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RAMBLINGS REPORTS 2022-23

Note – all FGIF match and ground ratings shown are marked out of a maximum of five stars.

updated on 01/05/23.



R No.38: *WebEd* - Saturday 29th April 2023; **Kirk Deighton Rangers** (v Huddersfield Amateur); West Yorkshire Football League Premier Division; 2.30pm; Venue: Barr Field; Wetherby Road; Kirk Deighton; Leeds; West Yorks; LS224DS; Result: 1-0; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 37. REPORT TO FOLLOW.



R No.37: *WebEd* - Saturday 22nd April 2023; **Fulford United** (v Wilberfoss); York Football League Division Three: 2pm; Venue: Fulford Sports Field & Pavilion; School Lane; Fulford; York; North Yorks; YO104LY; Result: 2-1; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 21.

PLAYING FOR MORE THAN PRIDE

Fulford United Football Club plays its home games on the village recreation ground known locally as the Parish Field which adjoins the well-regarded Fulford School campus located at the end of Fulfordgate. The club has been based here since its formation back in 1920 when the site was first used as a farm with land belonging

to a local pig farmer who lived in the area. After the old buildings were finally demolished in the mid 1980's, the parish council bought the land and rented it back to the football club for a nominal fee. Although this kind gesture meant that the club still had somewhere to play, it has since found it extremely difficult to develop the facilities any further, making it a bitter-sweet situation.

However, things are soon about to change. With plans to develop a brand-new multi-use games area there is some good news at last for the club as the project has now reached an advanced stage. Following a successful bid, the club has been awarded funds from the *Football Foundation* to develop football within the local community which will be a great asset to everyone involved - currently FUFC have over four hundred players of all ages on their books. To avoid a dispute with the council the new floodlit all-weather 4G playing area will be built on land behind the school sports centre opposite. Work will begin in September, and it is estimated to take about a year to complete the task. An agreement has been reached with the LEA and Fulford School meaning the club can have access to the facility during out of school hours and in poor weather particularly during the winter months, a definite win-win compromise for all parties concerned.

Today I made the short fifty-minute-long trip using the A19 (by-passing Selby) to get here. The club is found in a cul-de-sac at the end of Fulfordgate a leafy suburban lane which leads to the Fulford School where there is free parking next to the ground. A narrow path takes you back alongside the village tennis club and onto the playing field. At the entrance a smart equipment storage block is found to your left with the main club pavilion opposite, to your right. The site is enclosed by some pretty tall trees growing at both ends of the field and full of blossom look quite resplendent at this time of year. In the distance, behind the goal over to the left you can see a large modern development of new homes recently built as part of ongoing programme of urban growth, a popular feature around York at the moment. The school buildings including a large sports centre as well as the tennis courts also back onto the site to give it an enclosed feel. The main pitch itself is marked out over on the far side of the playing field close to a mini children's playground and runs parallel with the well-heeled houses situated along School Lane behind. As expected, there are no dug outs or cover, only a makeshift rope passed through some plastic stakes to make a barrier down the nearside touchline and that's about it really - you could best describe it as basic but homely at the same time.

With neither side having any outside chance of gaining promotion or fighting a relegation battle, today's end of season game, has nothing really riding on it, except pride of course! Where have we heard that one before? Although only two points separate these middle of the table sides, higher placed United, according to the current league standings (highlighted on the excellent YFL website), have scored a few more goals than their opponents Wilberfoss, making the result a hard one to call.

By four o'clock my prediction indeed proves to be right with only one goal separating the sides in what is a really close game of football. For the record,

United take the lead inside the first ten minutes when the tricky and hard-working Ethan Kay (8) lobs the keeper from the edge of the area. Wilberfoss get themselves back into the game just after the half hour mark when midfielder Sam Gibney (31) scores an absolute 'worldie' (an *FGIF* Goal of the Season contender if there was such a thing) hitting the ball from a full thirty yards out straight into the top right-hand corner of the goal frame and beating the outstretched keeper to restore parity for his side. It is nothing more than they deserve. The winner comes shortly after the break when Matt Sutcliffe (51) beats his marker for pace to slot the ball home from two yards out. Although there are no further goals the rest of the second half proves to be just as exciting as the first with plenty of chances created at both ends right up until the final whistle. The visitors must feel gutted to come away with nothing to show (except sweat) for their efforts. Credit must also go to enthusiastic and diminutive referee Sam Adjare who lets the game flow without any major incident. It had certainly been a great advert for YFL football all-round.

The match played on a rather bumpy pitch in cloudy conditions attracts just over twenty spectators. During the game I manage to have a brief chat with club secretary Scott who confirms his team line up and introduces me to one of the club's former players, octogenarian Bill who still attends all United's home games, sitting in his picnic chair under a small playground shelter close to the corner flag. What a hero! Scott also explains to me how, in his other role as social media manager, he helps to promote the club by editing the excellent Instagram, twitter and Facebook account pages. He's pretty busy with his camera during the afternoon and it's well worth checking out the recorded match footage with some slow-motion playback. Modern technology, eh?

It had been another cracking hop to one of the league's friendliest and most welcoming clubs and a visit to the Parish Field home of Fulford United FC is one not to be missed by hoppers and footy fans alike. Incidentally, I understand that both sides have only one game left this season and, by a quirk of fate on the part of the fixture compiler, they will meet each other again under the lights at Storking Lane in Wilberfoss on Tuesday evening. If today's match was anything to go by, I would imagine that both teams will definitely be up for the challenge. Who said watching mid-table end of season matches is boring? Don't believe it...the joys of hopping continue no matter what time of the year it is!!

FGIF Match Rating: 4* *FGIF* Ground Rating: 2*



R No.36: WebEd - Saturday 15th April 2023; **Selby Olympia** (v LNER Builders); York Football League Division Four: 2pm; Venue: Ouse Bank Recreation Ground; Recreation Road; Barlby; Selby; North Yorks; YO85AY; Result: 4-2; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 18.

GETTING LUCKY!

Most hoppers tend to be all-round sports nuts and like me enjoy watching a range of other sports, apart from football. From being a youngster, I have always loved watching those big live sporting events on TV including the Olympics, Tour de France and the Wimbledon finals. I even remember looking forward to the boat race at one time... The excitement of such major spectacles is palpable and can literally cause the hairs on the back of your neck to stand on end - the expectation, the build-up, the pomp and the atmosphere all add up to making these classic sporting occasions so special. Today is no exception either as the Aintree Festival in Liverpool reaches its wonderful climax with the Grand National taking centre stage once again. Who can believe that it's being going since 1839? My first vivid memory was watching that famous race back in 1967 (on our very old black and white TV) with my dad when the 100-1 outsider Foinaven picked its way through the melee of fallers at fence number 23 to go on and win the race for rider Johnny Buckingham. Although I'm not a betting man, I do like to have the occasional flutter (no more than a tenner, mind you) and try each year to pick out a winner on what is the biggest race of the year, just to add a bit more enjoyment and interest. With little or no research done beforehand, it's usually all down to lady luck as to where my chosen horse comes in the field (usually a non-finisher if I'm being perfectly honest).

My hop today has been chosen with the horse race in mind. As the big event commences at 5.15pm, I intend to get back from football in good time before it starts and have chosen a game that's not too far from home. My destination this afternoon is Selby which is only a forty-minute drive from *FGIF* HQ. Although the venue is shown on the excellent YFL website as being in Barlby village the ground is very close to Selby itself. Indeed, as I approach Recreation Road, I can see the beautiful spire of Selby Abbey in the near distance with the large Olympia pub almost opposite the turning. From here you drive through a small narrow railway tunnel (under the A19) operated as a one way only system by some traffic lights before turning right into the large tree-lined playing field.

An unmade puddled driveway leads to the car park at the far end. Here a couple of old portakabins set back from the pitch double up as changing rooms and a large equipment store in the corner. The colourful graffiti catches my eye with the writing *Welcome to Selby Olympia Football Club* written in large bubble letters on the outside. Look out Banksy! There are two pitches on site with the main one closest to the club buildings. A number of tall trees behind the top goal and along one side (to the right) help to create a lovely enclosed and at this time of year verdant setting. A white post and rail fence has also been erected along this side of the ground. Although there is no dedicated spectator cover at present, a couple of blue steel framed seats (similar to those found in a park) have been placed side

by side and close to the halfway line opposite. Train spotters will be pleased to learn that trains are a frequent distraction here passing the far end of the ground at regular intervals as they convey passengers between Selby and York.

Today's game is a proper grassroots game of football featuring two of the lowest placed sides in the entire York Football League pyramid and could be best described as the 'basement battle' of the day. The hosts in eighth place (out of ten sides in the division) are playing their final game of the campaign in a season which has seen them struggle throughout losing over half of their games. However, their record seems quite favourable in comparison to their opponents LNER who, sitting rock bottom of the league, have an unenviable record. Seen as the proverbial whipping boys in the competition they have lost all but two of their matches - in fact, their one and only win came at their Tollerton Road ground (Newton-on-Ouse) when they beat Bishop Wilton 3-2 back in October last year. Scoring the fewest and conceding the most goals, their massive negative goal difference standing at an eye-watering -110 understandably makes for particularly grim reading. I imagine they will be more than pleased when the season ends. Having said all that I am really impressed to find that they have managed to rally the troops bringing no fewer than fifteen players over to the Olympia Rec this afternoon.

Despite my earlier reservations both sides produce what is an excellent game of football this afternoon - I would even go so far as to say it's probably one of the most exciting and competitive matches I've seen this season. After taking the lead twice Olympia are pegged back quickly each time by the visitors to leave the score at 2-2 with nearly sixty minutes of play gone on the stopwatch. It's frantic but compelling viewing. Despite a spell of constant pressure, the hosts cannot regain their lead as the Builders ride their luck having the woodwork and a cracking penalty save by keeper Matt Crowland to thank for keeping the ball out of their net. However, the breakthrough comes when the slender, shaven-headed Tom Lazenby beats the offside trap to run clean through and tuck the ball under the advancing keeper to complete his hat-trick. With less than ten minutes to go Josh Woollard pokes the ball home through a crowd of players to make it 4-2 and seal the inevitable victory. I feel a bit sorry for the hapless visitors who not only stuck to their task throughout but also deserved so much more from a game that they had played such a big part in. Upon reflection a draw would have been a fair result. For the hopping neutral it just goes to show that whatever level of football you attend, there's always the chance of finding a cracking game to watch.

During the second half I get into conversation with a couple of the older club members who explain to me a little bit more about the club and the ground; formed back in 1953 (see the club badge) Selby Olympia was so named after this area of Selby, known locally Olympia - in fact some of the neighbouring streets bear the name in their titles. It first shared this site with the local cricket club having access to a pavilion complete with an ornate clock tower and a social club which used to stand on the opposite side of the field, sadly now reclaimed waste land after the buildings became dilapidated and were removed. The playing field is

now owned by the imposing BOCM company whose factory can be seen from the field as it dominates the skyline. The club used to be members of the Selby & District League at one time before joining the York Football League.

The game played on a muddy surface (soft in places to maintain my horse-racing theme for the day) in beautiful, sunny, warm conditions is attended by almost twenty spectators. A minute's silence in recognition of a family bereavement affecting one of the Olympia players, is observed impeccably by all before kick-off - it's a poignant moment as I watch both players and fans alike embrace arms in support of each other as they gather around the centre circle.

It had been another terrific hop and having received such a warm welcome I can strongly recommend a visit to the Ouse Field home of Selby Olympia Football Club. Having successfully negotiated the busy York ring roads, I manage to arrive safely back at *FGIF* HQ in good time to watch my next sporting event of the day, the Grand National. With a map of the course and a list of the runners and riders at the ready I can barely contain my excitement perched on the edge of the sofa, as the starter's flag goes down. I'm now hoping that my chosen horse *Corach Rambler*, an 8-1 shot, will put on a good show and end up somewhere at the front of the race. Incredibly, with two flights remaining the Lucinda Russell trained horse ridden by Derek Fox pulls away from the rest of the field and roared on by a massive Aintree crowd romps home to win by five lengths. In the words of Victor Meldrew, I cannot believe it! What a truly fantastic sporting moment! For once my bet has finally paid off literally after realising moments later that I have just won a staggering (for me) £70...to cap off what has been a truly memorable day!!

