

Chips who incidentally sponsor the HPL cup), the playing field is in fact located down in a hollow below ground level making it quite a surreal setting.

Access to the ground is made along the embankment at the top which runs parallel to the right-hand touchline below and adjoining rugby club. This elevated area is reserved for spectators who can watch the game from behind a dedicated metal post and rail safety barrier. Near the corner is the rusting metal frame with loose seating from a by-gone stand. It is also possible to watch the game from the top of a similar but more precarious and steeper looking bank covered in rough vegetation which runs behind the nearside goal - making this one of only a few two-sided grounds in non-league football (not counting those restricted 3G caged pitches!). Players and officials can make their way down to the pitch by using a couple of sets of concrete steps located at the ends of the two pitch-side dug-outs. Apart from the two areas of grass banking the remaining sides of the pitch are bordered by a tall wire fence behind the opposite goal and by a long tall hedge (a-la Brechin City FC) running the length of the opposite side. Although spectators are not usually allowed down to pitch-level I was lucky to get the thumbs up by both of the team coaches and the match officials to take some photographs. Phew! Whilst you're here it's also worth taking a look at the tidy rugby ground belonging to Hornsea RUFC. Complete with mini stand and floodlights it also shares this area of the field.

Today's game goes according to the form book with the high-flying visitors from Beverley, who look much fitter and sharper all-round, beating their lowly hosts by 2-4. Indeed, the score-line does not paint the full picture as a dominant Walkington side score all of their goals inside the first hour. It's only in the closing stages that Hornsea make any impression pulling two goals back in the last five minutes to give the result a more presentable look. The game played in warm sunny conditions is attended by a crowd of fifty spectators who congregate on top of the main embankment running parallel to the near touchline. During the game I get into conversation with a guy called Paul who was here assessing the three match officials. He explained how difficult it has been to attract new referees to take up the whistle locally with the worrying trend that some competitions such as the East Riding County League are in grave danger of not having officials to cover their games on match days. Much recent debate has surrounded this topic on social media with local clubs suggesting that assistants in the HPL should be assigned as referees to the ERCL instead. Watch this space for more! More details about the club can be found on the generic *FA Full-Time* site covering the HPL as well as the regularly updated club *twitter* pages.

No trip to the seaside would be complete without a quick stroll along the sea front. Even at this time of year the prom was busy with day-trippers enjoying the last few warm days of the year. Although I had left my bucket and spade at home, I did manage to buy a bag of chips and a can of fizzy drink from a popular chippy near the sea front. Apart from the inflated price (typical Yorkshireman) this brought back many fond memories from my childhood. Ah the joys of travelling to football grounds in remote seaside towns...have fun when you decide to dip your toes.

R No.08: WebEd - Saturday 14th September 2019; **Northallerton Town v Barnoldswick Town**; FA Vase 2nd Qualifying Round; Kick-Off: 3pm; Venue: The Calvert Stadium; Ainderby Road; Northallerton; North Yorkshire; DL7 8HA; Result: 2-3; Admission: £6; Programme: Yes - 32pp/£1.50; Attendance: 131

It's a trip up the A1(M) and a taste of FA Vase action for me today. My destination is to Northallerton Town FC where the hosts are taking on Barnoldswick Town in a eagerly awaited 2nd Qualifying Round tie at the well-appointed Calvert Stadium. After dropping Fran and Steph in the bustling High Street for some retail therapy I make the short drive to the club situated to the west of the bustling town centre.

This is probably the nearest Northern League club to *FGIF* HQ. It's been quite a while since I've visited a ground in this league and the journey brings back fond memories of some of the early hops organised by the legendary Mike Amos back in the early 1990's. Who remembers that first ever game at Ferens Park featuring Durham City in 1993? My last hop up in this area (to watch a NL side) was in fact back in February 1997 when I attended the Turnbull Ground coincidentally for an FA Vase game. According to my little blue book the stats read: 01/02/97 - Whitby Town 1 Tiverton 0 (FAV5). Where has the time gone?

Records show that the club has led quite a turbulent existence since it was founded back in 1895. They originally played in the Allertonshire League, before moving onto the Vale of Mowbray League and then the Ripon & District League. By 1972 they became members of the Teesside League but only remained in it for two years transferring to the North Yorkshire League in 1974. The club later joined the Darlington & District League and then moved on to the Harrogate & District League. By 1982 they had entered the newly-formed Division Two of the Northern League and after finishing as runners-up in Division Two in 1989-90, the club was promoted to Division One, winning the Northern League Cup in 1993-94.

Sadly Northallerton Town folded during the summer of 1994 and were reformed as Northallerton Football Club. By 1994-95 they finished second-from-bottom of Division One, resulting in relegation back down to Division Two. However, after being crowned as champions in 1996-97 they were promoted once again back to Division One but this was only shortlived being relegated again to Division Two at the end of the 1997-98 season this time as Town having reverted to their previous name.

The club were Division Two runners-up in 2005-06, resulting in promotion to Division One. Again relegation beckoned as they finished bottom of Division One in 2008-09 and were competing in Division Two the following season. The club won the league's Ernest Armstrong Memorial Cup in 2011-12, and went on to win the trophy again in 2015-16, 2016-17 and 2018-19. At the end of last season Northallerton finished third in Division Two and were promoted back to Division One for the third time since joining the league well over twenty five years ago now. To say that they have been a yo-yo club in the Northern League is probably quite an understatement. Readers may be interested to learn that brothers Michael Dawson (ex-Tottenham Hotspur and Hull City defender), Andy Dawson (Hull City defender) and Kevin Dawson (Worksop Town defender) all started their football career at Northallerton Town.

Despite the club's name it has actually never played in the town itself. Matches were initially played at the Bluestone Ground located near County Hall in the village of Romanby until 1974 when it was compulsorily purchased by North Yorkshire County Council. Thankfully, the council provided the club with a new ground a short distance away on Ainderby Road, which was later re-named the Calvert Stadium.

Visitors here will be well-impressed by this cracking ground. Spectator facilities are first class with cover running almost the length of the pitch on one (entrance) side. This comprises a low covered stand offering around 400 standing spaces (dating back to the early 1990's) and a tidy 200-seater stand beyond. In addition there are several open steps of terracing situated (full-width) behind both goals which affords a great view of the action. Look out for the wicked stanchions arranged on the steps - curiously they lean back at a unnerving angle and on first sight look out of place and seemingly unsafe.

