

RAMBLINGS REPORTS 2020-21

updated on 27/10/20



24/10/20 - Action from Santon FC (red) v Brumby Seniors (S&DL CC) 0-15

R No.8: WebEd - Saturday 24th October 2020; **Santon** (v Brumby Seniors); Scunthorpe & District League Challenge Cup Round One; Kick-Off: 2.30pm; Venue: Appleby Playing Field; School Lane; Appleby; Winterton; Scunthorpe; North Lincs; DN15 0AN; Result: 0-15; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 12.

Where would grassroots football clubs be without the help of unpaid volunteers? I'm thinking of all those people who readily give up their valuable free time each week to fulfil a wide range of roles and duties at their clubs - most are those thankless tasks, which often go unnoticed, taking place behind the scenes. You must remember that it's for the cause, all collectively important and necessary in order to get a game of football on. From those who tirelessly mark out the pitch in all weathers; prepare the matchday programme (yes, they do still exist in print form - just ask our ace correspondents Keith and Steve); sort out player availability, sometimes at short notice; organise the catering and refreshments to others who maintain the ground with a lick of paint every now and again to the perimeter walls. It takes hundreds of man (and woman) hours to fulfil these, what could be best described as mostly, unglamorous tasks. Without this full team approach and support many more clubs would simply hit the wall. For the smaller clubs who just don't have armies of volunteers to rely on, it's even more difficult to carry out the same duties, in what is essentially, a hand to mouth existence. It rests on the shoulders of just a few die-hard troopers, many retired, who regularly have to multi-task and juggle their time alongside other aspects of their life. In short, they are, and have been for some time, the life blood of their clubs and more importantly wider community.

Today I'm heading over the Humber (once again) into the North Lincolnshire sticks for my footy fix. My destination (about a twenty-minute drive from *FGIF* HQ) is the picturesque village of Appleby, found close to the adjoining village of Winterton (Martyn with a 'Y' Girdham country) where the long-exiled Santon Football Club is

playing Brumby Seniors in a Scunthorpe and District League Challenge Cup First round tie. It's an eagerly awaited 'David v Goliath' contest with the hosts who play in the second tier of the league, taking on their opponents from the division above them. For me, this is something that adds a little bit more spice to the now typical autumnal proceedings.

The ground is found off the B1207, or Ermine Street, a long straight former Roman Road, the name of which you may remember from your school days. Dating back to about 60AD and joining Lincoln (Lindum Colonia where Emperor Nero built a fortress) up to the Humber and beyond - this stretch of road is now, for the most part, recognised as the A15. I made a left turn down Paul Lane (just after the village signpost next to the Church Lane crossroads) which takes you down to the Village Hall on the left (with the ground opposite) at the junction of School Lane and Beck Lane. It's found in a beautiful tree-lined location which looks even more picturesque at this time of year - a narrow concrete entrance (between the trees) at this end of the site leads to the playing field where car parking is allowed over to the left, behind the goal.

As you would expect the facilities for football here are fairly basic with only enough space for one (un-roped) pitch to be marked within the tight confines of the perimeter. Apart from a children's playground and some outdoor fitness equipment over to the right, there are no changing rooms or dug outs at pitch side - the players would normally change at the village hall over the road but not today of course due to the Covid-19 restrictions in force. Although there is a tidy mini pagoda-style wooden shelter with some bench seating, set back just inside the entrance, it's not really an ideal position from which to watch the game with several parked cars and some overgrown trees obstructing any chance of a decent view of the action on matchday.

Upon arrival at the Appleby Playing Field I was greeted by club stalwart Mal Ayre. With step ladder tucked securely under his arm (on his way to put up the goal nets) the affable gentleman made me feel most welcome here. After exchanging pleasantries, he was more than keen to answer my quick-fire questions about himself and the club. It's worth noting at this point that Mal, a spritely eighty-year-old (yes eighty - you did read that correctly), is what can be best described as a true club legend. Sporting a trendy red baseball cap with the words Mr Goat printed on the front (more about that later) he told me that he joined the club in 1968, that's over fifty-one years ago now. Within three years he took over the reins as first team manager, a role he still fulfils to this very day. In the words of the late David Coleman (of 1970's *Grandstand* fame) that's really 'Quite Remarkable', isn't it? Surely there can't be any managers in the whole of the country with such long service as 'the gaffer' on their CV? Well until recently, there was - Mal told me that one of his old mates had been a manager of a local Sunday League for the same length of time until his sad death a couple of years ago. There must be something in the local air or water supply that aids longevity in these parts! He has unsurprisingly also been the club secretary as well as being the proverbial general dog's body - in fact, you could say for every job that's ever needed doing, he's been there and, done that.

Santon FC was formed in back in the 1950's with the team originally playing its games on the local playing field in the neighbouring village of Low Santon (hence the name) which is just over a mile (south as the crow flies) from here along the B1207. When the 'ground' was deemed unsuitable, they played some games on the local corporation pitches (now called the Co-Op grounds) in Scunny for a short time before moving to Appleby initially using a field close to what is now the electricity board sub-station before coming to the present site in the early 1980's. They became members of the Scunthorpe & District League playing mostly in the lower divisions. As Mal tells me the club has always struggled in terms of attracting players over the years and has never in its history played in the top division of the competition. In fact, if you look at the tables on the *FA Full-Time* site covering the league over the last fifteen years, you'll see that the club has finished bottom of its division on no fewer than nine times. The stats really do make for some grim reading: in 2014-15 the club suffered its worst ever season finishing bottom of division three recording 0 points (losing every single one of their eighteen games) and in 2005-06 they finished bottom of division three, with just one point and a negative goal difference of -173. On a positive note they did finish in seventh place (out of eleven teams) in division three gaining 28 points (winning nine and drawing one of their games) to achieve their best season in 2012-13. It really does beggar belief how the club, regarded as the league's perennial 'whipping boys' manages to keep going from one season to the next; I suspect that's down in no small part to the enthusiasm and dedication of Mal Ayre, I'm sure.

Before play today it was quite remarkable to note that Santon was sitting in equal first place (with Barnetby United Reserves) in the current second division table standings, achieving maximum points after winning their first two games of the season. This feat has not happened for over seven years since they managed back to back league victories in March 2013! That's the good news. The result of today's cup tie was probably decided before a ball had even been kicked. As I walked over to the pitch just ahead of the scheduled 2.30pm kick-off, I could sense some concern amongst the home players. It was plainly obvious from their body language that all was not well in the Santon FC camp as they were busy explaining to Ethan Nundy, the young referee from Scunthorpe, that they were still waiting for some players to turn up. Despite making frantic phone calls (and waiting a good ten minutes), it was finally decided to get the game underway with the hosts fielding just eight players. Apparently, it turned out that three of the lads had gone out fishing earlier in the morning and were supposedly making their way back to the ground. That's definitely a new excuse to add to the list of reasons for 'not playing'!