FGIF Match Rating: 4* *FGIF* Ground Rating: 3*



R No.35: WebEd - Saturday 8th April 2023; **AFC Cottingham** (v Costello); East Riding County League HE Dean Cup Round 1: 2pm; Venue: The Hub; Springhead Avenue; Anlaby Common; Hull; East Yorks; HU55YJ Result: 3-1; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 19. REPORT TO FOLLOW.



R No.34: *WebEd* - Saturday 1st April 2023; **Bridlington Spa** (v Flamborough); East Riding County League HE Dean Cup Round 1: 2pm; Venue: Bridlington Sports Centre; Gypsy Road; Bridlington; East Yorks; YO16 4AY; Result: 1-1 (6-5 pens); Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 45.

SEASIDE SPECIAL

A life-long interest in soul music began in my late teenage years. Back in the day my humble vinyl record collection was based around the unmistakable *Philly Sound* with artists such as The O'Jays, Harold Melvin & The Bluenotes, Billy Paul, The Three Degrees and MFSB, to name but a few, amongst my early favourites. I used to buy a copy of the *Blues and Soul* magazine ordered from my local newsagent to find out the latest news and would pour for hours over the updated Top 20 rhythm and blues charts - no doubt my obsessive interest in 'lists' had already started. It was whilst flicking through the back pages of the must-read sister newspaper *Black Echoes*, another popular staple, that I noticed an advert promoting a concert for top American soul band The Stylistics (of *You Make Me Feel Brand New* fame) who were coming over to tour the UK. Incredibly they had booked a date to play at the Bridlington Spa and a few of my mates and I were lucky enough to get some tickets. This was my first ever concert and needless to say that February evening in 1979 certainly made a lasting impression on all of us.

As I pass the 'Welcome' signpost on my way into the seaside town of Bridlington this afternoon, I notice that a small banner affixed underneath the ornate town logo is advertising some forthcoming music events at the Bridlington Spa. Interestingly four decades since my visit, the venue is still attracting top musical talent to the area with Nile Rogers and Chic set to appear on stage here at the end of this year. What a coup! Incidentally, I've seen them before in concert as well on a visit to the Sheffield Arena on what was another memorable evening of foot tapping and gyrating to the unforgettable and legendary sounds such as *I Want Your Love* and *Everybody Dance*. But I digress.

Back to football hopping. Although my destination is not the famous Spa itself, I'm coming to watch one of the town's local clubs, Bridlington Spa FC (sponsored by the same promoters), who are playing in an East Riding County League HE Dean first round cup game against near rivals Flamborough. This end of season knock-out competition coincides with the onset of lighter evenings with midweek matches in the first couple of rounds conveniently regionalised meaning less travel for clubs

and allowing early kick-offs to take place. Just what the eager hopper keen on adding further ticks to their list wants to hear. With both sides still actively involved in crucial ERCFA cup competitions, today's fixture has since been moved from a traditional midweek slot.

Bridlington Spa FC plays its games at the well-appointed Bridlington Sports Centre located off Gypsey Road in the town centre. The large venue, run by the registered charity Bridlington CYP (Club for Young People), is a bustling hub providing facilities for football, boxing and other sports catering for fitness enthusiasts of all ages and abilities. Access to a sports hall, 4G floodlit multi-use games area, changing rooms and adjacent Harpers bar is found around the back of the site, next to the expansive playing field. Travellers may be interested to learn that it is also home to landlords Bridlington Rovers FC, who run several clubs currently playing in the ERCL. Today is no exception either and the place is a real hive of activity when I arrive with players moving about in all directions to get to their dedicated pitches. There are three matches taking place, all kicking off at 2pm: the first team, taking on Langtoft in the HED Cup, are playing on the main 4G pitch and Rovers' second-string side Millau (named after its twin town in southern France and pronounced *Millhow*) are hosting Reckitts Reserves in a county league game on grass pitch number one.

Bridlington Spa FC, who are not part of the Rovers' set up, hires out grass pitch number two, inconveniently marked out on the furthest side of the field running alongside and parallel to the busy Bessingby Hill Road (A165), a bypass which conveys a never-ending queue of holiday makers up to the north coast. It's a bit of a trek to reach the playing area from the changing rooms and no doubt many sides travelling here this season should benefit from the extra warm-up time just crossing the field to get there! Without any dedicated perimeter rope or dug outs, it's a rather basic public playing area that could, if I'm being honest, do with a bit of extra maintenance. But its council owned and with financial cut-backs being what they are, that's not going to happen any time soon, is it? It's not until you actually stand behind the goal over to your right that you can really appreciate the steep slope which drops markedly (by a few feet) down towards the opposite goal.

According to their latest *twitter* profile, the club was formed as recently as November 2018. After leaving the disbanded Drifffield & District League which folded during the COVID-19 pandemic, they have enjoyed great success in their brief spell in the ERCL winning the Division Five title in 2020-21 and Division Three last season. They have also made superb progress this campaign, currently sitting in runners-up spot, some six points (and with a game in hand) behind leaders Millau in Division Two and are still involved in a forthcoming ERCFA Junior Country Cup Semi-Final (v Wheldrake) to be played at Pocklington Town FC in the coming days. It looks like a bit of a headache to fit in so many fixtures in such a short space of time. Flamborough have also enjoyed a cracking season themselves remaining undefeated by winning all but one of their ten league games played so far, lying in second place in Division Three just four points behind and with three games in hand over leaders Market Weighton. Coincidentally they will meet Millau

in the other Country Cup Semi-Final held at Queensgate. If results, go according to plan both sides could meet each other again in the final, something *Wraybet* has yet to lay the odds on!

With plenty of local rivalry at stake and the chance of a possible upset from the lesser fancied visitors, an exciting cup tie is definitely in prospect. Incidentally, as Spa are also the beaten finalists of the HE Dean cup having lost 1-0 to North Cave in the final last May, there may be a big incentive for them to make amends by trying to lift the trophy this time around.

The game, as expected, turns out to be a real cracker for the football ground collecting neutral. It is non-stop, end to end stuff with plenty of chances created by both sides in what is a very tight, fiesty contest. For the record the tie is eventually won from the penalty spot with the hosts coming out on top after no fewer than twelve spot kicks are needed to decide the outcome. It is Spa who take an early lead when Sam Clarke (10) beats the Boro' offside trap to steal in at the back post and deftly lob the advancing keeper making it 1-0 going into the break. The hosts look like they are going to hang on for a narrow victory only for Jack Almond (70) to score from the spot mid-way through the second half to spoil the party. Despite a rather frantic final five minutes neither side can break the deadlock without resorting to a shoot-out. With players in both teams incredibly scoring the first five spot kicks the tie enters the 'sudden death' phase. Spa keeper Reece Nestor correctly dives to his right to deny his opposite number, leaving Clarke the unenviable task of sealing the win - keeping his cool, he calmly places the ball out of reach into the far corner of net to send his side into the next round. What a breath-taking, exciting finish to proceedings it has been!

Played in dull, overcast and drizzly conditions throughout, the game attracts nearly fifty fans all gathered under an assortment of umbrellas along the same touchline to create a terrific atmosphere which is certainly a lot more than the dozen or so attending the game between Millau (v Reckitts Reserves, which ends 7-2) on the adjoining pitch. Special mention must also go to local match referee Wayne Mallen who keeps a lid on things especially in dealing with some of those 'meaty' last gasp tackles. An official using a bit of common sense and having the right attitude certainly goes a long way in peace-making on the pitch and often saves the need to brandish loads of cards in my book (pardon the pun).

It had been another cracking afternoon's entertainment and I would recommend a hop to watch Bridlington Spa FC at the Bridlington Young Peoples Club in Gypsey Road. The ground is easily reached approaching from either Beverley/Hull taking the A1035 or from Driffield using the A614 heading towards the town centre. It's only a stone's throw away from the famous golden beaches and the excellent Spa music venue which are also worth checking out. As I head back to *FGIF* HQ I soon recall that punchy dance-floor track written by Nile Rogers for *Chic...Good Times...* an apt fitting to my memorable day out. Now what date was that concert?

FGIF Match Rating: 4* *FGIF* Ground Rating: 2*



R No.33: *WebEd* - Saturday 25th March 2023; **Tockwith AFC** (v Haxby Town); York Football League Division One; Kick-Off: 2pm; Venue: The Tockwith Sports Centre; Kirk Lane; Tockwith; York; YO26 7PX; Result: 5-1; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 26. REPORT TO FOLLOW.



R No.32: *WebEd* - Saturday 18th March 2023; **Poppleton United** (v Kirkbymoorside); York Football League SC Rd 3; Kick-Off: 2pm; Venue: The Poppleton Centre; Main Street; Nether Poppleton; York; YO26 6JT; Result: 4-0; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 19.

THE OTHER TRACTOR BOYS

Today I'm heading back up to York once again for my footy fix. My chosen game this week is an exciting York Football League Senior Cup game which has now reached its crucial third round stage. For the hopping record, my stats spreadsheet also reveals that this will be ground tick number thirty (out of fifty-four clubs) currently competing in the league. Bring it on!

My destination is the village of Nether Poppleton which is found to the north-west of the city and is easily reached from the A64, A19 and A1237 by-passes. The ground is based at the impressive Poppleton Centre located on the outskirts of the village - in fact the village sign is literally right next to the main entrance. It's a lovely set up and provides an excellent community hub and facilities for a wide range of on-site sports and social activities. A large sports hall decked out in a light grey outer shell is found at the end of the drive on the left. This incorporates plenty of space inside for a cafe with rooms used to hold functions and business

meetings as well as housing the sports' changing rooms. Beyond is a set of floodlit tennis courts and an adjacent bowling green both patronised by the local teams. On a bright mild day like this an array of daffodils have sprung up resolutely beside the lovingly maintained path borders, a clear reminder that Spring is just around the corner.

The main football pitch is positioned on the opposite side of the driveway and pavement occupying a fully enclosed area of land bordered by a variety of trees and hedges. The land at the far end rises up steeply to form a narrow embankment which spans the entire width of field running behind the goal. Much landscaping has been undertaken here as evidenced by the large number of saplings planted recently at this end of the ground. The pitch also benefits from having a neat metal post and rail fence which has been erected in part along both sides. Two portable sturdy metal benches incorporating three seats apiece are placed on opposite sides of the halfway line for use by the subs; fashioned in orange and black (like the goal nets) they represent the colours of the local football team. As expected, there are no spectator facilities at present. A small green rusting metal container close to one of the corner flags on the far side field is used to store essential ground and playing equipment.

As the club logo shows The Tigers (what a great nickname, but I would say that, wouldn't I?) were formed as long ago as 1903. League tables archived on the excellent YFL website reveal that Poppleton United Football Club played in this league (competing primarily in Division Three to start with) from at least the 1909-10 season. Despite disbanding during both major wars, the club has been members of the YFL ever since, a superb feat lasting the best part of 100 years. In more recent times they have won the Division One championship in 2016-17 gaining promotion to the top-flight where they have remained ever since, maintaining a mid-table finish near enough for each campaign.