In the summer of 2018 the floodlights were replaced. The previous eight columns running along side the pitch were replaced with four individual columns in each corner, providing much more efficient lighting - the project was delivered with help from various individuals, local organisations and the *FSIF*. This year the club signed a 25-year lease on the ground which will allow them to invest £250,000 in new facilities.

Between the covered stands is a small section of open terrace complete with picnic tables. Behind is a homely clubhouse (officially opened by JH Naylor in August 1976 according to the plaque on the wall outside) serving a number of draught lagers and ciders, including guest real ale. The range of hot food available is quite remarkable (just look at the extensive gut busting menu!) and this is served both from within the clubhouse and outside during matchdays (unusually hatches operate at both ends). Interestingly too, the club won the Northern League *'Teahut of the Year Award'* in 2016-17. I didn't realise such things existed but there you go!

Today's game sees the visit of North West Counties League side Barnoldswick Town FC to The Calvert Stadium. As always I just love watching teams from different leagues compete against each other. For the record Northallerton thrashed Stokesley SC 7-0 here in the First Qualifying Round. More significantly perhaps is the fact that visitors Barlick (as they are called) beat another Northern League side and previous (multi-time) Vase winners Whitley Bay (1-2) on their travels in the last round which adds quite a bit of anticipation and excitement to the pre-match proceedings.

As expected the match played in beautiful warm, sunny conditions proves to be an absolute belter of a tie. The hosts settle quickly building up an early two goal lead through Connor Short (10) who sneaks the ball over the line from close range and Jason Blackburn (12) who slots the ball past the keeper just two minutes later. They look to be cruising but waste several chances to add more before the visitors counter against the run of play to nick one back when the skilful Ric Seear (38) taps the ball home to make it 2-1 going into the break. The second half is pulsating with plenty of alternating end to end play (almost resembling a basketball match).

The visitors strike again when Ethan Kershaw (72) equalises to make it 2-2. Now with the upper hand and cheered on by their vociferous band of fans Seear (80) looks to have scored but the ball is cleared off the line. With time running out and a replay looking likely it's Joe Noblet who under pressure plays the ball across the six yard box for the fast advancing Seear to tap home from a tight angle at the back post. Unsurprisingly this sends the faithful into hysterics and Barnoldswick into the next round! What a great advert for the Vase.

A decent 32-glossy page full-colour programme containing all the usual stats, news items and previous match photos, is issued for the game - priced at £1.50 it's a really good read to accompany my half-time cuppa. Talking of food, the tea bar which is open throughout the game does a brisk trade from its vast but rather pricey menu (typical Yorkshireman!). I can't ever remember seeing a cheeseburger cost £3.80 before and declined to partake on this occasion preferring to stick with my corned beef sandwiches instead.

Before the game I have a chat with a few of the travelling fans who have come prepared with their '*Sewer End*' and *Baxenden Blues* flags and drum which they use to good effect during the game. There's also a guy here called Paul Brown who has come over from Skipton to video the match. During play he moves from his usual default position at the side of the pitch and decides to join the travelling fans for a *Fan-Cam* experience behind the goal - the footage on his *twitter* feed makes cracking viewing particularly when the winning goal goes in to settle things late on. Check out: @SteveBCraven for more.

This had been a terrific afternoon's entertainment at a superb ground. A visit to this friendly club in the Northern League comes highly recommended. To find out more check out the league website, club website and regularly updated *twitter* pages. The joys of attending FA Vase games continue...have fun whenever you pick one to watch on your travels.

R No.07: *WebEd* - Saturday 7th September 2019; **Horbury Town** v Boroughbridge; West Yorkshire Football League Premier Division; Kick-Off: 2.30pm; Venue: Slazenger Sports Club; Main Street; Horbury; West Yorkshire; WF4 5EH; Result: 1-0; Admission: Free; Programme: Yes (but not today!); Attendance: 32

It's another hot sunny day and I'm on the road again travelling over the county boundary and into West Yorkshire. I'm heading for the outskirts of Wakefield where Horbury Town Football Club are entertaining newly-promoted Boroughbridge in a West Yorkshire League Premier Division fixture. This is one of my favourite competitions and if recent trips to Carlton Athletic and Leeds City are anything to go by then I'm in for another great afternoon's entertainment. Although I'm not an avid paper-chaser like many of our hopping brethren (most matches I attend are paperless these days), I am of the understanding that the club also issues programmes for all its home matches which will be a real bonus for me.

With on-going motorway roadworks continuing on the M62 over the weekend, it's just my luck that the junction I need to come off at (number 31) is closed to all traffic, necessitating a bit of a detour. I exit the motorway at the junction before which takes me through Wakefield city centre. The extra ten to fifteen minutes

added onto the journey doesn't prove to be a major problem and the last few miles through the leafy residential suburbia are easily covered arriving at my destination well ahead of kick-off.

The name Horbury incidentally is attested in 1086 as (H)orberie and is derived from Old English *horu* 'dirty land' and *burh* which translates as 'filthy fortification' or 'stronghold on muddy land'. The name possibly referred to a fortification near an old fording point of the River Calder which runs alongside the ground.

Based at the impressive Slazenger's Sports Centre the club is reached off the main A642 (Wakefield to Huddersfield road) by turning left into Daw Lane and then almost immediately by taking a sharp right into Southfield Lane before going over a tight railway bridge. A narrow entrance (marked) leads to the club but beware the height restriction gantry - this certainly makes it difficult for the male driver of a works transit van in front of me who realises just in time that he can't go any further and has to pull over onto the verge allowing the convoy of queuing cars to pass by. With the playing field coming into view there is plenty of room along the driveway and in the adjoining car parks for motorists to find a space. Phew!!

The Slazenger's Sports Club is a multi-sport facility built in the 1940's and has served the local community since with high grade sports facilities catering for football, cricket, hockey, tennis and bowls. The club has a long and illustrious history, first as the sports and social venue for workers of the local Slazenger factory; from where it gets its name. It can trace its roots back to its time as a destination for the workers of Slazenger Sports Company based at Horbury Bridge. Since its original founding, the parent company has come and gone from the area, but the name is retained in the independent club. The Sykes Sports Goods Factory (which merged with Slazenger in the 1940's) had a wealth of sports teams, though were based in Horbury Bridge. As the company developed and the factory grew, a larger facility was required to serve the employees. The site was chosen as it was close to the factory, and allowed a wide range of sports to be hosted. It was once the home of the Horbury Fever Isolation Hospital, but was bought from Horbury Council in the late 1940's. Since the 1980's though, it has operated as a totally independent club by members for members and the local community. The site has developed over that time and now offers some excellent turf pitches, a caged floodlit synthetic all-weather sports surface and a crown green for bowling. The club also has a fully-licensed bar, lounge, conservatory and function room for its members.