It certainly goes without saying that Brumby took full advantage of the host's misfortune and mercilessly went on a goal scoring spree to win the tie. Once they had netted their first goal (surprisingly after fifteen minutes) the floodgates opened after that (a bit of a pun here as it was absolutely lashing it down with rain). Half-time couldn't come quick enough for Santon who by now were already 7-0 down and facing further difficulties after it was revealed their captain had taken a nasty knock to his knee; having a depleted squad he decided to stay on the pitch by swapping his position with the keeper. Although two more players arrived

soon afterwards to give them a complement of ten, it made little difference as Brumby didn't ease up one bit scoring eight more times after the break to take the final score to 15-0 by the end. This wasn't their worst cup defeat though (and there have been a few) - a 21-0 drubbing by Limestone Rangers in November 2014 takes those honours. For the record out of the six goal scorers for Brumby, Harry Burnett-Haynes scored five, Daniel Own four and three penalties were awarded, two of which were converted. Despite the result I felt a bit sorry for Santon - no club deserves to be beaten this heavily - for the neutral the game isn't really a spectacle on days like this. Having said that, the result was my third highest goal fest total after attending Hickling (v Ruston) in the NEN (Result: 1-17) on 11/03/17 and Bardwell Sports (v AFC Orwell) in the SIL4 (18-0) some six months later on 02/09/17.

The game played in really heavy showers (it was literally rodding it down seconds after the game started and lasted all afternoon) on a bumpy well grassed pitch covered in leaves, attracted a dozen spectators who tried hard throughout to get out of the rain by either retreating to their cars or by standing under some of the bigger trees for shelter (that was me). It was really unpleasant I can tell you. Thankfully as a seasoned grounds collector there aren't many days like this to add to our hopping CV's. Needless to say, I got soaked to the skin even when wearing three top layers and some waterproof trousers. For the first time in ages I gave up taking photos mid-way through the second half as my lens cloth looked like a chamois!!

It was also lovely to have a chat with Ann or Mrs Goat (as she is referred to these days - check out her warm red woolly hat). An exile from Beverley, she has also played a big part with her husband in helping out at the club. Yesterday she was busy marking out the pitch - not something you would expect for someone in their seventies to be doing! Pre-lockdown (remember that?) she, along with several other past and present players and other personnel, organised a private bash to commemorate her husband's distinguished football career with Santon. He was taken completely by surprise when (unbeknown to him) so many familiar faces appeared in person to celebrate the occasion which took the format of a *This Is Your Life* (as once hosted by Eamon Holmes and Michael Aspel). He really treasures the 'big red book' complete with a collection of narrative, photos, press cuttings and momentos (including special souvenir club hats), all covering the last eighty years. What a lovely gesture.

Despite the atrocious weather conditions, it had been another cracking hop made even more special by my chance encounter with Mal and Ann. Even as the rain persisted, they dutifully continued their jobs donned in sturdy well-made rain suits right up until the bitter end - even as I said my 'goodbye' after the final whistle they were both still busy helping the young lads to take the nets down. I don't think the words: pipe, slippers, knitting and a good book beside the fire, is in their vocabulary somehow. Hopefully their dedication and lifelong service at Santon Football Club can be an inspiration to us all. The joys of attending true grassroots football clubs continue - have fun wherever you go and spare a thought for those who make it all possible, many in difficult circumstances.

R No.7: WebEd - Saturday 17th October 2020; **Hodgson** (v AFC North); East Riding County League Division One; Kick-Off: 2pm; Venue: Beverley Leisure Centre; Flemingate; Beverley; East Yorks; HU170LT; Result: 1-1; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 16.

Since the Middle ages Beverley has been renowned for its long proud tradition of tanning - the term given to processes involved in turning raw animal skins into leather. Being a market town was an ideal location in which to operate a tannery having a rich number of resources available within the immediate area: there was always a plentiful supply of animal hides with local farms rearing cattle for sale; the underlying outcrops of chalk provided an important source of lime required to remove coarse hair; there was an abundance of bark (a tanning agent) from oak forests in the area; numerous water courses running through Beverley from the Wolds gave vast amounts of water and finally, this in turn, allowed barges to transport the finished products via Beverley Beck and along the River Hull to the Humber and beyond.

In 1812 William Hodgson from Gainford in County Durham, first opened a tanning business in the north side of Flemingate. He originally rented premises from the Denton family who ran a local tannery at the time. From 1845 his son Richard, also known as Colonel Hodgson (from where the company name first began), continued this fine tradition as mechanisation expanded the business with the introduction of steam power engines and bark mills. The business was one of major occupations in the town and the largest of its kind in Europe employing over 100 people. The industry expanded to meet the needs of the war years but was seen to decline as orders fell soon in the early 1920s. The company was later taken over by Barrow, Hepburn and Gale of Bermondsey, an operation based in South London. Within fifty years the business in the town had closed down most of its departments falling victim to what was becoming strong competition from companies with new production methods from overseas. Despite ceasing trade altogether in 1978 the name Hodgson is still highly regarded as part of the town's history today.

A football club bearing this proud company name (synonymous with the town) has competed in local football on both Saturdays (in the ERCL) and on Sundays (Hull SFL) for over fifty years. Initially the players selected were paid employees working at the growing tannery business, before the team soon dropped the stipulation of being a works' side and started to attract other lads from in and around the town.

The club has achieved notable success over the years particularly in the top divisions of the East Riding County League and in the Humber Premier League (for a brief spell) winning the Division One title in 2010-11 before finishing 14/16 in the Premier Division the following campaign. They dropped out of senior football for a season before returning to take their place in the county league once again where they have occupied a top half finish in Division One since 2015-16. During this time the team has been sponsored by the Hodgson's pub (to continue the proud tradition of the company) before being taken over by a new modern gastro pub called the Potting Shed which moved into the refurbished building in 2017.

The football club plays its games at the East Riding Council-owned Beverley Leisure Centre playing field located off Flemingate, also a stone's throw from the former Hodgson's site where the tannery once stood. It's only a few hundred yards from Beverley town Centre and the beautiful Minster. A busy entrance (off the B1230) close to the junction of the Premier Inn, Jewson's timber merchants and the Potting Shed (used by the players and spectators post-match) leads to the sports centre and its adjoining car park around the back of the building. It's free to park here but remember to get a ticket from the machine and display it before heading off pitch-side. As well as providing indoor facilities including a swimming pool, gym and fitness suite there are a couple of pitches marked out on the field for football, rugby and cricket. Although the set-up is fairly basic, it is found in a most appealing scenic location within the shadow of beautiful Beverley Minster that provides a cracking backdrop to the action.