However, the club has also had to endure some struggles off the pitch in the last few years. Indeed, United made the headlines back in 2017 when it was reported in *The York Press* that the club was in possible danger of folding due to facing financial difficulties after the club's tractor worth £10,000 was stolen. Although it was insured, the incident left a large hole in the club's finances and meant the pitch could no longer be prepared properly for games leading to the club changing its venues for home games. Notably, it was from around October of that year they played matches either on their opponents' grounds (away) or used the pitch belonging to their Under-18 side, Poppleton Juniors on Millfield Lane, before returning back home the following May. Thankfully a donation of £500 made by a local charitable organisation *Pavers Foundation* and a dedicated club *JustGiving* page have also helped to fund the purchase a new tractor and sustain the future of the club.

Moving onto today's game. Another quick glimpse of the current thirteen team Premier Division table shows that both sides have not had the best of campaigns to date with the hosts currently sitting next to the bottom (one place above Easingwold Town) and in some danger of relegation. Their opponents from the

Yorkshire Dales who, also in the bottom half, have fared slightly better lying in ninth place before play. By a quirk of coincidence, both sides met each other here only two weeks ago in their last league game (last week's fixtures were postponed due to heavy snowfall) with The Moorsiders coming out on top winning by a 3-1 score-line to move a bit further away from the relegation places. Although I imagine that a cup game would come as a welcome break to both sides this afternoon, it would also be an ideal opportunity for Poppleton no doubt to seek a bit of revenge and level the score (if you pardon the pun) once again.

Just as the teams came out onto the pitch the heavens begin to open and a heavy shower follows, lasting for most of the first half. With nowhere to hide for cover I get a good dousing. Where is the pitch-side cover when you need it? After a keenly contested opening ten minutes the hosts take the lead when the tricky Josh Winn (15) finds himself unmarked and easily drills the ball home from ten yards out. Their lead is doubled as the lanky Kev Luke (47) rises to the ball first in a crowded penalty area to head home following a corner on the left with what turns out to be the very last touch of the half, making it 2-0. What a time to score, eh?

From a neutral's viewpoint (that's me), the match is largely over as a contest by the hour mark, being decided by the cruel fate (for Kirkbymoorside) of two second half penalties, awarded to United by affable referee Jacob Drummond. Both are dispatched by Will Turner who keeping a calm head on his young shoulders helps his side to reach the next round of the competition: the first (on 54 minutes) given for an innocuous trip on the edge of the area, is placed neatly into the right hand corner of the goal but the second (on 69), given for a dubious and very harsh hand ball, requires a bit of luck after being initially saved by keeper Sam Rawson. As the ball rebounds at his feet the alert striker is given the easiest of chances and obligingly smashes it home on the follow up. This set-back seems to knock the stuffing out of the visitors who battle bravely against the odds to get back into the game which at this point is looks to be very much beyond them. Without any further goal scoring chances created, the score remains at 4-0 and it's The Tigers who successfully progress. I wish them well in the next round of the cup.

The match played in a mixture of sunshine and showers on a large pitch was attended by almost twenty spectators including a handful of fans who had made the long trip down the A19 from Ryedale. There were plenty of elevated photo opportunities to be had from atop of the grassy embankment behind the goal. With a plethora of random mole hills to contend with in the soggy grassy area behind the goal, the intrepid snapper needs to watch his/her footing (and more importantly, the camera and lenses) to avoid any nasty accidents! My hopping shoes have since dried out ready for the coming weekend.

Despite getting a really good first half soaking, I really enjoyed my hop to the Poppleton Centre and would recommend fellow collectors of village football grounds to make a visit here. You'll love it. They are a really friendly well-run with a long proud history and I wish them well in their fight to avoid relegation over the coming weeks. With several games in hand over their closest rivals at the foot of the table, they may just beat the drop, but it will be very tight. It might also take

a bit of luck, a calculator and prayer mat to sort it out...but it is the business end of the season, and anything can happen, as they say!

FGIF Match Rating: 3 FGIF Ground Rating: 3**



R No.31: *WebEd* - Saturday 11th March 2023; **West Didsbury and Chorlton** (v Ascot United); FA Vase Round 6; Kick-Off: 3pm; Venue: The Step Places Stadium; Brookburn Road; Manchester; M218FE; Result: 1-1 (3-4p); Admission: £6; Programme: 28pp, £2; Attendance: 1320. REPORT TO FOLLOW.



R No.30: *WebEd* - Saturday 4th March 2023; **Hall Green United** (v Rawdon OB); West Yorkshire Football League Premier Division; Kick-Off: 2.30pm; Venue: Crigglestone SC; Painthorpe Road; Hall Green; Wakefield; West Yorkshire WF4 3LA; Result: 2-0; Admission: Free; Programme: No (occasional issuers); Attendance: 33.

WAKEFIELD WANDERINGS

Like many hoppers I do like to take in games from as many different leagues as I can during the course of a season. Today I'm turning my attention to watching some West Yorkshire Football League action with a hop to the outskirts of

Wakefield for the Premier Division game between Hall Green United and Rawdon Old Boys.

Hall Green Football Club plays at the Crigglestone Sports Club which is not actually in the village itself but about half a mile down the road (in Crigglestone) and is easily reached from the M1. Come off the motorway at junction 39 (signposted Denby Dale) and follow the A636 before turning into Hollin Lane which soon joins Cliff Road. Turn right into Painthorpe Road next to Cliff Farm, a small pet food supplier and continue along here for about a mile until the club becomes visible on the left-hand side - although parking is tight luckily there is an overflow car park on the opposite side of the road which provides plenty of additional space.

Although only a few minutes from the motorway, the ground has quite a rural feel about it. Surrounded by open fields, the immediate area has since been landscaped following the closure of the Newmiller Dam colliery in 1981 which operated a rail line to the pithead passing close by. Access is through a gate to the right-hand side of the modern brick-built pavilion and clubhouse built here with the help of Football Foundation funding some ten years ago now. The main football pitch is found in a self-contained hollow at the bottom of a shallow grassy incline about two hundred yards from the changing rooms and marked out beyond the main cricket square used by Crigglestone CC which shares the facilities here.

The playing area has a neat post and rail fence perimeter fence on all sides with two large sections of string netting supported by poles erected at both ends to prevent stray balls from getting lost, especially behind the goal to the right where a row of houses (and gardens) back onto the ground. There are a couple of spacious black painted metal framed dug outs situated close to halfway behind the far touchline but as yet there is no spectator cover at pitch side.

Before kick-off I managed to have a brief chat with super friendly chairman Kev Barker who kindly explained more about the club and the ground. He mentioned that a new patio area and garden has recently been developed next to the pavilion with the help of some 'young men working on a community service project' - and very smart it looks too. There are also plans in the pipeline to improve the cricket square and outfield in the future which will help to provide finance for the club. Although the club plays in the West Yorkshire Football League, I wasn't aware that it is affiliated to the Sheffield and Hallamshire County FA and plays in its Saturday Senior Cup competition.

He also gave me a copy of their most recent matchday programme issued for their last home league game played a couple of weeks ago. Apparently HGU don't do bits of paper regularly as very few spectators and players are apparently not that fussed in obtaining one. As Kev explained: 'Selling only a handful can be more bother than it's worth!' This copy (dated 11/02 vs Pool) contains two folded A4 photocopied pages inside a glossy full colour advertising shell. Apart from a current league table and a 'look back in history' against their opponents, there's little reading content. In fact, I was more drawn to the club history and honours pages listed inside the static front cover.

Formed in 1969, following the demise of Hall Green Athletic, the club started life in the Barnsley & District Football League where they spent three years before moving across to the Wakefield & District League. They achieved notable success in the late 1970's winning the W&DL Division One title (three times) and Challenge Cup during which time they also set a club record by remaining unbeaten for sixty-three league matches. A proud moment also came when they lifted the Sheffield & Hallamshire County FA Challenge Shield in 1978-79. At the start of the 1982-83 season United joined the (now defunct) West Riding County Amateur Football League but it took almost fifteen years before they went on to win the Division Two title in 1997-98 thereby gaining promotion. A successful period followed as United were crowned Division One champions in both 2002-3 and 2005-06 as well as winning the S&HCFA Challenge Cup for the first (and only) time in a final played at the Keepmoat Stadium in Doncaster in 2008-09. They moved up to join the West Yorkshire Football League in 2015 winning the Division One title two seasons later but came straight back down again the following campaign after finishing bottom. It was definitely a case of *deja-vu* as United spent one season there bouncing straight back at the first time of asking after finishing as runners-up in 2018-19. They have remained in the top-flight ever since, recording their best placing when finishing in fifth position at the end of last season.

Today's game saw the visit of bottom placed club Rawdon Old Boys (one win so far this campaign) from north-west Leeds to the Crigglestone Sports Club. With Hall Green sitting only a few places above them in the sixteen-team table I expected a close game, and so it turned out. For the record United edged proceedings (just) with an uninspiring 2-0 victory; a goal scored in each half, both well-taken strikes by young striker Dan Critchelow (on 15 and 55 minutes), was enough to separate the sides in what, if I'm being honest, was a pretty lack-lustre game of football. Based on this performance I can't really see Rawdon doing enough in the remaining few games to stay up as Division One football surely beckons next season. The game played on a well grassed pitch in mainly dull and overcast conditions attracted a crowd which peaked at just over thirty on or around the hour mark. With a small embankment running the length of the goal line (nearest to the houses) avid snappers will enjoy the elevated photo opportunities on offer standing behind the goal.

Despite witnessing a poor game today, this had been another really enjoyable hop. Hall Green United FC is a really friendly, welcoming club run by a hard-working, proactive committee, and a visit to the Crigglestone Sports Club comes highly recommended to all hoppers and footy fans alike. For paper chasers there may also be the chance to get your hands on a copy of the club's matchday programme but a word of warning as they don't issue for every home game it's best check first to avoid any disappointment or a wasted journey. Thankfully, that's not something I really worry about too much these days.

FGIF Match Rating: 2 FGIF Ground Rating: 3**



R No.29: WebEd - Saturday 25th February 2023; **Bishop Wilton** (v York RI); York Football League Division Four; Kick-Off: 2pm; Venue: Bishop Wilton Hall; Worsendale Road; Bishop Wilton; Pocklington; East Yorkshire YO42 1ST; Result: 4-9; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 5.

ONE HILL OF A GROUND...

There can't be many more idyllic settings for watching a game of football in East Yorkshire than at the Bishop Wilton playing fields. The village, located in beautiful countryside about five miles to the north of Pocklington and some six miles to the east of Stamford Bridge, is definitely one not to be missed by visitors coming to this part of the country. Found close to Garrowby Hill which, standing at 807 feet (246m) above sea level, is the highest point in the Yorkshire Wolds, making for the perfect backdrop to the action.

Today I'm here to watch the local village football team take on York Railway Institute FC, a once proud and well-regarded opponent who now find themselves struggling in the bottom tier of the York Football League. It's a far cry from their days playing in the NCEL. From *FGIF* HQ it only takes about forty minutes to get here by car, following a route from the A63 through South Cave and Pocklington on the A1079, before completing the journey along narrow winding lanes climbing up through the sticks covering the last few miles.

The ground located on the outskirts of the village is found by turning right into Worsendale Road at the staggered crossroads close to St Edith's church, a useful landmark in such an isolated rural setting. The medieval CofE parish church, dedicated to Edith of Wilton was restored in 1859. Designated as a Grade I listed building in January 1967, it is now maintained by Historic England. The club plays its games on a field behind the well-appointed Bishop Wilton Hall, a large modern red bricked building erected some ten years ago as indicated on a plate affixed beneath the gable and designed for community use. The entrance to the site looks resplendent and is marked by a seasonal outcrop of snowdrops neatly arranged in

the grass banking beside the main fence. A steep ramp takes you up from road level into the car park where a set of floodlit tennis courts is found alongside and parallel to the playing field itself. The village hall immediately to the right incorporates a large function room at the proximal end and the sports changing rooms at the other. Beyond is a cricket scoreboard, a reminder that the site shares its facilities with other clubs and sports in the area.