Horbury Town FC itself is found on an expansive self-contained site with wonderful elevated views of the surrounding countryside. Access is next to the impressive new light-coloured brick-built pavilion constructed here about four years ago. The building comprises of changing rooms and an equipment store at the nearest end with a smart purpose-built and well-stocked tea bar (called the Red Café) at the other. Look out for the signage (including a Player of the Match awards board) and large red and black flag (fashioned in the club colours) catching the breeze on the outside wall. A row of picnic-tables and accompanying parasols are neatly arranged in front of the pavilion. From the far end you can catch a glimpse of the spire belonging to the lovely St Peter and St Leonards church.

The main pitch which has a beautifully manicured surface is reached by players in the corner. It has a marked side to side slope (dropping down noticeably to the left-hand side of the field if you stand behind the nearest goal). It is fully enclosed by a neat white plastic post and rail perimeter fence (similar at first sight to those found along the gallops straddling Newmarket Heath!) which is a recent addition. Pride of place also goes to the brand-new 50-seater stand (with red and black plastic seats) complete with the club name on its fascia which is set back behind the fence and offset to the two Perspex dug outs (marked Home and Away) further along the pitch sited close to half-way. six other seats (similar to director's chairs) are placed alongside each other are found behind the goal line nearest the pavilion.

Today's game sees the visit of North-Yorkshire based side Boroughbridge Town to the SSC. I always find it a bit of an anomaly when clubs out of the normal league membership catchment compete in a seemingly mis-placed league. Although it would appear geographically better for them to play in the York Football League for example, I imagine that being close to the A1 makes it easier to travel to away games and this suits them. Just a thought. With both sides in the top half (4th v 8th) a good game is in prospect and that's the way it turns out. The hosts win a thoroughly absorbing and really close contest by a solitary goal scored by young forward Gibril Bojang (39) who slots the ball home following some good build up play by captain Captain Luke Playford just before the break. Being behind the lens taking action pictures can sometimes make it difficult to record the scorer and goal time. But I get lucky today as one of home fans helps me out by opening the club's *twitter* page on his smart phone to reveal the all-important details after being posted immediately on-line. What great service!

The match played on a terrific pitch in perfect weather conditions attracted just over thirty spectators including a fellow traveller Michael who had travelled up from Nottingham by train for the game. We spent the final ten minutes of the match swapping hopping tales including news that another WYFL Premier Division side, Ilkley FC, could also be issuing this season. Watch this space. Sadly, I'm paperless once again on my travels as the club editor is still on holiday and the club (regular issuers in this league) hasn't produced a programme for their game today. Sods Law! The affable and helpful Chairman Paul Howard (a former player for NCEL side Pickering Town FC and FA Level 2 coach) who is on hand in the tea bar when I arrive takes my details and promises to send me a future copy in the post. Phew!

It had been another terrific afternoon's football and a great hop to a cracking ground in the WYFL. A visit to this really friendly club on the banks of the River Calder comes highly recommended to all football ground collectors. For more details about the club check out the generic *FA Full-Time* site covering the league and the club's website, *twitter* and *Facebook* pages. The joys of hopping continue. Have fun wherever you go even if it turns out to be paperless!!

R No.06: WebEd - Saturday 31st August 2019; **Bubwith White Swan** v Wheldrake; York Football League Division Two; Kick-Off: 2pm; Venue: Bubwith Playing Field;

Main Street; Bubwith; Selby; East Yorkshire; YO8 6LX; Result: 4-1; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 5

Could this be what hoppers often refer to as a Double-Header? The purpose of my trip over to Selby today can best be described as 'killing two birds with one stone'. Please don't tell my wife I've said this for goodness sake as she has just renewed our subscription with the RSPB! As a keen MAMIL* I'm taking part in the *Selby Three Swans* cycling sportive (to raise funds for *Yorkshire Cancer Research*) which starts and finishes in the town tomorrow and have decided (upon the advice of organisers) to register a day early. For those who like wearing tight-fitting lycra (all part of my ongoing mid-life crisis you understand) this seems a good logistical idea and will no doubt save time by doing the necessary paperwork a day early. It also means I can use my trip to double-up with essential Saturday football watching duties in the vicinity. After signing in at the Summit Adventure Centre registration point, I collect an envelope containing my riding number, micro-chip timing sicker and race info just after mid-day allowing enough time to get through the busy town traffic and head out to a local game.

Before leaving home my mid-morning list of possibilities is down to just three games (all fixtures in the York Football League): Cliffe FC (v Marston Green) in Division One; Bubwith White Swan FC (v Wheldrake in Division Two and Selby Oylmpia FC (v York St John's University) in Division Three. With the postponement of the latter I'm quickly down to a choice of two and so opt for Bubwith leaving a trip to Cliffe for another day. It takes about fifteen minutes to cover the six miles and I soon reach the village whose name incidentally means *Bubba's Wood*, Bubba being a Scandinavian male name. It is listed as *Bobewyth* in the 11th-century accounts of Selby Abbey and in the Domesday Book is written as *Bubuid* in case you wondered. You pass the White Swan pub (surprise, surprise) in the centre of the village before turning right into the modern Leisure and Sports centre car park (signed at the entrance). The sports hall which has a licensed bar runs events and weekly classes (according to an advert near reception) with Zumba, Tai Chi, BoxFit and Salsa on the keep-fit menu. The adjoining Bubwith Centre is also used by the local community for private parties and the Youth Club. The site holds three tennis courts used by the Bubwith Tennis Club.

The playing field which shares its facilities with football and cricket, is found around the back of this building which also houses the changing rooms at the far end. It's a bit of a trek from here (beyond the roped-off cricket square) to reach the main football pitch which is marked lengthways over on the opposite side of the tree-lined field. There are no spectator facilities or dug-outs apart from a picnic seat close to half-way on the left. Behind this is a mini basketball post and back-board which appear to have seen better days. Look out too for some old training floodlights (resembling telegraph poles) which are positioned on either side of the pitch - peeking out of the trees and now covered in foliage, I doubt if they are any longer in use. There are also some portable cricket cover frames buried in the long grass behind the furthest goal.