Hodgson's AFC use a pitch marked out in the farthest right-hand corner of the field. This is landscaped by some tall trees and a smart metal posted fence which border the perimeter on the right - space is at a premium for those watching as there's just about enough grass to stand on between the pitch and the fence behind. A further clump of trees can be found behind the goal which backs onto the Spark Mill allotments. A fully enclosed skate park (with adjoining tennis courts and bowling green in tandem) is positioned behind part of the furthest touchline on the opposite side. At present there are no other facilities for spectators or playing squads.

Before play both teams occupied a mid-table position at this early stage of the new season. The visitors who had got off to a better start winning two and drawing one of their opening four games sat in third place and just one point over their mid-table hosts who themselves had a similar record with one win, one draw and one defeat in their first three games. Looking at the league table I fully expected that a close encounter was in prospect and was proved right (for once) as both teams contributed to a splendid 1-1 draw, in a proverbial game of two halves. Hodgson's dominated the first forty-five minutes scoring the opening goal in the first fifteen minutes when the hard-working Andrew Stott (14) poked the ball home from close range after a goal mouth scramble left the keeper unsuspected. AFC North upped their game in the second half and spent most of it camped in their opponent's penalty area. After repeatedly missing chances to score their hard work finally paid off when Connor Battey (80) chipped the ball beyond the advancing keeper from a tight angle. This was a fair result and one of the best games I have seen since football restarted last month.

The game played in unseasonably warm sunshine on a soft pitch, covered partly in leaves and twigs that had fallen from the surrounding trees, attracted a dozen or so spectators. It was really nice to get the camera out and capture the intricate spires from the Minster peeking out behind the sports centre roof on such a lovely autumnal afternoon. I did feel sorry for some of the committee members who were kept busy fishing out balls (kicked out of play) from the Mill Dam Drain running behind the padlocked boundary fence. I managed to have a chat with home gaffer Anthony Steer who explained to me how the club is currently thriving with plenty of new players signed up for the new season; indeed, I counted almost as many

subs (as players) standing on the touchline in their brand-new striking orange and black training tops during the game. His ever-friendly counterpart Colin Beecham was thrilled about how well his Bransholme based lads had responded following their step up (from division three) in the ERCL. He had also strengthened his sizeable squad since the re-start to football and had post lockdown purchased a new kit and some neatly designed drinking bottles each marked with the players unique initials for their own personal use and to minimise spreading the virus. A nice touch.

It had been a cracking afternoon's entertainment played in lovely weather for a change. A visit to the Beverley Leisure Centre home of Hodgson AFC is to be recommended to all travellers. Match details of this great club can be found on the generic *FA Full-Time* website on part one of the *FGIF* Links page. Within five minutes I had picked up Fran and Steph who had gone shopping into the town centre for a couple of hours - thankfully without buying any expensive Gucci tanning products - and was soon back home watching the final televised stages of the *Gillette Soccer Special* on *Sky Sports*. The joys of local hopping continue. Have fun and stay safe.

R No.6: WebEd - Saturday 10th October 2020; **Ashby Bowl** (v Scotter United); Lincolnshire County FA Junior Cup Round 1; Kick-Off: 1.30pm; Venue: Scawby Playing Fields; West Street; Scawby; Brigg; North Lincs; DN208AP; Result: 2-6; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 15.

County cup ties are definitely right up there amongst my favourite hopping fixtures in the grassroots football calendar. With plenty of interesting matches to choose from I just love taking in these ties particularly in the early rounds of the competitions. It gives the enthusiastic traveller a wonderful opportunity to visit loads of clubs from different leagues and watch them play against each other, as well as being able to tick off some interesting grounds along the way. Today is no exception either as I drool over the matches on offer in the first round of the Lincolnshire Junior Cup. After much deliberation and with half an eye on the afternoon's dodgy weather forecast, I eventually pick a tie closer to home in favour of a longer trip down into the Lincolnshire Wolds where there is a greater chance of some heavy rain. My journey over the Humber towards the outskirts of Brigg takes about half an hour as I arrive at the Scawby Playing Fields with plenty of time to spare before Ashby Bowl take on Scotter United in a first-round encounter - by coincidence it's also a contest between two of the Scunthorpe and District Football League Division One sides. My trip down to Alford United FC (of the East Lincs Combination) will just have to wait for another day (hopefully when the elements are kinder).

Ashby Bowl Football Club, unsurprisingly named after a family-run independent tenpin bowling alley business (based in the Ashby area of Scunthorpe), will be competing in the top division of the S&DL for the first time this season when the league action officially gets under way next week. It's been a long wait (since the Covid-19 lockdown came into place) for the club to get back into playing regular matches again. When the league was unexpectedly halted back in March, Ashby Bowl led the second division with a six-point cushion and with two games

remaining over second placed Barnetby United Reserves who had already managed to complete their fixtures. Although Limestone Rangers Reserves standing in fifth place and with four games in hand, could mathematically catch them, Ashby had (near enough) won the competition. They certainly looked a useful outfit when I saw them beat Briggensians in a S&DL2 fixture played at the Brigg Recreation ground at the end February (result: 1-4; Attendance: 15) before things became less than normal. So other than having a handful of pre-season friendlies under their belt this was the hosts first proper competitive game of the new season. Considering this is nearly mid-October, how weird is that?

For a village recreation ground, this is one of the best in the league. It is located in a lovely, enclosed, tree-lined setting and will appeal to all hoppers attending a game here. The narrow entrance found off West Street (beyond the Sutton Arms pub) is adjacent to the Scawby Academy (a primary school with 200 pupils on its roll) and is approached up a steep ramp. The driveway, which runs parallel to the school playing field and a small children's playground, leads to a car park hidden behind the Scawby Parish Pavilion (to give it its full title). This brick building opened in 1994 normally provides the matchday changing accommodation for the players but in view of the current Covid-19 restrictions it is deemed out of use - a polite notice inside the foyer reminds all patrons to observe the necessary rules about hand washing, social distancing and wearing of masks. To meet necessary Track and Trace safety requirements (via your NHS phone App), a copy of QR code covering the site was also attached to one of the windows.

The playing field is a veritable oasis of greenery being surrounded by some tall trees dotted around its entire perimeter to give it a pleasant rural feel. To add to its character both pitches on site (marked parallel to each other and running lengthways) are set down in a bit of a hollow below ground level. This provides the visitor with a terrific more-elevated view of the action with grass banking partly running along the side nearest to the pavilion and along the entire length of the left-hand side of the field. This is particularly marked on the pitch over to the left where the banking is higher behind the nearest goal and along the left touchline. Pride of place here goes to a low roofed metal shelter-cum-stand painted in grey/cream which offers standing cover for about thirty spectators straddling the half-way line. My game today however took place on the other (un-roped) pitch which, I am told, is the preferred one of the two here unless the weather is really bad when matches can revert to the other one (with the stand) as a back-up. At present the club does not have dug outs for their playing squads but there are a couple of wooden benches overlooking the field near the pavilion for use by spectators.