The main (and only) un-rope football pitch is found over to left hand side of the field and is marked at a right angle to the tennis courts running close to the behind the nearside goal and is some two hundred yards from the changing rooms. Visitors will immediately appreciate that the playing area has a distinct slope as it drops markedly down from one side to the other touchline (right to left) - if there was a book listing 'non-league's top ten sloping pitches', it would definitely be in it! Apparently, the pitch used to be on the far side of the field where there is more of a plateau on the land, but it was quite a trek in getting there. With the steep imposing Garrowby Hill climbing high into the distance and the vast swathe of woodland dominating the landscape overlooking the Vale of York, it really is a stunning (and quite surreal) place to watch football. It comes as no surprise then when I confess to letting my eye wander several times across this rolling vista during a stoppage in play. Any thoughts of donning my hiking boots and climbing to the top of this steep incline soon pass though.

By the time I had reached pitch side the bright sunshine and blue sky had been replaced by some menacing looking clouds which seemed to suggest that a shower might be on its way any time soon. There was also a stiff breeze gathering in the air, strong enough to tug on the large flag depicting the white rose of Yorkshire which rippled forcibly on its tall pole next to the cage in what was a strong gusting westerly wind. As kick-off approached the temperature had dropped by several degrees, and it felt bitterly cold in such an open, exposed location. One of the locals asked if I was alright and said: '*It's always like this up here pal*'. Within minutes, and as expected, it started to rain...then hail...then sleet. With no dug outs or cover to shelter from I was left at the mercy of the elements. Any chance of retreating to the veranda at the end of the hall was scuppered when I learned that only members of the ladies' crochet club were allowed inside this afternoon! Thankfully the storm passes over within five minutes and my needlework career is put on hold as I finally settle down to take in the action.

During a brief ten-minute spell in the first half, I manage to have a quick chat with Adam Thomas, the affable player-manager of the Bishops who gave me a thumbs up about the club. He explained that the site here once belonged to a wealthy landowner named Lord Halifax who was proactive in encouraging sport within the area. Indeed, many years ago the club used to participate with other neighbouring sides in what was known as the Halifax Cup, a prestigious and well represented football cup competition.

Following the demise of Bishop Wilton FC, the village no longer had a team, and it was only about four years ago that Adam got the ball rolling (pardon the pun) with the help of some mates, to re-form the club. They initially competed in the

Drifffield and District Football League achieving a creditable third place before it was sadly disbanded at the end of the COVID-19 interrupted 2019-20 campaign during which time its membership fell. A decision was then made for the club to join the York Football League, starting out in Division Four, the following season. Once again, the competition was halted prematurely being declared null and void upon strict FA and Government guidance. However, when football did manage to resume last season, the club eventually finished in fourth place, albeit a long way behind the three promoted sides Sporting Knavesmire, Hamilton Panthers and Elvington Harriers.

Today is a real basement battle (eighth v ninth) as the Bishops face a York RI side who are just one place and one point beneath them in the eleven-team division. If you ignore bottom placed LNER Builders who incidentally look to be in big trouble and have issues fielding a side, neither club can feel that confident going into the game with the Bishops having scored the fewest goals and RI conceding the most in the league. Based on these stats *Wraybet* was offering firm odds on a low scoring draw.

However, my prediction was way off the mark as events on the field soon proved in what turned out to be one of the craziest and highest scoring games of football I've seen so far this season. By half-time I had already noted six goals on my *FGIF* Stats Card which showed that the visitors led 2-4 at half-time. In truth there has been some pretty woeful defending in the first forty-five minutes and the visitors were fortunate to be ahead; the hosts probably had the same number of a chances but squandered too many to be on level terms.

In a frantic second half which saw end to end action (think basketball here) both defences were breached further and with seven more goals added, left the final score at 4-9 by full-time to conclude what had been a most bizarre game. For the record, you can check out the score log from the game below. Sadly, only a handful of spectators (literally) were present to witness this terrific spectacle. Although it had been compelling viewing you had to spare a thought for Bishop Wilton...how can you score four goals and still manage to lose the game?

Adam understandably cut a frustrated figure by full-time. After being side-lined through injury for the last five games he will hopefully be back on the field donning his goalkeeping gloves once more next week allowing his understudy to return to his normal attacking duties up front. He admits that results like this don't help to galvanize what is in essence a small squad but a trip down to *The Fleece* pub (off the village High Street) afterwards might just put the world (and incredible football games) to right and convince his lads to turn up once again next week when they travel to Stillington to take on Marton Abbey, a side coincidentally level with them on nine points in the latest edition of the league table. It should be another interesting game, one that *Wraybet* definitely won't be predicting the score for! Behind the scenes there is some talk in the camp that the club may be tempted to join the East Riding County League in the near future, having played a few teams already from that league in some of their ERCFA county cup ties in recent months. It's not set in stone yet, so watch this space, as they say...

It had been another terrific afternoon's entertainment for the football grounds collector. According to my records this was ground tick number twenty-nine out of the fifty-four clubs currently playing in the YFL. It had also been one of the most scenic and I would certainly recommend a visit to this friendly club set high in the Yorkshire Wolds to all footy fans and hoppers out there! The joys of hopping continue, have fun wherever you go, even if it's off the beaten track.

Score Log: 0-1 (3); 0-2 (8); 1-2 (12); 1-3 (33); 2-4 (37); 2-5 (48); 2-6 (56); 2-7 (70); 3-7 (71); 4-7 (74); 4-8 (79) and 4-9 (82).

FGIF Match Rating: 4 FGIF Ground Rating: 5**



R No.28: *WebEd* - Saturday 18th February 2023; **Ebor Wanderers** (v Stamford Bridge); York Football League Junior Cup Round 1; Kick-Off: 2pm; Venue: Hopgrove Playing Fields, Malton Road, York, North Yorkshire YO32 9TD; Result: 0-11; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 8.

SURVIVING THE BATTLE

I have always been fascinated by Roman History. My earliest recollection of the subject was back in secondary school when my class (1FA) was asked to complete an extended project in our history lessons. I was about twelve years old at the time and remember spending several weeks gathering information taken from books in the school library. I really loved reading and copying all the facts into my exercise book which eventually covered many pages all neatly written in fountain pen (remember those?) with carefully labelled drawings laid out in between. It was well worth it though, as the gold star, awarded to me by my teacher Mrs Hobbs, was a proud academic moment. Happy days.

More recently I have travelled up to Northumberland visiting several places along Hadrian's Wall (*Vallum Hadriani*, in Latin) which stretches from Wallsend on the River Tyne across to the Bowness-in-Solway in Cumbria. The three-mile section between Grindon and Once Brewed is probably the best with the opportunity to

stop on route and check out the old Roman forts and excavations - it's also the nearest you'll get to meeting a Roman!. If you ever get chance to go up there, I will definitely recommend the sites at Housesteads and Vindolanda which are both superb and well worth a visit.

Any study of Roman History will inevitably involve looking at a map of Roman Britain highlighting all the main settlements and roads linking them built some time back in 54AD. No doubt you will be familiar with such places at *Lindum* (Lincoln), *Camulodunum* (Colchester) and *Londinium* (London) and even heard of roads like Fosse Way (West), Watling Street (Kent) and Ermine Street (East), the names of which are still in use today. I imagine we have used them all at some time or another on our way to watching football matches.

So what has all this got to do with my hop today, I hear you ask? Well, I'm on my way to York, a place steeped in Roman history and I'm taking in a game at Ebor Wanderers Football Club, members of the York Football League. It's all in the name and as many of you might already know the city itself was called *Eboracum* back in Roman times. The title is still well recognised here with the famous Ebor Handicap horse-racing meeting held in Summer as part of the four day Ebor festival being one of top events of the year.

Although a club with the same name was one of nine founder members of the YFL when it was first set up in the late 1800's, the present club has no previous associations or links with it, but is, in fact, a relatively new one, as I soon discover on my latest hop. My journey from *FGIF* which takes about an hour is an easy one this afternoon. With clear roads I follow the A64 northern bypass for a couple of miles before leaving the A1037 to join the Malton Road adjacent to the large Toby Carvery. The entrance to the Hopgrove Playing Fields is almost opposite this large gastro-pub with a distinctive welcome sign clearly visible as you approach. There are many pitches on the large site which shares its facilities with football, cricket and archery. Yes, the York Archers, a local archery club is based here. Don't worry you won't be kebabbed, as the bowmen and women of the parish use an adjoining field for practice!!

The Hopgrove PFA has a modern changing pavilion with gabled roof (funded by the National Lottery) bearing a rather wonky sign on its fascia. It is situated next to a couple of floodlit tennis courts and is used by many of its junior and open age clubs. A couple of brightly coloured shipping containers around the back provide added space for changing and equipment storage. Wanderers currently use a pitch nearest to the pavilion - its marked at a ninety degree angle to the main building and with no attempt to rope it off or provide dug outs, it's a pretty basic affair. With such a large open field, I imagine it can become a rather exposed location especially on a much colder winter's day, so would be best to make a visit here in warmer weather. From the far side of the pitch you appreciate the large electricity pylons straddling the field as they convey power through their giant cables which dominate what is an otherwise rural vista.

Today's game, a league junior cup first round tie (for teams in the lower divisions of the YFL) sees the visit of near neighbours Stamford Bridge who have made the short trip (about five miles) up the Hull Road (A1079) to get here. Having checked out the current league tables ahead of kick-off, I feel that there's going to be a bit of a mis-match this afternoon with Wanderers floundering at the foot of division three taking on their opponents who are up to third place in division two. Looking at the stats I do fear for the hosts who have yet to pick up a single point and have suffered some very heavy defeats so far this season (resulting in a few double figure scorelines) including a 15-0 and 19-0 whalopping on visits to York St Johns University and Church Fenton respectively. Maybe the chance to play in the cup game might take some of the pressure off?

Well the stats don't lie, do they? To put it quite simply, the Wanderers took another heavy beating this time out at the hands of a hard-working, well organised and young, skilful Stamford Bridge side. The difference in class was clear for all to see (when I say all, I mean the handful who turned up!). To be fair though it did take the visitors twenty or so minutes to open the scoring and that came by way of a dubious penalty awarded for a handball incident close to the six yard area. From that moment on the home goal was bombarded and the score was kept down to six-nil going into the break. The second half was a repeat of the first and with a couple of goals disallowed for offside the final score could have ended up being even greater still. Although big scores enhance my hopping 'goals' stats, I honestly don't enjoy seeing sides get pasted like this. Who does?

The match played in generally cloudy conditions on a well grassed pitch attracted just eight spectators, all of whom had travelled over with the opposition from East Yorkshire to the Hopgrove playing fields. For a few minutes during the first half I managed to have a brief chat with substitute and lino Tony Middleton who told me that the club had only been formed as Ebor Wanderers FC last summer. The group of lads used to play for former YFL-side Harrison Signs who used to play matches at York University. When the club disbanded at the end of the season Tony and several others (all reserve teamers) helped to form Ebor Wanderers with the club playing its first games here at the Hopgrove. Incredibly some of the players (all mates) travel from as far afield as Tadcaster and Leeds to play for the team. Despite their on-field difficulties which haven't been any fun, Tony still hopes that they can re-group following what looks likely to be certain relegation come May and compete with confidence next season in division four.

I for one, certainly hope that they can stick together and come back stronger in the future. Just like the once proud Roman centurion (depicted on the club's logo) used to summon an army for impending battles, hopefully Ebor Wanderers can find some of the same fighting spirit and a bit of luck to achieve much needed success once again.

FGIF Match Rating: 2 FGIF Ground Rating: 2**



R No.27: WebEd - Saturday 11th February 2023; **North Gawber Colliery** (v Wombwell Main); Sheffield & Hallamshire Football League Premier Division; Kick-Off: 2pm; Venue: Woolley Miners Welfare, Woolley Colliery Road, Darton, Barnsley, South Yorkshire S75 5JA; Result: A-A (match abandoned after 62 minutes - serious foul play with score at 1-2); Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 78.
REPORT TO FOLLOW.