Although fixtures in the top divisions of the York Football League have already started (the Premier began a couple of weeks back), it's the opening day of the

season for clubs in Division Two. It's been a bit of a wait but this appears to be an intriguing game as visitors Wheldrake (last season's champions in D3) are making their debut at this level. Thankfully before kick-off the rain is replaced by bright warm sunshine - good job too as I've left my anorak at home! It's the hosts who settle more quickly and net an early two goal lead catching their opponents (who are missing several players today) completely off-guard with quick-fire goals converted by Jordan Nason (9) and Ben Olson (11) scored within the space of two minutes. The visitors pull one back when Dan Zimer (28) nips in at the far post to strike the ball home before Nason (42) grabs his second of the game just before half-time to make it 3-1. With honours fairly even after the break it's Bubwith who score the only goal of the half as Martin Howson (85) completes the scoring to give his side a well-deserved 4-1 win. The match played on a very wide well grassed pitch attracts only a handful of spectators including fellow ground collector Nick a smashing guy who has travelled up from Worksop to get his fix. Using the handle *Grass Hopper* he documents his travels on his dedicated twitter page with posts including photos and details of the clubs he has visited including many in this league. If you like tweeting check out his tweets! As expected, neither a programme nor refreshments are on offer for today's match.

Although not technically a Double Header this has been another terrific hop in the flatlands of Selby. Although slightly off the beaten track visitors here will get a warm welcome from everyone at the club details of which can be found on the excellent York Football League website (have I ever mentioned this before?). Owing to the open nature of the ground it might be better to choose a game in favourable weather. In the mean-time have fun wherever you go. And if you want to get fit, it's never too late to get into cycling. It's a wonderful sport - in case you have reservations you don't have to don all that trendy spandex, but it does help!!
* MAMIL - means *Middle Aged Man In Lycra* but you knew that already.

R No.05: WebEd - Tuesday 27th August 2019; **Hessle Sporting Club** v Howden; Humber Premier League Division One; Kick-Off: 6.30pm; Venue: Hessle Recreation Ground; Park Avenue; Hessle; Hull; East Yorkshire; HU13 ONG; Result: 4-1; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 13

My destination tonight, the Hessle recreation ground, home of Humber Premier League side Hessle Sporting Club FC, is literally a big stone's throw from *FGIF* HQ (not a big stone but a big throw!). Although it's only 1.2 miles from home it's not the nearest ground from my doorstep. In fact, football travellers with a statistical bent may be interested to know that it ranks third on my 'hopping from home distance travelled' charts behind two other local clubs (who both ply their trade in the East Riding County League): namely Costello FC (1.1 miles) a new side playing at the Costello Playing Field situated on a pitch next to the superb Hull athletics stadium and the nearest, Malt Shovel FC (1.0 mile) who are based on the 3G pitch at the well-appointed Sirius Academy off Pickering Road.

I arrive with time to spare ahead of kick-off amid darkening skies which signal an imminent thunderstorm. It's lovely to meet up with football club chairman Charlie Walker (a retired PE teacher) who gives me a potted history of the club and takes me on a whistle-stop tour of the superb pavilion as the players complete their pre-

match talks. The football club is part of the Hessle SC charitable foundation which provides sporting and social opportunities for all ages within the area. A quick glimpse at the emblem shows that the football club was formed in 1976 playing matches initially in the ERCL with varying degrees of success until joining the newly formed Humber Premier League in 2006-07. After finishing as runners up in Division One they were promoted to the Premier Division where they remained for two seasons before dropping back down again at the end of 2010-11. Despite a real struggle on the pitch, finishing in bottom position in three of the last five seasons they have remained in this competition ever since.

However, there is a renewed optimism this campaign after the recent appointment of new coach Greg Beswick who travels over from York for each game joining his brother Graham at the helm. His partner Rachel who fills in my *FGIF Match Stats Card* with the home line-up, is also the new club physio. During the last few years the club has grown as a footballing hub for the town and now runs numerous sides (over 30 teams I am led to believe) including thriving junior and girls football sections. A couple of years ago, the club ran a successful weekend tournament attracting over 180 teams to the 'recca' (as it's referred to here) during the record-breaking weekend. A commemorative framed shirt donated and signed by ex- Arsenal FC star Martin Keown hangs proudly on the wall after he attended the event as guest of honour.

Charlie explained that the club is also proud of its on-site facilities which include a superb new brick changing pavilion built four years ago now with the assistance of local funding and a welcomed *Football Foundation* grant. It's a superb building fronted by a smart glass front door (with multi mini club logos etched into it) which leads to four changing rooms and a smart trophy cabinet, crammed full of silverware, won mostly by the club's junior sides. A plaque on the wall commemorates the official opening of the pavilion in 2015. Beyond is a lovely function room (accessed by its own separate entrance at the far end) complete with chairs and tables as well as an adjacent tea bar with hatch in the corner selling a range of hot and cold food throughout the evening.

The main pitch is marked out on the far side (to the left) of the tree-lined field which is about one hundred yards from here. Two synthetic dug-outs with mini benches straddle the half-way line on the right with a perimeter rope set up part way along both sides. For a council owned site, the playing surface is in pretty good nick. It's the last round of early season midweek kick-offs in the league programme and tonight's game sees the visit of bottom placed Howden AFC to the 'recca'. The Minstermen are in desperate need of points having made a dreadful start as their playing stats confirm: L 2-1 v Goole; L 1-5 v Bridlington Town Res and L 1-7 v Kingfields. The hosts have fared slightly better with their results - L 0-4 v East Riding Rangers; W 4-3 v Beverley Town Reserves and L 0-6 v Reckitts Res making them favourites in what could be termed an early basement battle.