For the neutral this was a fantastic cup tie and a great advert for both the Lincolnshire FA Junior Cup and the Scunthorpe & District League. The hosts got off to the best possible start scoring twice inside the first ten minutes: the opener came literally just after the kick-off (I actually noted just fifty seconds had passed on the *FGIF* stopwatch!) after Callum Johnson (1), latching onto a through pass, lobbed the advancing keeper before the quick-thinking Cameron Pepper (10) beat the offside trap to double his side's lead. But then the course of game changed dramatically - just like the weather which had suddenly taken a turn for the worse

- with Scotter battling back under leaden skies in the driving rain. Within the next twenty minutes the visitors incredibly had taken a shock 3-2 lead with Jack Anderson (19 & 30) and Daniel Ford (28) getting onto the scoresheet. In between all of this excitement Scotter even had the luxury of missing a penalty, saved expertly by Sam Horton diving to his left. With only five minutes remaining until the break Joe Watson (40) made it 2-4 to end what had been a pulsating half and one that kept *WebEd* busy logging all the important details on what was becoming an increasingly soggy *FGIF* Match Stats Card. Though Ashby tried hard to get back into the game in the second half the extra effort seemed to sap their strength. As the game petered out in the latter stages it was left to Dan Ford (85 & 88) to round things off by scoring twice more to claim a deserved hat-trick and keep the ball. Mind you, judging by the price of these leather balls these days I'm not sure whether this still happen at grassroots level? His second was a real gift presented to him by the keeper who got caught in possession trying to dribble the ball out of his six-yard box. Why do keepers continue to do this? Just punt the ball forward instead...it's quite simple really! Needless to say, Colin Picken* and his United team will be pleased with the final result after a super fight back and gratefully accept their place in the second-round draw which takes place next week.

The match played in varying weather conditions featuring spells of sunshine and heavy showers (yes, I got soaked after all but it was worth witnessing a terrific rainbow arcing over the playing field during the first half) on a well-manicured and larger than normal playing surface, was attended by fifteen spectators. For the record and, as expected, neither programmes nor refreshments were available here. I was joined pitch-side by Barton Town FC season-ticket holder and part-time hopper John Bramley* who had picked this game over another Lincs county cup tie played at Market Rasen Town (who were playing S&DL side Barnetby United) this afternoon. Obviously great minds think alike. The paper-chasing enthusiast (and former Retford FC editor) gave me the low-down on the local football clubs, grounds and mutual hopping acquaintances. Great stuff! It was also interesting to meet up with Kyle Reeve the Ashby manger who told me that since gaining promotion he has had to step up into the hot seat after the previous gaffer and several players had left for what he called 'bigger and better' clubs post Covid-19. This is not what you want to happen the eve of a new season - it will be interesting to see how they manage to re-build and compete over the coming season. I certainly wish them well in the coming months.

And finally, paper-chasers will be interested to know that I did manage to acquire some printed matter on my hop today. This was a single A5 sheet complete with insert gained upon entry at the pay booth. Sadly, not a programme but a *Notice of Toll Due* reminder (together with receipts) issued by the Humber Bridge Board. I suddenly realised on my approach to the crossing that payment was by plastic card only and in order to minimise the spread of Covid 19 cash was no longer being accepted. You've guessed it - I had left my wallet at home (not for the first time) and despite a having the correct change and doing a bit of grovelling, was politely reminded about the error of my ways by a rather efficient young lad working at the pay booth. Doh! The new normal is anything but. The joys of hopping continue, have fun wherever you go whilst you still can!

*Thanks go to hopping supremo Martyn Girdham from Winterton who after looking through the *FGIF* photo album from the game helped supply some of the names to add to my report. Cheers Martyn with a Y!

R No.5: WebEd - Saturday 3rd October 2020; **National Amateurs** v Longhill Ravens; East Riding County FA Qualifying Cup Round 1; Kick-Off: 2pm; Venue: Hull University Sports Centre 3G; Inglemire Lane; Hull; East Yorks; HU67TS; Result: 1-1 (5-6pens); Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 12.

Another wet weather footy-fix for the football ground collecting neutral today. As the skies darken mid-morning, I decide early to cut my losses and pick a game on a trusty plastic surface from my short-list. Luckily, I have back-ups involving a local cup game at Hull University and at the new Oliver's Mount ground home to NCEL-side Handsworth FC (near Sheffield) which already feature prominently on the *FGIF* HQ hopping drawing board. With no let up in the rain I don't particularly fancy a long drive in difficult wet conditions and so swap a trip west along the M62 motorway for the comparatively easier route which takes me on a twenty-minute journey around the city ring road to the Hull University Sports Centre grounds based off Inglemire Lane in the northern suburbs. This was my third consecutive county league game of the new campaign.

For the uninitiated, travelling sports fans visiting the HUSC for the first time, will find it a truly rewarding experience as the on-site facilities are literally quite superb. All straddling one side of the road (opposite the Allam Sports Centre and car park), it's a veritable Astroturf haven with three adjacent, separate and self-contained pitches catering for a combination of football, rugby league and hockey on tap. Add to this neighbouring railed ERCFA ground (named the Roy West Centre) and St Mary's College 3G pitch just a bit further down the road, you could say that hoppers are really spoilt for choice in what is an oasis of truly mouth-watering, 'must- see' football grounds.

It's my third trip here in the last couple of seasons. Notably on my previous visits (made in wet weather as the photo albums in the *FGIF* gallery will highlight) I've attended Humber Premier League games featuring Chalk Lane FC (who coincidentally are in action here again this afternoon) and more recently Reckitts FC who both play on the middle of the three available pitches in situ. Today I'm 'doing the other ground' by taking in a game on the furthest MUGA (multi-use games area) which is referred to on *Full-Time* fixture listings as a 'dual use surface' with lines marked out for both football (on yellow lines) and unsurprisingly, for this neck of the woods at any rate, rugby league (in blue) on the plastic crumbed grass. Although its technically on the same site as I've been to before I'm still ticking this off as a new ground. What would other hoppers say about this rather pedantic behaviour I wonder?

All players involved in matches normally use the dedicated multi-room changing rooms in the well-equipped brick-built flat-roofed pavilion located next to the entrance. Not today however. With the stringent rules enforced by all of sport's governing bodies (including the FA) drafted in recent weeks in order to minimise the risks of spreading Covid-19 and in an attempt to get their matches on, players cannot yet use the tight confines of the pavilion and (as agreed in advance).