R No.26: WebEd - Saturday 4th February 2023; **Chaos United** (v Sutton United); East Riding Intermediate Cup Q-F; Kick-Off: 2pm; Venue: St John's Grove, Preston Road, Hull, East Yorks, HU95SN; Result: 2-2 (5-4p); Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 28.

COMPLETE CUP CHAOS

The Tigers might be taking on Cardiff City in an intriguing Championship fixture at the MKM Stadium but for the avid grassroots football fan a much bigger game is

also taking place just a few miles up the road from here this afternoon. The East Riding County Intermediate Cup has now reached its crucial quarter-final stage with Humber Premier League hosts Chaos United entertaining county league minnows Sutton United as they fight it out (not literally I hope) for a place in the last four. To coin a phrase, it's what you would call a real 'David v Goliath' contest: it might first appear to be a one-sided affair but as we all know, with cup football, the tie could just as easily spring a big surprise which makes for compelling viewing. Apart from the game, there's also the added incentive for the 'pitch collector' to tick off a new ground which the club has only moved into a few short weeks ago.

So, it's with bigger fish to fry (pardon the Hull related piscatorial pun), that I set off in eager anticipation along Clive Sullivan Way (A63) and head towards East Hull for my fix. The eight-mile journey is less than a twenty-minute drive from *FGIF* and with no major hold-ups in the city centre which is undergoing an extensive programme of roadworks (until 2025!) I make pretty good time. After leaving the by-pass at the A1033 Hedon Road junction (close to the King George dock) I follow Southcoates Lane for about a quarter of a mile before making a right turn into Bilsdale Grove. This leads you through a large and, in some places partly built, new residential estate. After crossing Holderness Drain continue past the Woodland Primary School on your right where the road then becomes St John's Grove. Although you can just about spot the playing field through some thick undergrowth in this area of semi-wasteland, access is restricted to all vehicles, so it is best to continue a bit further along the road, park up and walk. A path leads you to a narrow cut-through into the playing field which is clearly marked by the presence of a thick sturdy yellow metal barrier/gate (opposite Hilston Grove).

As I cross the field I am soon greeted by Mike Chadburn (or 'Chaddy' as he's affectionately known in these parts). Dressed in his distinctive trademark shorts and blue polo top (with the distinct logo featuring the popular *The Funky Fish* chippy, one of the sponsors emblazoned across the front and the St George cross embroidered club badge stitched on the chest) which he wears even during the colder winter months, the larger-than-life character who could also be dubbed Mr Chaos United FC, having helped to form the club back in 2017. His enthusiasm for the club is immediately infectious and with a broad smile tells me they only moved here a few weeks ago having left their previous based at the Alderman Kneeshaw Park which is only about a mile from here in the Bilton Grange area of the city. Apparently, the pitches there were being overused by several teams and the playing surface had deteriorated markedly in recent months. So, when news came through the grapevine to say that this site had become available, the club grabbed the opportunity to move here with both hands.

Although Chaddy has big plans to develop this venue over time, facilities here are pretty basic at present and realises that quite a bit of work will need doing to bring them up to a decent standard. The playing field is found in quite an exposed location bordered along its perimeter in part by the main road, some local housing, new businesses and the Archbishop Sentamu Academy, all of which can be easily

seen closeby. The main pitch is marked out over on the furthest side of the field where a tall metal green security fence from the adjacent primary school runs parallel to the far touchline. With the help of some previous funding the council owned site has in the past received grants from the *Football Foundation* to build a modest flat roofed pavilion which is partly hidden from view behind a metal fence in the corner. Although looking a bit dated and in need of a lick or two of paint to cover the drab grey exterior, the club is more than happy to use the changing room block on matchdays. As expected, dug outs and spectator cover is a long way down the club's list of priorities at present. From pitch side it is possible to pick out the tops of some of the cranes and ships on the horizon which hail from the local docks and neighbouring P&O Ferries terminal. Followers of rugby league will also be interested to note that Craven Park, home to Hull Kingston Rovers RLFC, is a long punt (well maybe half a mile or so) away from here.

Since gaining promotion from the county league back in the 2020-21 COVID-19 interrupted season, Chaos United has since established itself in the HPL. After finishing in sixth place last season, they have shown good form of late and currently sit fourth in the division one table, albeit quite a few points behind a runaway pack of Great Drifffield AFC, Beverley Town Reserves and Scarborough Athletic Reserves who at this stage look to be the only teams realistically in with a chance of gaining honours. In their maiden and only game played at St John's Grove playing fields so far, the hosts lost 5-3 on penalties to Hessle Sporting Club (after being unresolved without any goals in ninety minutes) in the HPL Whiteheads Cup seven days ago. By contrast their opponents Sutton United from the ERCL Division Two (that's the third tier of the competition) have had a largely indifferent campaign. Racking up the second worst defensive record and winning four out of their eleven games played to date, it's not the best of starts for a side newly promoted in May last year. In fact, I attended one of the club's home games back in December when they were on the end of a 2-9 thrashing at the hands of West Hull based Haltemprice in a particularly feisty encounter played on the 4G pitch at the Bishop Burton College (see *RR No.20* below, for more).

With nearly twenty minutes gone on the clock it was the visitors who came closest to taking the lead when a point-blank header from Jamie Barker (19) was palmed onto the post by keeper Alix Agius who showed great reflexes to dive low to his left and keep the ball out. As the tension mounted tempers began to fray and play was held up on the half hour mark following a mass brawl in the middle of the pitch. Patient referee Iain Drewery did well to keep a lid on things as nerves gradually settled with the score remaining at 0-0 going into the break.

It must have been a cracking half-time team talk as Chaos rather fortuitously took the lead less than sixty seconds after the re-start when Jamie Barker (OG, 46) mistimed his headed clearance, diverting the ball agonisingly over his own keeper Shaun Gleeson. Five minutes or so later Sutton thought they had drawn level only for Connor Lynch's (53) tap in from the edge of the six-yard box to be adjudged offside - it looked a tight one and with no VAR to help resolve it, the ref's decision stood. The disappointment was only short-lived though as Sutton's persistence

finally paid off when the Chaos keeper completely fluffed his lines, mis-timing a pass-back with a wild air-kick leaving the grateful Sean Rispin (64) with the easiest of chances to finish off by side footing the ball into the unguarded net in front of him. With little to separate both sides and with just over ten minutes left Chaos re-gained the lead, when the ball was somehow bundled over the goal line by diminutive substitute Kealan Coxon (79) following a corner taken on the left. Could there be a grandstand finish? One of the young home fans standing alongside me certainly thought so: he was convinced that Sutton would equalise for a second time - I hope he knows the lottery numbers as his prediction was absolutely spot on - literally within seconds of the re-start the ball was hoofed unceremoniously up field and into the Chaos box where Owen Stanley (80) was on hand, stretching out one of his long legs to make contact and divert it beyond the stranded Agius, making it 2-2. What entertainment!

With neither side being able to find a winner in the remaining ten minutes, the match, as my new friend had foretold, was going straight to penalties to decide the final outcome. So, with the toss of a coin, it was Sutton who were tasked to shoot first from twelve yards out: again, there was very little to separate either side each scoring their respective first four opening spot kicks. It was now all down to who could hold their nerve the most with that vital final kick - for the record, Sutton blasted theirs over and Chaos found the net to mark the end of what had been a cracking game. I imagine that the hosts were quite relieved it was all over. You had to feel a bit sorry for Sutton though, they probably felt a bit gutted with the result but no doubt proud they had come so close to a place in the semi-final.

The match played in mainly dull but mild conditions on a well grassed and, in many places, rather bumpy pitch, attracted almost thirty spectators. During the second half I managed to take some photos close to where the Chaos 'ultras' were congregating - it was clear that they were having a good time judging by the number of cans and bottles of beer (and the odd complementary dodgy ciggy) being consumed during the action! Being a non-smoker, I didn't partake in the fun but still felt a bit light-headed by the end! Also present at pitch-side was Hull lass Jayne, a knowledgeable referee with bags of previous WSL experience on her CV who today was busy writing notes on the man in the middle as part of her assessment role for the county FA.

It had been a really entertaining afternoon and a superb hop. So, if you're after watching a decent game of football and are not too fussed about the state of the pitch or spectator facilities, then I can definitely recommend a visit to St John's Grove, home of Chaos United FC. It's certainly grassroots at its best and you will definitely receive a warm welcome when you go, that's for sure. I wish the club the best of luck going forward and hope that their new ground project proves to be a great success. The joys of hopping in the 'City of Culture 2017' continue...have fun wherever you go.

FGIF Match Rating: 4 FGIF Ground Rating: 1**



R No.25: WebEd - Saturday 28th January 2023; **Swinton Athletic** (v Ecclesfield Red Rose 1915); Sheffield & Hallamshire Football League Premier Division; Kick-Off: 2pm; Venue: Swinton Miners Welfare, Park Road, Swinton, South Yorks, S648JH; Result: 6-1; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 25.

A HAPPY RETURN

After ground-sharing at Mexborough Athletic for more than five years, Swinton Athletic Football Club has made a welcome return home to the Miners Welfare ground in Park Road. The club has now taken over the site which was formerly owned by the council and with many ground improvements taking place, it's looking a tidy set up, as I found out on my eagerly awaited hop here today.

Situated on the south banks of the river Don, the former South Yorkshire mining town is located about five miles from Rotherham and is easily reached from the A1 by passing Denaby and Mexborough using both the A6023 and A6022 approach roads. Although my car sat nav initially took me the wrong way to begin with, I would say it's best to follow signs for the town (by-passing the railway station) before turning off Church Street into Rookery Road and then taking a sharp left into Park Road which leads you through a large residential area. Within two hundred yards the ground itself can be seen slightly below street level and is set behind a tall green metal perimeter fence which encloses this part of the site. Although the main entrance gate is closed at the moment, access can be gained by using the driveway belonging to the adjacent Park View Bar and Function Suite. Like a couple of others attending the game I soon discovered that I had gone too far and had to complete a U turn before parking up. Doh!

Upon arrival, I meet up with well-respected club chairman Andrew Billups (affectionately known to everyone as Billy) who is standing outside the changing rooms and is busily adding the final few names onto the team sheet ahead of the game. He explains how the club is now developing the ground having recently added smart a new post and rail fence (painted in black and white matching the team colours), some hard standing on the near side and applying the finishing touches to the new stand and dug outs situated over to the left. When completed

it will contain three rows of seats providing cover for about fifty spectators. The rest of the field is flat standing with a gently sloping embankment rising up to and spanning the entire width behind the goal at the Park Road end. This affords some wonderful, elevated views of the action giving the amateur footy snapper some cracking photo 'hoppertunities during their short visit. The changing pavilion (check out the superb club-themed murals painted on the outer walls) near to the entrance is also set upon on a raised grassed area in the corner and is positioned at a forty-five-degree angle facing the pitch. A flight of concrete steps leads down to the playing area below. It is clear this is a pro-active community club judging by the vast number of colourful advertising hoardings celebrating local businesses affixed to the pitch fencing.

You can also see the Swinton Academy school buildings in the adjacent field behind the far goal. I mention this by coincidence having been here once before in my distant youth. It was whilst competing in the intermediate boys' javelin for East Yorkshire Schools at the Yorkshire Schools Championships back in 1974 that I first visited Swinton. I can remember having a mare of a day finishing well down the pecking order to my other fellow 'spear chuckers' taking part. In fact, I still own an old tracksuit top bearing an embroidered badge to commemorate the event - kept for posterity, it's no doubt lurking somewhere gathering dust in the loft. I digress.