The result goes according to the form book with Hessle winning the match comfortably by a 4-1 score-line. They take a three-goal lead through Callum O'Connor (5); Sam Leach (17) and Luke Owen (59) before Robbie Tomlinson (68) pulls one back from the penalty spot. There's just enough time for sub Graham

Doyle (86) to add a fourth, also from the penalty mark to round things off and claim three points to move into the top half of the fourteen-team table. A dozen or so spectators gather to watch the match (which is expertly refereed by young local whistler Spencer Pearson). He plays the full ninety minutes as proceedings finish in what is near darkness with a couple of lightning flashes and thunder rumbles to illuminate the distant sky in the closing stages. For the first time this season I witness the use of the 'sin-bin' as visiting striker Josh Lamming is banished for an indiscretion with ten minutes to go. When the Howden bench realise that he should be back on it was well into time added on and his return lasts only a matter of seconds! Thankfully I manage to head back to the car just as the heavens open but get a good soaking after returning to the field when I discover my hoodie is still hanging on the perimeter rope. Doh!

During the game I also get into conversation with club secretary Alan Hall, who is also running the line this evening. He's a lovely guy who works tirelessly behind the scenes, running some of the younger sides and refereeing. For his sins he also follows the Tigers and both of the city's rugby league sides. A week ago, he travelled to watch City play Tranmere in the league cup. After getting stuck in busy traffic on the M6 he arrived half an hour late at Prenton Park missing two goals in their 3-0 victory!

I thoroughly recommend a visit to the Hessle recreation ground if you are in the area. You will certainly receive a warm welcome by everyone at the Hessle Sporting Club when you go. More details about the club can be found on the generic *FA Full-Time* site covering the HPL as well as the regularly updated club *twitter* and *Facebook* social media feeds. The joys of hopping locally continue. Have fun however far you decide to travel.

R No.04: WebEd - Saturday 24th August 2019; **Garforth Town** v Colne; FA Cup Preliminary Round; Kick-Off: 3pm; Venue: Bannister Prentice Stadium; Cedar Ridge; Garforth; West Yorkshire; LS25 2PF; Result: 0-4; Admission: £6; Programme: Yes, 24pp; Attendance: 168

It's FA Cup day and I'm heading over to the outskirts of Leeds for my footy fix, the eagerly awaited Preliminary Round tie between Garforth Town and Colne. Well, let's rephrase that: I would be if I hadn't got a flat car battery. Being a Bank Holiday weekend, this has literally put the proverbial spanner in the hopping works and, it's pretty much touch and go whether the AA patrol officer can still get to me within the next forty minutes (the latest deadline to still give me enough time to reach my intended destination). I head back in doors and wait. For some reason I sit and look at the phone thinking it might speed things up. Thankfully the new App (on my android device) allays my hopping fears by confirming on screen that help is now on its way and will be arriving at the allotted time. It does and a lovely guy in a yellow patrol vehicle is on hand to change my fate. The bonnet is quickly opened and he attaches something to the battery terminals. Incredibly, the hopping gods are looking down on me and with one turn (yes, just one turn) of the ignition key the car engine is purring again and I'm back on the road with the colour fast returning to my cheeks. Apparently, the *SatNav* had been on full charge (through the cigar lighter) for several days leaving me without any power. Doh!!

Within an hour or so I'm approaching the ground but miss the turning down Cedar Ridge. Thankfully I spot a few home fans clad in their blue and yellow shirts so I turn back and follow them along the narrow road leading through a smart residential estate. Situated at the end of a cul-de-sac the site is dominated by the large cantilever stand decked out neatly in contrasting blocks of seats sporting the club's colours. The clubhouse is found in a separate building to the left with plenty of picnic seats already taken on the veranda outside as fans bask in the hot sunshine ahead of kick-off. After entering through the turnstile (and programme point) you pass the well-stocked refreshment hut tucked away under the stand to your left. Access to and from the seats is only gained through the back of the stand but if you prefer to stand pitch-side follow the separate paths at either end. Further cover is behind the goal to the left and many of the visiting fans today have already set up base with their Red Army flags and banners proudly hanging on display on the back wall ahead of kick-off. The rest of the ground is open standing along the perimeter path.

Hoppers may be interested to learn that the club initially played on a council pitch in nearby Swillington as there were no facilities available in Garforth. When they joined the West Yorkshire League in 1976, they bought land at Brierlands Lane, a former council rubbish dump, to build a new ground. A clubhouse was built in 1991 and floodlights erected in 1995. In 1998 they moved to the present ground called Wheatley Park. The ground has a capacity of 3,000, of which 278 is seated and 200 covered. The record attendance of 2,428 was set for a Northern Premier League Division One North match against Chester on 29 April 2011.

It's always nice to attend a cup game which features sides playing in different league competitions. The hosts members of the Step 6 NCEL Premier Division currently have made a cracking start to their league programme (albeit after only three games) and currently sit unbeaten in second place (behind Goole AFC). In contrast the Step 5 visitors have yet to win having drawn and lost their opening two matches in the newly formed NPL North West Division. As far as the FA Cup goes Garforth reached this stage after beating Sildon in a replay here ten days ago; for Colne this was their first taste of cup action this season.

You could say today's fixture is a battle of the roses with the teams representing their respective counties from either side of the Pennines. The tie itself is played in baking heat and goes according to the form book with the visitors from Burnley winning comfortably by four goals to nil. Although they lead by a single goal at the break the second and third came within ten minutes of the re-start which give them the upper hand and it is quite surprising that they don't add several more by full-time. The match played on an undulating and bobbly well-grassed surface is played in blistering heat throughout and it is a credit to the officials who wisely punctuate play with several hydration breaks to keep the players cool.

A colour photocopied 24-page programme containing all the essentials is issued priced £1.50 for the game. It is interesting to note in the bullet-pointed club history that the Garforth Miners FC (as they were known) was formed as a pub team (The Miners Arms - hence the colliery wheel on their logo) as recently as 1964. I had almost forgotten that Brazilian legend Socrates also played here back

in 2004. Apparently, it was when the then manager Simon Clifford who had ambitious plans for the club to reach the Football League made a couple of signings with the South American making one appearance and Lee Sharp another high-profile player (ex- Manchester United and Leeds United forward) turning out 21 times and scoring six goals in the same season. Mention is also made to Colne FC and their heroics (as Dynamos) in winning the league and cup double as well as reaching the semi-finals and beating AFC Wimbledon along the way in the 2003-04 season.