Instead they must arrive already changed at pitch-side to play their chosen sport. For spectators there's also a requirement to scan the necessary large format QR-code (via the generic NHS App downloaded on your smartphone) entitled Hull Sport affixed in a waterproof acetate A4 sheet onto the outer wire mesh fence before entering the cage. Who would have envisaged all of this back in March? It's certainly new, but surely not normal! Mind you if it means we can get back to playing and watching football, then I'm all for it (I think).

This particular pitch, which on first impression seems to be quite wide, is found within a spectator-friendly set up having floodlights (same as on the other pitches); a dedicated perimeter fence for an unhindered viewing around all areas of the pitch and some modern tough plastic dug-outs situated along the far side touchline next to half-way - they do look very smart with their large Olympic-style torch logos and distinctive lettering to show the respective Home and Away benches emblazoned brightly onto the navy blue backgrounds.

Today's hosts National Amateurs Football Club (members of the East Riding County League Division Five) are one of the county league's newest teams and have only been going for only a couple of years now. The team who have adopted the same name as the well-established gastro pub on National Avenue (less than two miles from here) have used this venue since their formation and upon joining the ERCL last season. Interestingly, their opponents for this afternoon's game, Longhill Ravens (from the large sprawling Longhill Estate, based over in East Hull) now play in the division above, having led the Division Five standings with an unbeaten record before the Covid-19 lockdown called a halt to proceedings. With both sides already occupying top half places in their respective county league tables after making encouraging starts to this season (which began only a couple of weeks ago) an intriguing tie, in this East Riding County FA Qualifying Cup (contested for by clubs playing in the lowest tier of football within the county) first round match, is in prospect. After gaining permission from the referee and both team gaffers to enter the cage I settle down close to the outer fence ready for the action.

Both the goals (each from open play) came in the first half-hour of the game. The visitors from Longhill who, to be honest, had sustained most of the early pressure, netted first following a counter-attack when Will Scott lobbed the advancing keeper after twenty minutes. The hosts who reacted well levelled within ten minutes with Stephen Linford finding the back of the net. Despite plenty of excellent chances created at both ends thereafter, neither side could break the deadlock by full-time and so a penalty shoot-out was required to decide the outcome. Just as well really as I didn't fancy standing in the rain much longer by this stage of the afternoon. With both sides scoring each of their mandatory five spot kicks the contest then moved into the sudden death phase. This went the way of the visitors when they converted after their keeper had made a great save to deny the National boys of glory to book their place into the next round.

The game attended by a dozen or so spectators was played in very wet and windy conditions throughout the entire afternoon. As you would imagine it was the sort of constant drizzle that really soaks you right through your layers down to your skin and even to bits you wouldn't expect. Lovely. Despite the large number of

differently coloured lines printed onto the large playing the surface it did not detract in any way from your spectator viewing enjoyment. Once you get used to the football pitch markings it doesn't cause a problem. Word of praise must go to young referee Mitchell Waller who at the tender age of just eighteen had a great game. Watched over by an appointed ERCL Referee Mentor (a great initiative brought in to assist rather than assess youngsters who have just taken up the whistle) he maintained law and order between two physical and at times vocal sides. He was certainly on the ball during the ensuing shoot-out when the visiting players ran from their position on half-way line to celebrate victory after their keeper had made a tremendous save. He immediately told them to go back to the centre-circle explaining that their celebrations were in fact a bit premature as there was still one kick remaining (for them) to decide the outcome of the tie. You can imagine their embarrassment when they realised and had to trudge red-faced back to the middle again! Thankfully their faux-pas was only short-lived and quickly replaced by unbridled joy when they converted the next penalty to advance into round two.

A visit to watch National Amateurs FC at the Hull University Sports ground comes highly recommended. Check out the club's regularly updated *twitter* feed (as well as the ERCL FA *Full-Time* pages) for details about forthcoming home games. Like the other clubs playing on the 3G pitches here, it's makes a perfect venue for all hoppers looking for a wet weather alternative. Look out for the QR code too - what more could you want? Enjoy your travels and stay safe.

R No.4: WebEd - Saturday 26th September 2020; **North Cave** v AFC Fiveways; East Riding County League Division One; Kick-Off: 2pm; Venue: North Cave Playing Field; Church Street; North Cave; East Yorks; HU152LA; Result: 3-6; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 41.

After leaving the Humber Premier League (Division One) only a couple of seasons ago, North Cave Football Club has returned to senior football by taking up their place in the East Riding County League this campaign. Based at the North Cave playing fields its an idyllic tree-lined setting on the outskirts of the village and is found off the junction of Church Street and Wold Hill (B1230) opposite the beautiful All Saints church, a grade I listed building dating back to 1966. Sharing its facilities with the local cricket team the Sports & Social Club boasts a smart brick-built pavilion incorporating a tidy bar/lounge, changing rooms (unused today) and cricket scoreboard on the outer wall next to the entrance.

In keeping with the current upgraded Covid-19 restrictions and FA protocol regulations, the club has encouragingly set up a dedicated Track & Trace Spectator Check-In table under a smart weatherproof gazebo next to the pavilion. Before entering the playing field, visitors must sign the guest book and leave contact details or scan the new QR-Code attached to the table - luckily, I had already downloaded the NHS App onto my Samsung Galaxy A21s (to quote my daughter who knows such things) the day before so took the tech-savvy option which worked immediately. How cool is that? With the requirements to use hand sanitiser, wear a face mask and maintain social distance in the bar area the club committee members had made a cracking effort to stick to the guidelines.

The main pitch, marked beyond the cricket square, is positioned in the middle of the playing field and runs parallel with the main road. One end over to the left is bordered by fencing and trees whilst the other is dominated by a new housing development site which looks to be almost finished. It's also possible to catch a glimpse of the impressive church spires peeking through the tree branches if you are standing behind the touchline over on the far side of the field. At present there is no spectator cover or dug outs at pitch-side.

Today's game, an ERCL Division One fixture, sees the visit of fellow league new boys, Hessle-based side AFC Fiveways. Looking at the league stats on the dedicated *Full-Time* site, both sides had won their respective opening league games when the season kicked-off just seven days ago: North Cave came away with a 2-1 victory at Skirlaugh whilst Fiveways had an impressive win recording a 7-0 victory over Driffield Junior Reserves on their Sirius Academy 3G pitch off Pickering Road.