Today Swinton welcome Ecclesfield Red Rose 1915 FC to Park Road. Despite the adverse frozen conditions of late the visitors have been fortunate to complete their fixtures throughout January playing their last three (consecutive) matches at home, using the 4G pitch at Hillsborough College. However, the league table doesn't lie, and the stats show that they have endured a truly dreadful season so far, having lost all but one of their games this campaign (beating South Kirby Colliery 2-1 last October). Last week was no exception either suffering their highest defeat going down 11-0 to North Gawber Colliery. It is no surprise then that they find themselves at the foot of the Premier Division table. By contrast Swinton currently sit in mid table but do have several games in hand on those rival sides directly above them. Remarkably today is their fifth consecutive game played at home, having last taken to the road in October!

As expected, Athletic turn out to be too strong for their opponents eventually winning the game by a comfortable 6-1 score-line. It's Jack Bancroft (15) who gets his name on the scoresheet first, steering the ball beyond the keeper from the penalty spot. Within six minutes Tommy Needham (21) taps in from close range following a clever counter-attack down the left to double his side's lead. Athletic add two more in a frantic spell of action just before the interval with Luke Gostling-Skelton (43) claiming his side's third, although the ball does take a wicked deflection off a defender before crossing the line, with Curtis Wilkinson (44) wrapping things up only a minute later as he calmly taps the ball home unchallenged at the back post to make it 4-0.

Athletic don't rest on their laurels and within moments of the re-start Wilkinson (46) grabs his second beating the keeper to a loose ball before side footing into an

empty net from the edge of the six-yard area. To their credit though Ecclesfield never stop trying to create chances and their hard work finally pays off on the hour mark when Todd Guest (61) powers the ball through a group of players giving the unsuspected keeper no chance to pull one back and give his side some much-needed encouragement. The hard-working Needham (78) gets onto the scoresheet for a second time firing in what is the best (and final) goal of the afternoon, a 25-yard effort that sails beautifully into the top right-hand corner of the goal net to give his team a well-earned victory and all three points. The result also helps Athletic to close the gap to within five points of third place North Gawber and with games in hand over all their rivals must fancy their chances of catching them. With sixteen games (yes, that many) left there is definitely all to play for, as they say.

The game played on a slightly damp but firm surface in mainly dull conditions attracts just over twenty fans. I am lucky to be joined pitch-side by former *FGIF* snapper and exiled Aussie hopper Jack Bauer who has travelled up from his base in Nuneaton. Indeed, this is his second game of the day having attended a match in the Sheffield Fair Play League (Sheffield Wanderers FC v Hammer & Pincers, 0-5) at the Sheffield Hallam University Sports Park earlier this morning. Jack tells me about his travels at home and abroad as we swap details covering our respective footy CV's. What he doesn't know about hopping can be written on the back of my *FGIF* Match Stats Card. The Perth-born sports nut is an absolute hopping legend having travelled worldwide to get his fix including making visits to Saudi Arabia and Qatar; he once travelled into eastern Europe watching five football matches in five different countries in five consecutive days. I feel dizzy just at the thought of it. His exploits don't just stop at football with other sports such as rugby league, cricket and speedway also thrown into the mix for good measure. Oh, I nearly forgot the Perth born traveller also follows Aussie Rules Football too - well I suppose you would.

During the interval and for the early part of the second half we spend some time chatting with Mark Sleight, the personable club historian and media officer who does a brilliant job in fielding our many quick-fire questions about things to do with Swinton Athletic. Flagging up information from his smart phone he tells us about when the club was founded just after the Second World War in 1946, how it folded in 2005, before starting up again in 2008. He kindly spends much time listing the club's major achievements, neatly entering the essential info into my spiral bound notebook, and it certainly makes impressive reading, highlighting numerous successes in the Sheffield County League and Cup and Doncaster Cup over the years. Notably Athletic won the S&HCL double back in 2017-18 and went on to lift the league cup only two years ago. He also recounts with a mixture of both fondness and a bit of frustration how Swinton went on a remarkable eighteen game unbeaten run (still a club record) on their way to winning the title only for the campaign to be declared null and void due to the COVID-10 outbreak in 2019-20. Reading between the lines I can feel his pain. He also expresses with affection the side's exploits in the much-revered Montagu Hospital Cup, a prestigious annual competition recently celebrating its 125th anniversary (involving Saturday and Sunday League sides) which Athletic have proudly won on eight occasions. It's big

around these parts as *FGIF* snapping supremo Gary Spooner first alerted me to following his visit to watch the final played at Mexborough last season. Mark points me in the direction of the excellent MHC website which offers plenty of in- depth coverage about the competition and the clubs taking part. Check out this link for more: [Football | Montagu Cup | Mexborough](#). Although the club doesn't issue matchday programmes at the moment, they do hold a limited stock of enamel pin badges which have been popular in recent months; in fact, hoppers coming from as far as Poland have shown a keen interest in acquiring them. How these international hoppers find out such things is truly incredible!

It had been another terrific hop and a cracking afternoon's entertainment. I really do enjoy watching games in this league. It goes without saying that I would thoroughly recommend a visit to Swinton Athletic to all fellow ground collectors and footy fans alike - It's a lovely friendly and well-run club who certainly go out of their way to make you feel really welcome. It was also fun to meet up with fellow hopper and avid snapper Jack who was pleasant company throughout the most of the afternoon. I hope he has a great time on his next major trip over to Holland in the coming weeks.

And finally, for those readers who, like me, are into their footy stats (and aren't we all?), I thought that the anorak in you might be interested to learn that over the last three weeks (including today) my games have ended with some spanking scorelines: 12-0; 4-5 and 6-1, all high goal busting matches, providing a total of 28 goals. It's supposed to be 'Dry January' but not this year when it comes to scoring goals. Over the season my 'goals per game' average so far stands at of 5.32, which is unprecedented compared to other years in the past. I'm certainly not one to boast and would be interested to know how these stats compare with those of other hoppers out there. I really shouldn't get too complacent though, surely, I'm due a 0-0 sooner rather than later...that's definitely jinxed it now!

FGIF Match Rating: 4 FGIF Ground Rating: 4**



R No.24: WebEd - Saturday 21st January 2023; **Civil Service** (v Cliffe); York Football League Division Two; Kick-Off: 2pm; Venue: York College 4G, Sim Balk Lane, York, North Yorks, YO232BB; Result: 4-5; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 10.

A MYSTIFYING EXPERIENCE

Most of you will probably agree that hopping can be quite a stressful hobby at the best of times. Certainly, in recent weeks it has become more than just a labour of love in finding that all-important footy fix. Of late I seem to be investing more time in planning where I'm going than actually watching the games themselves. As the arctic weather continues to take its toll on most fixture lists up and down the country, it has been increasingly difficult for football neutrals to find games that have survived the wintry conditions.

Lately I, like many of you out there no doubt, have taken more than a keen interest in checking out the latest weather bulletins and forecasts to see what the climate is going to be like over the coming days and weeks. Indeed, I have recently developed that vital skill of being able to synch the weather map with the small clock which appears on the bottom of the TV screen as the ever-cheerful presenter scrolls through the satellite imagery. I try and capture that all important moment when both interact in the crucial hours leading up to kick-off time. As an 'amateur' meteorologist I must admit that I have now learned quite a bit about warm and cold fronts (mostly cold, it has to be said), arctic blasts and can even tell from the colour saturation on the map how cold it's going to be judging by the subtle shade of the blue on the overlay. How sad is that? These days even the BBC Weather App on my trusty smart phone is using up more battery life than any other page on my device as it takes priority over the pages usually reserved for football fixtures, results and tables.

On days like this it certainly makes sense not to travel too far in order to avoid a wasted journey. I flag up the excellent York Football League website, not for the first time in recent weeks, to find out which, if any, games are still being played this afternoon. As expected, most have already been postponed marked clearly in bold with the words '*Pitch Unplayable*' next to each entry. A striking scarlet red background is also added to each cell on the spreadsheet for easy reference, just in case you need it. This layout also makes it very easy to pick out those solitary matches that are still taking place and offer something for the ever-hopeful traveller. Unsurprisingly, it doesn't take long to identify that only three games will provide the avid ground collector with any football action today: basically, it comes down to matches (taking place on trusty 4G surfaces) at: Civil Service FC (based at York College), AFC Howden (venue changed to Snaith School) and Knottingley Albion FC (at the De Lacy Academy) all of which have survived the cold snap. I'm in luck though as my persistence finally pays off. So it is, with eager anticipation that I quickly tap the postcode for York College into my car satnav as my intended destination for the afternoon. A trip to the Civil Service, it is!

Despite the falling temperatures, I leave *FGIF* HQ in bright sunshine with blue skies overhead, boding well for a pleasant afternoon at pitch-side. However, within the space of only ten minutes, I soon discover that all this is about to change as swirling fog begins to descend on the surrounding fields alongside the motorway, moments before I leave junction 37 at Howden.

The mist begins to thicken, making visibility for driving extremely difficult - the words 'pea' and 'soup' quickly come to mind here. By the time I reach the A64

York southern city ring road my speed has fallen dramatically as I can just about see the fog lights of the vehicles in front of me. This also requires increasing levels of concentration and adds a few more minutes to what is fast becoming a much more difficult journey than I had first anticipated. As I eventually turn into Sim Balk Lane and arrive at the main entrance to York College, the place looks totally deserted - well from what I can see of it, that is. After passing the main tall cream painted buildings forming the Construction & Skills Centre on the left and the 4G caged area on my right, I park up looking for some divine intervention. The murk has certainly not eased up and I now seriously begin to wonder if the game has already been called off.

Within five minutes I can hear some muffled sounds coming from the direction of the playing area so decide to go over and check out the state of play (or not, as the case may be). After entering the cage, I am soon greeted by a friendly guy dressed in several layers of warm clothing. It turns out his name is Michael, and he has come along to watch his son play; he soon allays my fears by confirming that the game is definitely on. Standing beside the half-way line the mist lifts slightly and it is possible to see both goals from this vantage point which is encouraging. As kick-off fast approaches the players can be seen (just) leaving the changing rooms behind us before making their way down the frozen grass embankment running parallel to the playing area before entering the cage and taking to the hallowed plastic turf. Amiable referee Mark James is keen to get the game started as early as possible hoping to beat the dull conditions without the need for turning on the floodlights which he feels obviously don't help that much in this type of weather. The watery sun overhead keeps trying to break through the mist as the game kicks-off five minutes early.

Today's match sees the visit of Hemingbrough-based side Cliffe FC to the York College 4G. With both teams currently sitting in the bottom half of the eleven-team division, the hosts have the slight edge with a three-point buffer over their opponents who have not done very well on their travels, to put it politely. Having conceded more goals than any other team they have yet to notch up a win on the road this season. Indeed, when the teams met in the reverse fixture at the Cliffe playing fields back in mid-October, it was Civil Service who won convincingly by an impressive 1-7 score-line. For the football neutral at least, the odds looked to be heavily stacked on what should be a comfortable home win. How wrong can you be?

The match turned out to be an absolute (nine goal) cracker of a game. The away side opened the scoring inside the first fifteen minutes only for the hosts to level ten minutes later. Cliffe regained the lead on the half hour mark, and it stayed that way going into the break. They extended their lead within moments of the restart, and it looked as they would go on to the game win comfortably. By the hour mark the hosts grabbed a second before Cliffe came back two minutes later to maintain their two-goal advantage. As the swirling fog thickened it became much more difficult to pick out the players and I needed quite a bit of help in filling in my *FGIF* Match Stats card - thankfully several of the subs were on hand to provide

the all-important names, allowing me to fill in the blanks. The best was yet to come. Incredibly with only ten minutes left Civil Service had pulled two goals back in quick succession, drawing level to make it 4-4 with Luke Addison notably firing home the last one, completing a memorable hat-trick in the process. With just a few seconds remaining on the clock Cliffe pushed up-field (or should that be, synthetic turf?) for a winner. Their gamble paid off and, against the run of play, managed to stab the ball home from close range following a corner taken on the left. As the final whistle sounded the visitors had gained three precious points recording what was their first away victory this season. They'll be dancing in the streets of Cliffe tonight. Despite the foggy conditions, it had been a truly remarkable game.