Just to add a bit of spice to proceedings the cheery guy on the tannoy announces during the game some of Colne's notable residents which include none other than children's author and broadcaster John Cunliffe (of *Postman Pat* and *Rosie & Jim* fame), Tony Livesey (*BBC 5 Live* presenter) and ex-Burnley FC and Manchester United coach (under Sir Alex Ferguson) Mike Phelan. A crowd in excess of 150 is in attendance including a number of other hoppers and a lovely elderly couple from Colne: the wife a newspaper reporter compiles match notes whilst her other half (also the groundsman) takes the matchday pictures. I am most grateful to both of them for their help in completing the missing bits on my *FGIF* match stats card.

Like all clubs in this competition, details covering Garforth Town are easily accessed through the excellent NCEL website. Regularly updated it's a terrific resource covering a wide range of match stats all neatly arranged for the eager hopper to drool over. As always, I found my trip was a most enjoyable one and would recommend a visit here to all ground collectors. I would also recommend turning your SatNav off properly when you have completed your journey (footballing or otherwise) just in case. The joys of having an AA membership continue. Have fun and stress-free motoring wherever you go to.

R No.03: WebEd - Saturday 17th August 2019; **Thorpe United** v Sporting Knavesmire; York Football League Premier Division; Kick-Off: 2pm; Venue: Thorpe Willoughby Sports Association, Field Lane, Thorpe Willoughby, West Yorkshire; YO8 9FL; Result: 6-1; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 13

Over a year ago Thorpe United Football Club won the York Football League Division One title and in doing so successfully gained promotion to the Premier Division of the competition. However, when league officials deemed that their ground and its facilities did not come up to scratch, they had to find an alternative home in order to participate at the higher level. As a result, the club entered into a ground-share agreement with fellow league side and local neighbours Riccall United FC enabling them to play at Landing Lane for a season whilst the necessary ground work was being completed.

With the important alterations now carried out (and ahead of schedule) and the work getting a big thumbs up from the league committee, I'm making my way to the tidy Thorpe Willoughby Sports Association ground to take in the club's first home game after returning to Field Lane. Located only a couple of miles from Selby town centre the club is found by approaching along the A19 (Doncaster Road) and taking a right turn down Barff Lane in the village of Brayton. After about a mile this road joins Field Lane where the sports fields can be seen on the right, just before the road comes to a dead end, alongside the A63 by-pass.

The main entrance (marked with a smart sign) and short driveway open up into a car park which runs parallel to the road. The club founded in 1990 is a non-profit making organisation which acts as a superb sports hub for the local village residents sharing its facilities with football, cricket and indoor social activities in what is a largely rural site bordered by residential housing and open countryside. To the immediate left are two modern brick buildings - one provides players' changing rooms (which now includes female friendly accommodation to meet league requirements) and has a neat club logo above the doorway. The other much smaller adjoining one hosts a smart bar and function room with Sky TV. Behind here is a new floodlit caged 4G area used for activities such as 5-a-side and mini sports. The main football pitch is situated some 200 yards further away on the opposite side of the expansive field. This explains why the players were out warming up close to the changing rooms when I arrived ahead of kick-off.

Today I walked (with the players) around the edge of the cricket field boundary line as a cricket match was already in progress (the final game of the season to be played here, apparently). It was important to keep half an eye on the action as there was the distinct possibility of the ball struck from a wayward cover drive landing close-by, at any time; thankfully we all successfully managed to get there without any incident. The main pitch, shoe-horned into the available space by housing backing onto it at one end and by open fields (with hay bales) bordering two others, has a gentle undulating but well grassed surface. I'm told there's a big overall improvement in the playing area now since concerns were raised over its state a year ago (work to remedy this has been undertaken to meet one of the ground grading stipulations). Like many grounds in this top division, it has a neat post and rail fence around its perimeter to give it a nice fully enclosed feel. This is complemented with an accompanying small seated stand (well, probably an old dug-out!) on the near side and couple of portable perspex dug-outs for the coaching staff and subs on the opposite side close to half-way.

With the Premier Division kicking-off its league programme (for most teams) earlier in midweek (an established tradition in this competition), this naturally provides travellers with further 'hoppertunities to get in some midweek footy action. United got their season underway earning a hard-fought point with a 1-1 draw on their travels to Hemingborough United FC on Wednesday evening.

Today's game saw the visit of York-based side Sporting Knavesmire to the TWSA. With the hosts leading comfortably 3-0 at the break the visitors managed to pull one back and looked to have got back into the game but couldn't convert their chances. United got on top again adding three more goals (two late on) to take all three points and claim second place in the table by the time all the results for the afternoon had been confirmed. Notably the Man-of-the match award went to super striker Paul Moran who bagged himself a hat-trick with goals coming on 7; 83 and 88 minutes. The three officials did a cracking job considering the respective team strips were navy blue and purple! The game played in mostly sunny conditions was attended by a lowly crowd of thirteen spectators including two fortunate female fans (a grandmother with her granddaughter) who had a lucky escape when the dug out they were sitting in just five minutes earlier suddenly took off from the ground when a sudden gust of wind got underneath its frame during the latter

stages of the game. Phew! Owing to the close proximity of housing behind one of the goals it was also interesting to see some of the subs negotiate the high wire mesh fencing in order to retrieve stray balls from neighbouring gardens. Ouch! Programmes are not issued for games here (indeed it is rare to see one in this league) but refreshments are available from the bar area throughout the afternoon.

If you really love your footy stats then check out the York Football League website which is one of the best out there. Apart from all the usual fixture information and club/ground details, there is also a terrific player analysis which updates team line ups and team sheets after each game. It certainly helps to fill in those irritating missed entries and spaces on your *FGIF* Match Stats Card. I really love taking in matches in this league and would encourage all hoppers to do the same. A visit to Thorpe United FC is certainly one I would recommend to all ground collectors out there. I'm pleased they have made a welcome return to the TWSA ground. The joys of hopping in and around *Eboracum* continue. Have fun wherever you get chance to go there for your fix.

R No.02: WebEd - Saturday 10th August 2019; **East Hull** v North Ferriby; Northern Counties East League Division One; Kick-Off: 3pm; Venue: Dunswell Park, Dunswell Lane, Hull, East Yorkshire, HU6 0AA; Result: 0-3; Admission: £5; Programme 24pp, £1.50: Attendance: 321

Up until a couple of months ago nobody in the football world would have anticipated a fixture quite like this. I say this because much has happened on and off the field at both clubs, so here's a bit of background reading covering recent events.