Despite the poor weather conditions, the game turned out to be a real cracker and a true goal fest for the hopping neutral (well, just me, in fact) who was kept busy logging all the goals during the end to end frantic goalmouth action that unfolded. For the record a log showing the scoring sequence is shown below. To be honest the game was much closer than the score suggests. Despite taking the lead the hosts soon fell behind and were 3-1 down at the break. The visitors from Hessle continued to push forward and added more goals to their tally in what was a terrific pulsating second half display that incredibly ended 3-6. Words of praise must go to young (at my age aren't they all young?) forward Thomas Attwood who bagged himself a hat-trick (bringing his total to four in two games - he also grabbed one last week). One worth watching over the coming months. It was also pleasing to see local referee Jim McNaughton taking up the whistle once again this season - the avid Celtic fan who is still wearing his Scottish RA badge on his jersey is a cracking well-respected official and lets the game flow properly.

Played on a well grassed bumpy surface in constant drizzle throughout the entire ninety minutes, the game attracted a decent crowd which rose to just over forty at its highest point with many making the journey from west Hull to support the visitors. Although the club doesn't issue programmes (none do in the ERCL as far as I know) refreshments are available from the bar inside the pavilion.

It was great to see the club making its debut and return into senior football again. I certainly wish them every success as they take their place in the ERCL for the 2020-21 season. The joys of watching football at a ground with a proper track and trace system in place is to be commended. Don't forget to install your NHS Covid 19 App on your smart phone before going to watch your next game. It's the new normal remember?

0-0; 0-1; 1-1; 1-2; 1-3 (H-T); 1-4; 2-4; 2-5; 2-6; 3-6.

R No.3: WebEd - Saturday 19th September 2020; **Chaos United** v Holme Rovers; East Riding County League Premier Division; Kick-Off: 2pm; Venue: Barham Park; Barham Road; Bilton Grange; Hull; East Yorks; HU94DT; Result: 2-0; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 34.

It's a lovely warm sunny afternoon and I'm heading towards East Hull for my footy fix. I'm looking forward to my chosen game at Barham Park, located in the Bilton Grange area of the city, as it marks the first round of matches of the new season in the East Riding County League with Chaos United FC making its debut in the Premier Division of the competition. Since its formation only three years ago the club has made great strides in the county league winning divisions five and three before finishing in second placed behind Bridlington Town County in Division One when Covid-19 called a halt to proceedings in March. The team was gutted when a chance to win the title was denied as they only had four fixtures left to play. Perhaps the ERCL committee showed some sympathy by promoting the club 'remotely' after all.

Under the leadership of club stalwart Michael Chadburn, a larger than life character who makes his living as a haulier, the club is in good hands. Like many other unpaid volunteers involved in grassroots football up and down the country he is busy man fulfilling several unglamorous but equally important roles; as I arrive at pitch-side he is already multi-tasking by putting up the nets, dishing out the brand new all-red kit with striking logo and checking that his players have warmed up properly before taking up the flag to complete his lino's duties. He is ambitious and hopes one day that his side can move up the pyramid. He already has a set of floodlights in his back garden should the need arise in the future! He told me that the club name was borne out of a chance meeting with some mates one evening down at a local pub on the estate - one of the lads was looking up 'Chad and Our Shelley's' (the name of a pub) on his phone when the predictive text read Chaos...! Within weeks a new club with an off the wall name had been set up, a much sought-after place in the ERCL accepted and the rest is (recent) history as they say!

Chaos United are based at Barham Park (formerly the Alderman Kneeshaw Playing Fields as the signage still reads clearly on the front gate) which is off Barham Road in Bilton Grange (not far from Craven Park home to Hull Kingston Rovers). A couple of tall residential tower blocks which dominate the local area, also mark the entrance to the landscaped park. From here a narrow driveway leads to a small car park, children's playground and mini boating lake. Don't be confused by the adjacent mini wooden pavilion which is used by park officials and has nothing to do with the football club. The main pitch which is marked out over on the far side of the tree-lined field is a couple of minutes-walk away from here. Although there is no spectator cover or dug outs on the Hull City Council owned site the club does have use of a separate somewhat modest changing room-block (enclosed by a strong metal security fence) which contains dressing rooms, toilets and provides storage space for groundsman's equipment including the goal posts and nets which are taken down and stored here after each game. At the moment a bit of TLC (including some strong garden sheers and a sickle) is needed to remove the overgrown vegetation and restore the facility back to its former glory days. Needless to say, in view of current Covid-19 restrictions the changing rooms were not in use today and may remain so for the foreseeable future.

United made an encouraging start to life in the top division recording a comfortable 2-0 win over perennial Premier Division side Holme Rovers (from

Holme-on-Spalding Moor). The opening goal coming just ten minutes before half-time was a bit of a gift when the visiting keeper, inexplicably miscued the ball from a goal kick passing it straight into the path of United's unmarked Danny Scott (35) who couldn't believe his luck when he had plenty of space and time to tap the ball into the open goal in front of him. Second-half sub Matt Abbey (85) rounded things off moments before the final whistle when he chipped the ball over the advancing keeper from close range to seal what was a more comfortable than first anticipated 2-0 victory and give them three valuable points on the debut.

Today's game played in bright sunshine on a well grassed surface attracted over thirty spectators with many making the trip from the Wolds into the East Hull suburbs. As expected, for this level, neither programmes nor refreshments were available for the game. For the amateur snapper it was nice to have some decent light in which to take photos with the two tall tower blocks making for an interesting backdrop to the action. Although little was made about hand sanitiser and the wearing of face masks a smart notice at the main entrance to the park reminded visitors to maintain a two-metre social distance at all times in the park - with so few in attendance this afternoon, this definitely wasn't going to be a problem.

A visit to the leafy Barham Park home of Chaos United FC is to be recommended to all hoppers. You can check out the club's progress in the ERCL on the *FA Full-Time* pages as well as their *twitter* feed. The joys of watching football in my home city continue. Stay safe wherever you go.

R No.2: *WebEd* - Saturday 12th September 2020; **Keelby United** v Lincoln Moorlands Railway; Lincolnshire League; Kick-Off: 3pm; Venue: Keelby Sports Association; Stallingborough Road; Keelby; Grimsby; Lincs; DN418JA; Result: 3-1; Admission: Free; Programme: Yes, 16pp, £2; Attendance: 81.

I'm heading over the Humber Bridge into North Lincolnshire today to take in Keelby United's first game of the new campaign, a league fixture against the well-established side Lincoln Moorlands Railway. After a gap of almost fourteen years, the club is making a welcome return to Lincolnshire League football this season. Judging by their recent *twitter* posts everyone at United is really buzzing and can't wait for the action to get started. My check phone call, the previous evening is met with great enthusiasm by first team club captain and local legend, that is Gary Nimmo. The former Immingham Town FC star (amongst a range of other top clubs that he's turned out for in his illustrious career) is so excited by the new developments over at Keelby, that he almost forgets to mention the all-important match details. Thankfully he does and the job's a good 'un as they say.