The match was attended by a dozen or so spectators who chose to stand along the touchline over on the entrance side of the cage - note there are no restrictions about access here. During the game Michael told me a little bit more about Civil Service Football Club. Apparently, a team bearing the same name was formed just after the Second World War with records showing they first joined the YFL in the 1951-52 season playing in Division 3B. The club initially played its matches at the well-appointed Civil Service Sports Ground located off the Boroughbridge Road in the Acomb area of the city. Sadly, the ground closed in 2003 amid financial problems, leaving many of the amateur sports teams without a home. The 10-hectare site remained disused until 2007 when an arson attack razed many of the buildings to the ground. A property company has since bought the land to develop housing including 300 new homes built on what was essentially wasteland.

Not wanting to lose its place in the YFL, the club was forced to move its base away from the city centre and began using the Kirk Hammerton playing fields (on a site five miles away off the A59) at the start of the 2003-04 season where they remained for almost ten years. Apart from a brief spell ground-sharing at Rawcliffe FC, they moved to the York College some eight years ago now, enjoying a successful first campaign at their new home, finishing as runners-up to Wilberfoss in 2015-16. A glimpse of their record over the years shows they have spent most time predominantly playing in the second division (third tier) of the competition. I am reliably informed that the players these days no longer have to be employed in local government roles in order to be eligible for a place in the side.

Travellers intending to make a visit to the York College will have no difficulty in finding the ground (famous last words, eh?). After coming off the main A64 bypass at the rather convoluted Askham Bar exit, turn right at the lights (opposite the park and ride) onto the A1036 Tadcaster Road. Cross into the right-hand lane (marked Bishopthorpe and College) by-passing the Shell petrol station before taking a sharp right turn at the next set of lights down Sim Balk Lane. The college entrance is less than 100 yards from this junction and is soon visible on the left. Hoppers may be interested to learn that the ground is not far (no more than a long throw in away) from fellow YFL side Bishopthorpe White Football Club which I visited back in December (see *RR No. 17* below). In fact, you can see the distinctive cream coloured college buildings from White Rose Park itself.

By the time I had navigated back my way back into East Yorkshire again the fog had thankfully started to lift making driving home that much easier. To be honest given the large number of enforced postponements and the murky conditions, I was just pleased to get in a game today when things could have been so different. So, had all my hours of pre-match planning paid off? I would like to think that my obsessive daily checking of the forecast over the last few days had helped (even without any last-minute warnings about fog). I suppose it just goes to show that even with the best will in the world, as groundhoppers and footy fans, there are some days when you just have to get lucky, don't you?

FGIF Match Rating: 5 FGIF Ground Rating: 3**



R No.23: WebEd - Saturday 14th January 2023; **Knottingley Albion** (v York Shamrocks); York Football League Division Four; Kick-Off: 2pm; Venue: The De Lacy Academy 4G, Middle Lane, Knottingley, West Yorks, WF110BZ; Result: 12-0; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 22.

A SURREAL EXPERIENCE

My hop today will not be remembered so much for the match result or the ground but for the events which unfolded during my visit. After another week of heavy rain which had decimated so many fixtures throughout the country, I decided not to risk travelling over to Manchester for the eagerly awaited FA Vase fourth round tie at West Didsbury and Chorlton (v Horden CW) which had been my favoured hop but to stay closer to home instead. With many local call offs, I was reassured to read a tweet posted from Knottingley Albion Football Club who confirmed mid-morning that their York Football League game 'on the plastic' at the De Lacy Academy was definitely on. This was the best weather busting news every ground collector wants to hear ahead of their much-needed footy fix.

Within forty minutes I had turned off the M62 at the Selby turn (A19) and followed the A645 before arriving in Knottingley, a former market town in West Yorkshire

but now part of the city of Wakefield. It's not far from the intersection of the M62 and A1M at Ferrybridge. The ground is reached by taking a sharp right turn off Womesley Road crossing over the main Pontefract railway line (linking Leeds to Goole) and following Spawd Bone Lane until the school becomes visible on the left. Visitors here should use the first entrance which leads to the main car park. The sports pitches and 4G caged area are both signposted and conveniently situated beyond the main school buildings at the rear of the campus.

The players use the changing rooms within the boys' PE department, and it is only a short walk from here. A grass pitch (used today by the reserves for a Wakefield & District League game) is marked out alongside and parallel to the main cage. Although there are no designated dug outs or spectator facilities at present, entry/access inside is free to all and visitors can watch the game along both side lines. The site is dominated by views of the imposing Ardagh Group glassworks in the distance where a number of tall thin chimneys fill the skyline. It's quite impressive and makes for the perfect backdrop to the action, especially for the keen snapper looking to fill the frame and add a bit more to their composition.

Upon arrival I am met at 'cage-side' by affable club secretary Jason McManus who is busy sorting out his pre-match admin duties. Armed with a number of match balls tied tightly inside a string bag in one hand, plastic drinking bottles in their holder in the other and a pad of team sheets tucked somehow under his arm, he tells me that he is really looking forward to today's game which incidentally is the club's first match in almost six weeks when they beat Selby Olympia 5-1 here on 3rd December last year. Today sees the visit of York Shamrocks to the De Lacy Academy for what is seen as the division's 'game of the day' featuring two promotion chasing sides in an intriguing third v fourth league encounter.

Although the game starts five minutes late, Knottingley don't waste any time in taking an early lead scoring twice from close range inside the Shamrocks six-yard area. However, with barely fifteen minutes gone on the clock, events suddenly take a dramatic turn. What looks to be an innocuous and fairly even challenge close to the centre circle actually turns out to be far worse than first thought. As Young Shamrocks' midfielder Rudy Dear is felled, he lets out a gut-wrenching scream which gives great cause for concern amongst those standing closeby. It's clear all is not well and as the player lies motionless on the ground, an immediate call is made to the NHS ambulance service for help. His worried teammates hurriedly begin placing coats and a couple of around his body to keep him warm in what are bitterly cold conditions. There is unanimous agreement that he shouldn't be moved or given any food, drink or a painkiller under any circumstances.

At this point I assume that the match is going to be abandoned there and then. We all expect there is going to be a really long wait before help arrives especially given the current difficulties the NHS are facing. Referee Peter Braybrooke calmly suggests the rest of the players should go back into the changing rooms and wait until a decision about the game is made. During a brief chat he explains to me that he used to live in Ely in his formative years and had once played in the local Cambridgeshire Colts League. It transpires he knows some of the lads I used to

teach when I lived in Newmarket and had himself broken his leg playing in a youth game played on the local rec in the town. What are the chances of that? Our conversation abruptly ends when news that an ambulance has arrived out of the blue (pardon the pun). Incredibly it had got to us within 20 minutes from the HQ in Pontefract. Without delay the three paramedics park up at the front of the school, wheel a stretcher into the cage and soon get to work giving Rudy loads of gas (morphine) in both arms and the injured leg. He is soon cracking jokes as the medication takes hold before being taken to the ambulance waiting inside the car park. You can't fault the NHS, can you? With all the players now back on the pitch the ref restarts the match almost 45 minutes after the unfortunate stoppage in play - to be honest I, and many others in attendance, hadn't expected to see any more action this afternoon.

By now it is soon evident that the visitors are quite badly shaken having seen their teammate sustain such a horrific injury. If you'd have asked them, most of the Shamrocks players would have preferred to call it a day and head back to York. For them though it is now all 'backs to the wall' (or wire netting) as Knottingley are unrelenting in creating wave after wave of attacks. They add another seven goals to their tally in the space of just twelve minutes taking the score to 9-0 by the time the half ends. At this point it looks highly likely that the game is going to end in a double-figure scoreline. Sadly, with just ten minutes left and with tempers fraying there is another halt in play as a massive punch up develops in the centre circle. Once again, I fear the worst expecting the game will be called off. But no - three players are dismissed, the match continues, and it eventually ends under floodlights with the score standing at 12-0. On any other day this would seem an impressive feat but given the seriousness of events of this afternoon, it really doesn't matter that much.

However, just when you'd thought you'd seen everything, news arrives that another player from the game on the adjoining grass pitch has also suffered a broken leg only minutes following the first incident. I look across and notice that the same paramedics have come back onto the field for a second time to sort another emergency. A young lad wrapped in thick blankets is being treated near to the goal at the far end of the field. Apparently, whilst this is happening Rudy is still waiting in the ambulance before the paramedics can take him to hospital for treatment.

It had definitely been a most unexpected and surreal afternoon for those involved and praise must go to everyone in attendance including the players and staff of both teams, superb referee Peter Braybrooke and of course the incredible workers in the NHS and the ambulance service. It had truly been a huge team effort. A couple of days later I receive an E-Mail from Jason saying that Rudy had received his treatment following a complete leg break and had finally returned home which was welcome news for him and his family. Here's hoping that he makes a full and speedy recovery. It's on days like this we should remember not to take things for granted and consider that there are more important things in life than just a game of football.

FGIF Match Rating: 4 FGIF Ground Rating: 3**



R No.22: WebEd - Saturday 7th January 2023; **Sculcoates Amateurs** (v Hedon Rangers); Humber Premier League Premier Division; Kick-Off: 2pm; Venue: The Academy at St Marys, Cranbrook Avenue, Hull, East Yorks, HU67TN; Result: 0-2; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 78. REPORT TO FOLLOW.



R No.21: WebEd - Saturday 31st December 2022; **Dronfield Town** (v Nostell Miners Welfare); Northern Counties East League Division One; Kick-Off: 1.30pm; Venue: HE Barnes Stadium, Stonelow Road, Dronfield, Derbyshire, S182EU Result: 4-1;

Admission: Free; Programme: Yes (sold out!); Attendance: 209. REPORT TO FOLLOW.



R No.20: WebEd - Saturday 17th December 2022; **Sutton United** (v Haltemprice); East Riding County League Division Two; Kick-Off: 2pm; Venue: Bishop Burton College 3G, York Road, Bishop Burton, East Yorks, HU178QG; Result: 2-9; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 4.

THE ELEVEN GOALS OF CHRISTMAS!

This was definitely a case of *deja-vu*! Just like last week, I was all ready to set off for my footy fix, then, at the last minute, changed my mind to go elsewhere. Once again, I was heading over to the St Marys Academy in Cranbrook Avenue, Hull to watch Sculcoates Amateurs who this week were taking on Pocklington in an exciting top of the table HPL clash, reassuringly confirmed as ON according to their regularly updated and ever reliable *twitter* feed, but then spotted this game in the ERCL on the trusty *FA-Full Time* fixture lists. After a few minutes' deliberation and a quick check phone call, my new plan was to head over to the outskirts of Beverley instead. So, if there are any Scully fans reading this, please don't feel offended as I've got nothing against your club. I will get there one day. Honest. When Sutton United Football Club announced that it had switched its game from the grass pitch to the 3G facility at the Bishop Burton College, it seemed (bearing in mind it would be a new 'tick') like another hoppertunity too good to miss.

With the big freeze (brrrr...) covering large areas of the country I, like many other ground-chasers, discovered most fixtures had already been postponed by Friday evening, a sensible course of action in my opinion taking into account the players, spectators and fans, saving them from having a wasted journey in difficult conditions and lots of money in the process as well (what a Scrooge I hear you say - well it is nearly Christmas!). For the hardest of hoppers, however, this would provide a massive headache and much clenching of teeth, in trying to find a game that was still on, not only come Saturday morning but also by kick-off time. Luckily in this part of the world, apart from having the superb single span suspension bridge, the giant aquarium and a Championship football team (just!) to call our own, hoppers might be interested to learn that we have several clubs in both the

ERCL and the HPL that can boast to having artificial grass pitches at their grounds which is surely a good thing, especially at this time of year. Incredibly, by midday a grand total of six matches had managed to survive the icy conditions with ERCL games (all on 3/4/5G) being played at Hodgsons FC (Beverley Leisure Centre); North Ferriby U20 FC (switched to the South Hunsley School); Hull United Development FC (at the Steve Prescott Centre); Reckitts Reserves FC (Hull Uni Sports Hub); AAK S&S FC (Malert Lambert School) and, of course, Sutton United. Maybe it's not so grim up north, after all.