It was back in April this year that an application to change the name of NCEL Division One outfit East Yorkshire Carnegie FC to East Hull FC was approved by the East Riding County FA. At the same time the club announced that chairman Dave Reader present at EYC since promotion from the Humber Premier League would be stepping down from his duties (citing work and family commitments as the reason). His successor was to be Jamie Waltham (the owner of the club's Dunswell Park ground) who was last involved in the NCEL with Hull United FC before co-founding Carnegie. Furthermore, and here's the rub, he was also the former owner of North Ferriby United until its much publicised (in the press and on social media) demise following liquidation.

Waltham along with Carl Chadwick (a former colleague at North Ferriby United FC) have agreed to replace Reader at the helm as the club prepares to play under the East Hull FC banner with a vision of making it one of the largest club's in East Yorkshire. The club has also installed new manager Andrew Watts who has joined from near neighbours and fellow NCEL side Hall Road Rangers FC and starts the season with a completely new squad (indeed only two players remain here from last season). It was also agreed that the club colours be changed to red and black stripes for home games and black and gold, for away - the colours are said to represent the city's rugby league teams as well as the Tigers.

From a North Ferriby FC perspective (and probably with the backing most of non-league football followers) there is still a feeling of great anger and animosity towards those personnel involved in the lamentable events which led their club to being wound up following a court order earlier in March this year. It had been a difficult time for NFU FC up to this point last season. Competing in the Northern Premier League following their relegation from the Conference North, the Villagers had played thirty-three games managing just two wins and four draws to find themselves at the foot of the table, nineteen points adrift of second bottom Workington. The remaining fixtures were cancelled, and the club was wound up owing a sum of £7645.25.

Within a month it was announced that a phoenix club had been formed to be known as North Ferriby FC with financial backing coming from Les Hare who now becomes the new owner and chairman at Grange Lane. After some discussion it was agreed they would enter the football pyramid at Step 6 joining the NCEL First Division for 2019-20. Following the many years of struggle, there is now a renewed optimism amongst the committee, players and fans who feel they have got their club back again. Just take a look at the Villagers website to read about the latest initiatives to promote the club.

With the league fixtures commencing last week, both sides came into today's game on the back of differing fortunes: the hosts experienced a heavy 6-2 defeat on the road at Brigg whilst North Ferriby earned a 1-1 with Hallam at Dransfield Park, notably in front of 495 fans, incidentally the second highest Step 6 attendance of the day in matches played up and down the country. As expected Ferriby, roared on by a large travelling contingent, bossed today's game, a mostly one sided-contest, winning comfortably by a 3-0 score-line with all goals coming from exciting young prospect and debutant Tom Corner (including a penalty to open the scoring). On this form they will be a hard side to beat this coming season. The match played in mostly dull and overcast conditions on a superb playing surface attracted 321 spectators including a number of hoppers - far more than EYC's average of approximately sixty last season - to Dunswell Park. A terrific atmosphere was created by the crowd which included a drummer who was particularly active during the second half of the game. An attractive 24-page glossy colour programme entitled *The Riversiders* (as the club are now referred to) containing plenty of reading material was issued for the game priced £1.50. On arriving at the gate at 2pm, well ahead of kick-off, I was told by the gateman that only twenty copies had been produced and after a semi sprint from the car park was lucky to snap up two (out of the last three) copies when I reached the turnstile. Hot drinks were available from the refreshment kiosk with hot food on offer from a makeshift barbeque next to the players' entrance. During the game several large ice buckets containing chilled cans of lager were taken around the ground by a team of young female helpers. They certainly went down well (literally) by the green and white clad fans congregating in the far corner.

Dunswell Park can be reached by heading north along the A1079 Beverley Road from Hull towards Dunswell. The ground can be found on the immediate right after exiting the large roundabout on Beverley Road as soon as you enter Dunswell and is prior to the petrol station. For travellers using public transport for their journey

(approx. 4 miles) take the EYMS bus numbers 121, 122, 246 from Kingston upon Hull (Interchange, adjacent to station) to Dunswell (Beverley Road, A1174) running four times per hour with a journey time of 20 minutes. Then retrace the route back along Beverley Road where the ground is on your left (5 minutes).

As you follow the main driveway and cross a grassed area, you will see the clubhouse (with function room and bar) immediately to the right. On the left a smaller pitch (used by HPL side LIV supplies FC) with perimeter fence (fashioned from industrial size pipelines) and dug outs runs parallel to the main ground which is fully enclosed by a timber fence. Access in the corner is through a turnstile with plenty of seated cover behind the goal to the right and standing cover along both sides nearest to the entrance. The tree-lined far end is currently out of bounds to spectators. A small tea bar can be found on the far side near to the corner flag. A pair of dug outs are positioned near to the half-way line along the left-hand touchline.

As expected, much remedial work has taken place on the ground over the summer months. Since the name change came into effect, most of the re-branding has been completed to show the club's new logo (in red, black and white) on display at strategic points of the ground. A fresh lick of paint has been made to the stands and perimeter fence - in fact I was warned by several fans as I made my way around the pitch not to touch the metal rail as the paint in some places was still wet but sadly it was too late as some had come off on my shorts!!

And finally. Much had been written in the press about the current status of both clubs prior to the game creating much anticipation and excitement. However, nothing could quite match the publicity surrounding Jamie Waltham's proposal of offering a £5000 first prize in the raffle draw not only for today's match but for every home fixture this season. No. You read it correctly - £5000 first prize in the raffle draw!! In an effort to raise the profile of the new club the chairman who said (and I quote from the matchday programme): 'We will be focussing our efforts on generating a fan base whilst being competitive on the pitch. This is our belief that without a good fan base, there is a limit to everything - and with a large fan base there isn't a limit, so it's where we must concentrate our efforts'. So, as the final whistle sounded and we walked over to the exit, it was announced (over the tannoy) that ticket No.426 had been drawn from a colourful biscuit tin. This was much to the delight of the young guy (an East Hull supporter!?) who was jumping up and down next to me. Totally bemused, he exchanged his winning ticket for a rather tasty cheque from the chairman! The event was quickly met with derision by a small number of departing Ferriby fans (who had already partaken in several cans of lager) who together sang: 'Where's the money gone?' and 'You know it's going to bounce...'. Amid the ensuing melee I quickly made my getaway and joined the queue of cars heading back onto Beverley Road. I can honestly say that it had been a most surreal afternoon and one that will live long in the memory, maybe not for all the right reasons, dare I say it. The highs and lows of hopping certainly continue. Have fun wherever you go!