To reach the club travellers by car should follow signs for Immingham and Grimsby along the A16 before turning onto the Yarborough Road on the outskirts of the village. Continue for about a mile to the next junction, joining the Stallingborough Road until the entrance to the Sports Association (incorporating the tennis club) becomes visible on the opposite side of the road (it's close to the village sign post). A short driveway marked by tall tree on one side and a re-cycling container on the other, leads to a large car park and some vast playing fields beyond. A cracking square-shaped brick-built pavilion with terracotta tiled roof and glass

sided gable (used by several local sports teams) is immediately in front of you. A smart green and white (the team's colours) football club logo sporting the club crest, is affixed to the front wall next to the main entrance.

Much work has taken place behind the scenes over the last few weeks to make the club a Covid-19 safe place to be and to visit. After only recently re-opening the only access today is from around back of the building (due to arranged Covid-19 protocol) where a smart bright lounge with chairs and tables can be found inside with a tidy tea bar (and programme sales point) set behind a hatch, operating over to the immediate left. Outside a number of wooden picnic tables are arranged close to the veranda. The range of facilities is impressive with floodlit tennis courts, a cricket square and several pitches spaced out over the vast site. Keelby United FC use the main (roped-off) football pitch situated over to the left-hand side of the field which is close and parallel with the main road. A small groundsman's equipment store stands adjacent. At present there is no spectator cover or dug-outs at pitch-side.

For home fans, today's game proved to be a real roller-coaster of emotions which, thankfully for them, ended on a high note. Despite going a goal down midway through the half, the hosts soaked up a lot of early pressure before staging a terrific fight back to score three times in the second half. It was Bradley Wilson (20) who got his name on the scoresheet first when he stabbed the ball home following a goal mouth scramble that left United keeper Coby Kavanagh unsighted. After much soul searching and a few choice words at the break United levelled within five minutes of the re-start through Jack Humberston's (49) powerful run and shot from inside the box. By the hour mark the hosts took the lead through a cracking double strike from an on-form Gary Nimmo: his first (on 55 minutes) a well-placed shot across the six yard box was followed just five minutes later (on the hour mark) by an incredible (Goal of the Season contender) strike from the touchline (level with the edge 18-yard box) after taking possession on half-way. Despite a determined fightback from the visitors there were no further goals leaving the score at 3-1 on the full-time whistle to mark what had been a truly memorable day for the boys in green and white.

The game played in sunny but breezy conditions on a well maintained and neatly manicured surface attracted a decent crowd which topped eighty at its peak midway through the second half. A range of hot refreshments (including a tasty cheeseburger) on sale from a varied menu was dispensed from the tea bar throughout the afternoon. Hoppers and paper-chasers alike will be very pleased to know that the club are issuing programmes this season as advertised on their informative and regularly updated twitter account on Friday. It's a professional publication printed by *EPrint*, a firm in Grimsby. With 16 (colour) glossy pages on offer per issue its on sale from the tea bar inside the pavilion, priced £2. There's plenty to read with a Chairman's Corner welcome page; match stats covering pre-season results including the Lea Charity Cup (in memory of former player Micky Lea who died from MND earlier this year); a league table when lockdown began and football stopped, and team line ups. There's even some old Lion's (club nickname) black and white team photos dating back to 1968 and 1972. A lovely touch. As the club have a print run of 50 copies, I got there much earlier than normal before

kick-off to make sure I got one. With only two other hoppers (including Paul from Retford) there I needn't have worried about getting one to be honest. If you are after a pin badge you can also get your hands on one of those too.

For today's game a polite notice to maintain social distance is appropriately stuck over an *FA Respect* signage board behind the goal line next to the corner flag. Despite this request the words seemed to have been lost on most spectators here the majority of whom obviously chose to ignore it. Is this what they refer to as Covid fatigue? It clearly felt as though that there much dissent in the ranks with a complete lack of apathy and little respect for the latest Government directive. I imagine that some of you have may have witnessed the same type of feelings at the grounds you have visited recently.

You would love the club - it's all very friendly and welcoming. Affable and hard-working chairman Trevor Wright tells me how a phone call between him and Gary (Nimmo) created the spark for returning to senior football. They have since been pro-active not only in attracting players from within the local area but also in developing the facilities. It already has a strong base of junior sides representing all ages right through to adult football. In recent season's the club has competed in the Grimsby & Cleethorpes League, a Sunday League competition for sides in the immediate catchment area. To find out more about Keelby United FC travellers can visit their website, *twitter* feed or the generic *FA-Full Time* site covering the league. Have fun wherever you go and remember to maintain a safe distance where you can.

R No. 1: *WebEd* - Saturday 5th September 2020; **Strensall Tigers** v Hemingbrough United; York Football League Premier Division; Kick-Off: 2pm; Venue: North Earswick Sports & Social Club; White Rose Avenue; New Earswick; York; North Yorks; YO324AG; Result: 7-3; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 20.

At last, football's back! After a gap of nearly six months I'm on the hopping trail once again but my mind is in a different space. Who would have thought back in March when the coronavirus pandemic first struck that our lives would be about to change so much? It seems such a long time since I attended my last a game with a visit to the Priory Academy in Lincoln where the then league leaders Hykeham Town Football Club were playing Wyberton in a Lincolnshire League Supplementary Cup fixture. When the FA suspended play we were gutted and there was some initial concern as to how the season would finish. But time has passed and all of that has now sadly become a distant memory with football paling into insignificance compared to the events of recent months with the spread of Covid-19.

It's been a strange time: with the help of top scientists the Government told us to stay at home, protect our NHS and save lives. It was quite scary watching those daily press conferences from Downing Street. The data depicted on those early graphs and charts was rising as quickly as our levels of fear. After the total lockdown restrictions have thankfully since been eased, we have been able to return to work, reopen schools and bars, whilst keeping the virus under control. It's been a fine balance trying to rescue our economy and observe rules about social distancing to minimise spreading the disease. Without a vaccine it's

seemingly an impossible task for us to return to things that we once took for granted. They call it the new normal, but surely it isn't?

For footy fans many questions still remain unanswered: When will we be able to return to stadia again? What will it be like? Is it going to be safe? And more importantly, how will clubs survive without any regular income coming through their turnstiles? There's been plenty of speculation but no one really knows at the moment. Even though some football has returned at grassroots level, for most of us watching matches is going to be a really weird experience. The thought of hopping again is exciting but I don't know if I'm quite ready for it yet.