edited on 16/08/19

R No.01: WebEd - Saturday 3rd August 2019; **Barton Town** v Yorkshire Amateur; Northern Counties East League Premier Division; Kick-Off: 3pm; Venue: The Easy Buy Stadium, Marsh Lane, Barton upon Humber, North Lincs, DN18 5JD; Result: 0-3; Admission: The Perfect Ten - £10 entry including programme (44pp), food and drink vouchers; Attendance: 121

There's nothing quite like it, is there? Even after thirty years of football travelling, I still get the same buzz when the first day of a new season comes around once again. I imagine you feel the same. Ever since watching Chelmsford City take on VS Rugby at New Writtle Street on the opening day of the 1989-90 campaign, I still get the same pre-match excitement on what is always a truly memorable day in the ground collector's calendar. With only a few league's starting their games today I decide to stay local and pick a match in the NCEL for my footy fix. So, with camera fully charged and essential *FGIF* Match Stats Card at hand (well, in my camera bag pocket), I set off in eager anticipation from *FGIF* HQ to make the very short journey over the Humber Bridge to Marsh Lane home of Barton Town FC. Apart from newly reformed North Ferriby FC literally on my doorstep this has also got to be one of the nearest Step 5 grounds to home that I have yet to tick off.

Although local club records dating back to the 1880's show competitive football being played in the (then) village, it wasn't until much later that Barton Town Old Boys Football Club was formed in 1995. This came about as a result of a merger between Barton Town (established 1880) and Barton Old Boys (1923), with the new club taking Barton Town's place in the Lincolnshire League. After finishing fourth in their first season, they went on to win the title a year later and then took runners-up spot in both 1997-98 and 1998-99. In 2000 the club decided to switch to the Humber Premier League (but only for one season) before joining the Central Midlands League (Premier Division) in 2001-02. After finishing as runners-up, they were promoted to the Supreme Division in 2002-03 and won the title three years later in 2005-06 before claiming runners-up place the following season. A major ambition was realised when the club gained promotion to the Northern Counties East League Division One in 2007-08 (where they secured a creditable ninth place) and further success came in 2010-11 when Barton finished second earning them promotion up to the Premier Division of the competition. In 2013-14 the club exceeded all expectations by finishing as runners-up behind a strong Brighouse Town side. In 2017, the club was renamed as Barton Town. The club is proud of its achievements and the mission statement made last season was to finish inside the top six. Despite a great start results fell away in the winter and the Swans finished in eleventh.

Barton Town FC originally played on a cricket ground (now a pond at Water's Edge Country Park) which was at the time a few fields north of their present site in Marsh Lane which they took over in 1927. Since that time the ground has been reduced in size and aligned through ninety degrees to give a north south aspect. By contrast Barton Town Old Boys FC played on a ground on Pasture Road up until 1963 before moving to a pitch next to what is the present site of the Humber Bridge Viewing Area. Coast Guard House was used as changing rooms during the side's Scunthorpe and District League days shortly before they were disbanded in 1932. After reforming for a second time they moved to Marsh Lane in 1967 sharing

facilities with Barton Town. Once the clubs merged further ground improvements were made with an extensive redevelopment programme to include floodlights, new access, car parking, changing rooms, clubhouse and stands all necessary to fulfil the club's ambitions to join the NCEL. As the photos in the album gallery show this has now become a tidy Step 5 community ground boasting a superb pitch (having undergone remedial drainage work last year) and terrific spectator facilities both on and off the field.

Visitors to the Easy Buy Stadium (the sponsors are a weekly payment operating company) will discover that this is one of most friendly and proactive clubs in the NCEL. From the moment I arrived I was made to feel very welcome by the hard-working staff who were dressed in their smart corporate sky-blue polo tops. Welfare officer Lynn Green working on the turnstile was on hand to promote the club's *Perfect Ten* special admission offer - it's a terrific deal with entry, matchday programme, £3 food and £3 drinks vouchers redeemable inside the clubhouse all for £10. On top of that I was given a tidy A6-size 40-page BTFC fixture booklet containing a list of the club's fixtures, personnel and details about sponsorship as well as a voucher offering free entry into the ground for any future game! Aaron Irwin the busy media officer outlined some of the future ground developments before kick-off. The work will see the relocation of the main turnstile over to the opposite corner (next to the car park); the creation of a new outside refreshment access point (hatch) for the tea bar and kitchen. Helpful club secretary Kim Mumford (who travels to matches from Hull) explained how grateful the club are for the regular support of local fans and a growing number of sponsors - check out the impressive range of advertisers displayed around the ground and printed in the programme. Look out too for the Swans Forever Wall next to the turnstile.

Today's opening league game saw the visit of the well-respected Leeds-based outfit Yorkshire Amateur FC to Marsh Lane. Early errors proved costly as the relatively young and naïve Barton side soon found themselves 2-0 down within the first ten minutes. Despite a valiant fight back by manager Dave Ricardo's boys after the break, it was the Ammers who put the result beyond doubt when they added a third against the run of play midway through the half. Notably the NCEL's leading scorer from last season Ashley Flynn (who bagged over forty goals in all competition) was on hand scoring two of the goals (on 7 and 78 minutes) to get his season off the mark. For the record Fernando Moke scored the opener inside the first two minutes. The game played on a flat, well-manicured surface in mostly sunny conditions was attended by over one hundred spectators. A superb full colour 44-page programme printed on glossy paper was issued for the game and contained all the usual items including a wonderful tongue-in-cheek *Fans Focus* column. This week features a chap called Ben, an avid Swans' fan and lifelong Grimsby Town FC supporter who says his favourite biscuit is a chocolate digestive which he likes to dunk in his tea. A man after my own heart. Who said the future of programme production looks grim? A wide range of hot and cold food was available from a well-stocked tea bar throughout the afternoon and cheerfully dispensed by personable mother and son combo Sophie and Harry.

It goes without saying that a visit to Marsh Lane home of Barton Town FC comes heartily recommended to all travellers who will enjoy their short stay at this friendly, well-run club. More details covering the Swans can be found on the excellent NCEL web pages and the club's new website and regularly updated *twitter* feed. I will make a re-visit later in the campaign that's for sure. What a great way to start a new season - the joys of hopping for another campaign have returned. Have fun wherever you go during your travels in 2019-20!

edited on 15/08/19