I honestly thought that being football free for so long would have been a pain but in fact I was pleased to have an enforced break from it all. I have quite enjoyed taking time off from hopping and it has been a nice change to do other things and slow down a bit. You don't realise just how stressful our hobby can be with all the planning, travelling, reporting etc that consumes your time and that's apart from just watching the games. Hopefully it has given us all some much-needed time to re-focus and re-charge our batteries. From messages received from our contributors and readers over the intervening months there seems to be a bit of consensus about this. Reading between the lines there's more to life than football.

How appropriate is it that I'm going to watch the Tigers on my first game of the season? Not my beloved childhood heroes now plying their trade in EFL1 (that's another story) but Strensall Tigers Football Club, members of the York Football League. My trip up to North Yorkshire today serves as a poignant reminder that things are not the same. During a quick pit stop to refuel the car with petrol at the new Market Weighton Services I suddenly realise that I am not wearing a face mask as I enter the garage shop and have to go back to the car again to pick it up! Thankfully I only have to wear it for a couple of minutes before continuing my journey heading west around the northern city ring road.

Since leaving their former grounds at the Strensall Playing Field and more latterly the Strensall Army Barracks, the Tigers have played at the New Earswick Sports Ground (some three miles away) over the last couple of seasons. Hidden inside a modern housing estate in the suburbs along White Rose Avenue (off the Haxby Road leading from the A1237 by-pass) it's not immediately easy to find but a signpost directing visitors to the entrance located at the end of a cul-de-sac helps. The site is vast with a large number of pitches marked out on playing fields catering for cricket and rugby as well as football. The short driveway enters a point that's about level with the middle of the recreation ground: there's a cricket pitch over to the left (where a match is already in progress) which is complemented by a large two storey pavilion with gable and scoreboard to add some character and provide a striking backdrop to the action. The Tigers use a football pitch over to the right - it's a long walk from here being at the furthest (top) corner of the field beyond an adjacent rugby pitch that runs at ninety degrees to it. Whilst pulling into the heavily pot-holed overflow car park I notice that a driver (dressed in football kit) in the car behind me has just moved out onto the grass and making his way by the side of the rugby pitch before parking up behind the touchline on the football pitch. Needless to say, I follow his tracks

impressed into the grass and do the same - within a minute I arrive pitch side too (please don't tell the groundsman).

The set up here is a fairly basic. It is bordered by a low belt of trees spanning the far touchline (where the busy York-Scarborough railway line runs immediately behind) and some residential gardens abutting a hedge behind the far goal. It is also partially roped off with some yellow twine passing through fluorescent plastics stakes along this side and by neat metal post and rail fence from the adjoining rugby pitch that doubles up for football (how cool is that?!). A couple of dug outs fashioned out of breeze blocks stand beside half-way line. At present there is no spectator cover so a visit would be best saved for better weather. If you look towards the pavilion you can catch a glimpse of some distant spires atop of York Minster located less than three miles away. A terrific landmark and sight!

Today not only marks the club's first game of the new season but also their first ever competitive match in the top division of the York Football League. When football came to a halt back in March, they sat in first place in Division One. With five games remaining and sixteen points clear at the top Strensall needed only two more points to seal the title over second place Osbaldwick (coincidentally I took in a superb game between both sides when they met at the Osbaldwick Sports Centre last January (result: 2-2; attendance: 50) - it certainly was a great advert for the league).

You could say it was almost a done deal for the Tigers considering their form at the time and having double the goal difference over their closest rivals. However, as the wording in the page header above the final league table clearly reminds us on the YFL website: 'THIS SEASON WAS EXPUNGED ON THE INSTRUCTION OF THE LOCAL FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION - Results and League Tables are shown for historical record only. Although the stats are now meaningless a decision was rightly made to offer the club a virtual promotion instead and common sense prevailed in the end.

The Tigers got off to the best possible start in what the grounds' collecting obsessive would term a real 'goal-fest'. After scoring inside the opening five minutes the hosts showed their intent going 4-0 up into the break before rattling in another three in the second half to come out eventually with a terrific 7-3 victory. Visitors Hemingbrough United (from Selby) played their part in what was an absorbing contest. They did not look as poor as the final score suggests and battled well, scoring all three of their goals in the second half. 'I just wonder how many sides can score three times away from home and not win it' their manager Terry Gill added afterwards. The goal-scoring sequence is shown at the end of the report. All the full details including player stats can be found on the excellent, regularly updated York Football League website which in terms of match statistics provides hoppers with the really valuable service. It was also worth noting that one fixture featuring Rawcliffe FC had been postponed today because of an outbreak of Covid-19.

The game played in sunny but cold conditions on a well-grassed pitch attracted just twenty or so spectators. I was thrilled to be joined pitch-side by affable and well-regarded Sheffield based mega-hopper Pete Skinner who I literally bumped

into at the break. I have known Pete for a long time since I first started attending organised hops in Devon and Cornwall and writing articles for the hallowed Football Traveller magazine - over thirty years ago now. Although we have not seen each other for some time (since visiting the new b2net Stadium, home of Chesterfield FC on New Year's Day back in 2011), it was lovely to catch up on our travels and share stories about some of our trips, clubs, matches and the mutual friends over the years. It's amazing to think that Pete an avid Blades' fan still enjoys watching grassroots football (and rugby) making his trips on public transport these days (since his long-time hopping pal Frank passed away a few years ago). What's even more remarkable is that Pete who has since set up a cat rescue business with his wife is now into his eightieth year! He told me that he'd been here before to watch New Earswick RUFC play on the adjoining pitch several months ago. You certainly can't beat days like this, can you? The afternoon was punctuated by the regularly spaced train service with fast engines rattling at break-neck speed beside the ground. I wonder if any of the passengers caught a glimpse (or a blurred view) of the action as they peered out of the carriage windows on their way to destinations in leafy North Yorkshire?

So, how did everyone respond to the Covid-19 safety measures? When I first got here, I was told that the main pavilion (including the dressing rooms and bar area) was out of bounds with players and the referee arriving already changed in their kit before play. The FA Respect handshake had also been waived, acknowledging guidance from the DHSC. Even though I had come prepared with my own bottle of hand-sanitiser and face mask at the ready, none of the other spectators seemed to be overly concerned about it. Neither was the importance given to social distancing with some fans standing side by side throughout the game. A father who had come to watch his son play said: 'It doesn't matter about any of this stuff, we're all outside anyway'. It was a really weird experience believe me. Although It was lovely to get back to watching live football things just didn't seem right somehow. The new normal is anything but. The joys of hopping resume, but at what cost? Maybe that will change. Only time will tell - until then, stay safe.

0-0; 1-0; 2-0; 3-0; 4-0; H-T; 4-1; 5-1; 6-1; 7-1; 7-2 and 7-3.

End Note: Hoppers may be interested to learn that fellow YFL Premier Division side F1 Racing FC are also playing games (on a different pitch behind the pavilion) at the New Earswick Sports Ground this season.

End