It's only a short journey to the village of Bishop Burton, taking less than half an hour's drive from *FGIF* Towers, and easily reached off the A1079 western Beverley bypass by taking the York Road (second exit) at the racecourse roundabout. Continue into the village, passing the duck pond on the left and the well-heeled Altisidora pub (named after a famous racehorse) opposite. Ignore the first entry sign for the college and after about a mile, take the next turning on the right, where the name of the college is clearly displayed in large lettering on the neat sandstone brick walls at either side of main entrance. Follow the driveway around to the right as far as the manned security gate/barrier where you will gain entry (via the intercom) to the car parks and pitches over to the right of the campus.

Bishop Burton College was established over 65 years ago, primarily offering courses to students intending to follow careers in agriculture and animal sciences. Set in over 100 acres of beautiful, landscaped woodland, the site has grown into a multi-million-pound state of the art educational facility for those aged post 16 years wanting to study for both apprenticeships and for full-time degrees in a wide range of areas including physical education and sports sciences. The department has its own Sport and Fitness buildings with specialist sports halls, a gym, fitness and dance studios as well as access to over ten grass pitches and a modern floodlit 3G multi-use games area which can be seen alongside the main car park when you arrive. Indeed, there is a helpful sign nearby which pinpoints on a map the exact locations of all the pitches on site, so you don't get lost (or try not to).

I had previously seen a game here during a temporary break in the COVID-19 pandemic (wave two) when Hull Saints entertained Gilberdyke Phoenix in an ERCL D2 fixture on this respective Saturday back in December 2020 which now seems a lifetime ago. The match was played on a grass pitch on the far side of the campus which, from memory, involved quite a trek from the car park. No worries about walking too far today as I manage to leave the car right next to the 3G facility which you'll be pleased to hear is spectator friendly with access inside the cage for all matches. Although there is no cover here at present, there are two recessed players' dug outs positioned behind the nearside touchline close to half-way. The signage on the fence also tells visitors that Hull City Academy (U18) FC use this, and the adjoining (caged) floodlit grass pitch, for its home matches in the u18 Professional Development League played on Saturday mornings, details of which can be found on the main Tigers' website.

Sutton United FC is a relatively new club plying its trade for only the second season in the ERCL and representing the area of Sutton-on-Hull, a sprawling

residential conurbation developed between the wars and located only about three miles to the North East of the city. The club achieved great success in its inaugural (2021-22) campaign in the competition, gaining promotion from the ERCL Division Three, as runners-up, behind Bridlington Spa. I was lucky enough to take in one of their matches when they lost narrowly by the only goal of the game in a top of the table clash with Little Driffield at Back Lane in February.

Today's match features two sides who in truth are struggling at the moment and find themselves in the lower half of the table. Sutton have not continued the momentum they managed to build upon last season having won only a couple of games so far. By comparison, visitors Haltemprice who have a two-point cushion over their opponents, are the league's second highest scorers and have shown much better away form, suffering only one defeat on the road since September. It's the first game either side has played for two weeks as a result of postponements seven days ago.

United are missing three or four players in their line up this afternoon and it clearly shows as they capitulate big time, to a strong Haltemprice side who rattle in six goals before the break. Despite this they make a fight of it (literally) in the second half pulling two goals back before conceding a further three in the last ten minutes to make it 2-9 at the final whistle - an incredible score-line. I was in some doubt as to whether the game would finish when a heavy tackle on one of the Sutton players led to a mass brawl in the middle of the pitch just before the hour mark. Apart from myself, two spectators (watching their sons) and the home keeper, everyone else was involved in a punch up. Credit must go to Goole-based referee Gary Hallett who just watched on calmly as the fracas unfolded, giving himself time to pick out the main protagonists before eventually brandishing two red cards reducing each side to ten players. So much for peace and goodwill at Christmas aye!

For the record Aaron Linford and Sean Rispin scored one apiece for the hosts with Sam Wharton (x4); Sean Hardbattle (x3); Chiedu Oraka and Sam Herrington firing in for the visitors. In fact, I managed to have a chat with Sean (via E-Mail) a few days later when he contacted me about the matchday photos from the game.

Apparently, it was his tackle that led to the second half melee - however, there seems to be no hard feelings (just bruises) between the players as they are good mates off the field. You never would have guessed that at the time! Although there was plenty of frost still covering the surrounding areas within the campus, the plastic pitch itself was unaffected by the cold conditions and the springy surface seemed perfectly playable throughout the game which sadly attracted only four spectators, my lowest head count so far this campaign. It really didn't matter though as I was just pleased to get to a game on a day when things could have been a lot different. If you get chance to go and watch Sutton United FC play at the Bishop Burton College, I would strongly recommend it to all hoppers and footy fans alike. It's certainly one worth keeping up your anorak sleeve for days like this when finding a game is tricky.

As another 3G pitch provides my last weather busting hop before Christmas, it just remains for me to wish a heartfelt season's greetings and joy to all readers and their families over the festive break. With plenty of football scheduled over the holiday period hopefully you might just get lucky and find a game that has beaten the big freeze. Until my next ramble, stay warm, eat, drink and have fun wherever you go! Mince pie and cream, anyone?

FGIF Match Rating: 3 FGIF Ground Rating: 3**



R No.19: WebEd - Saturday 10th December 2022; **Withernsea AFC** (v Skirlaugh); East Riding County League Division One; Kick-Off: 2pm; Venue: Withernsea High School 3G, Hull Road, Withernsea, East Yorks, HU192EQ; Result: 0-1; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 26.

A LAST-MINUTE TRIP TO THE SEASIDE

To be honest, by midday this game wasn't even on my hopping radar. It was only after confirming that my first-choice match, a Humber Premier League fixture between table-topping Sculcoates Amateurs and Cherry Burton, was still taking place on the 4G pitch at St Mary's Academy in Hull, that I spotted this one by chance, literally at the last minute.

Out of curiosity I was quickly scrolling through the other local games on the *FA Full-Time* website just to see how many were still going head. Indeed, most had already been postponed earlier in the week as a result of the ERCL giving member clubs the option to call off their matches ahead England playing France in the World Cup so that the players could watch it live on TV, with a few that still remained been called off last night due to the extreme cold weather snap, which had really taken hold in the North during last twenty-four hours.

Surprisingly, with only four games (out of twenty scheduled) actually surviving the weather, I noticed that ERCL side Withernsea had switched their Division One match to the Withernsea High School 3G on the other side of Hull Road. With the

Amateurs having another home fixture next week, it made more sense to save my hop for then and head out to the seaside this afternoon instead, ticking off what would be a new ground for me. A footy trip to the coast in these biting temperatures might sound like an act of sheer madness but for the obsessive ground collector, keen on such things, this was too good an 'hoppertunity' to miss!!

Having already taken in a match at Withernsea AFC last season (v Howden ERCFA Country Cup in mid-November), I had no trouble in finding the High School (for pupils aged 11-18 years from the Holderness catchment area) which is almost opposite their Hull Road playing fields ground and a hundred or so yards from the historic lighthouse, the town's famous landmark.

Thanks to club secretary and joint first team coach Tom Finn with whom I had spoken prior to setting off, his directions were spot on in finding the artificial grass pitch which is not immediately visible from the main road. After pulling into the school drive, take the first left turn following a bold direction sign marked 'Sports Hall' and this will bring you into a large car park at the end of which you'll see the side of the caged games area and the pitch. A narrow path then leads you alongside the sports centre on your right and up some steps towards the main 3G entrance gate in front, where there is free access/entry allowing spectators to watch the game around the entire pitch. It begs the question: Why can't all clubs be so accommodating? Although the sports hall building does tend to dominate the backdrop here, it is possible to see (from the far side of the pitch) the top half of the lighthouse which on a sunny day like this makes for a heart-warming and most welcome sight on the horizon.

On the pitch Withernsea AFC have not got off to the best of starts this season. Currently lying three places from the bottom of the table, they have only won once since gaining promotion (with Langtoft) back in May. By contrast, today's opponents, north Hull side Skirlaugh AFC (pronounced *Skerla* in these parts) have moved into the top half, having only lost twice this campaign and look to be in decent form after beating Langtoft 2-1 at home only seven days ago.

The game was, as expected, a close contest with the visitors prevailing, scoring the only goal of the match after just five minutes of play. It was young Rocky Makwata's deflected shot from the edge of the area which somehow managed to evade Ciaran Collins the outstretched home keeper who could only kneel and watch the ball roll into the empty net. The hosts looked to have equalised midway through the half when the ball found its way into the roof of the net (during a goalmouth scramble), but it was adjudged not to have crossed the line. Where is VAR when you need it? Come on ERCFA get it sorted! Despite their obvious consternation with the seemingly unfair decision, Withernsea continued to press for a goal fighting back strongly (too strongly at times) to reduce the deficit in what was a feisty second half of football. Credit must go to affable referee Tony Dyble for keeping his calm and also a lid on things when they were looking likely to boil over as tempers began to fray in the last ten minutes or so.

Although the match began in bright sunny conditions, the light deteriorated quickly during the second half (the floodlights weren't used) and by the end the air temperature felt more like sub-zero. A crowd counted around the mid-twenties mark managed to brave the weather which visitors to the seaside often describe as 'bracing' on a winter's day like this. I prefer to call it b****y freezing myself! During the game Tom, donned wisely in a robust quilted training suit and new club branded woolly bobble hat in green and yellow, told me that the football club now plays many of its games here on the school 3G pitch which they rent out at a cost of £90 per session, incidentally all funded by the players themselves. At these prices it seems wasteful not to use it! I was also pleased to hear that he would contact the *Holderness Gazette* in the coming days with a report and some photos (courtesy of *FGIF*) to cover their game in their regular County League round up feature. It's great to see that some newspapers still report on grassroots football in their area rather than concentrating on just the bigger clubs. Cheers for that Tom!

For travellers looking to combine a trip to the seaside with a bit of hopping I would strongly advise a trip to Withernsea on the East Yorkshire coast. Although it was a bit too cold for me to go for a paddle or do some skinny-dipping (what a wimp!), I did enjoy partaking in a cracking pattie and chips with scraps (from the superb Lifeboat chip shop at the end of Hull Road). It been a wonderful afternoon's entertainment at a really friendly, welcoming club. If you get the chance to watch Withernsea AFC play a game on grass or plastic, just go for it, but maybe when it's a bit warmer!!

FGIF Match Rating: 3* *FGIF* Ground Rating: 3*



R No.18: WebEd - Saturday 3rd December 2022; **Barmby Moor** (v Marton Abbey); York Football League Division Four; Kick-Off: 2pm; Venue: Barmby Moor PF, Flat Lane, Barmby Moor, Pocklington, East Yorks, YO422EG; Result: 7-0; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 25.

BRRRRACING BARMBY...

Not wanting to travel too far this afternoon, I'm heading up to Pocklington for my footy fix, which is only a short drive, about thirty miles from *FGIF* HQ. It gives me an 'hoppertunity to tick off another ground in the York Football League. To be honest with you, I've still some way to go before uncorking the proverbial 'champagne bottle' having so far attended twenty-four out of the fifty-four clubs currently competing across all five divisions. On a bright sunny afternoon, it also makes a welcome break to get out into the fresh air for a bit and watch some live football in between all the scheduled televised World Cup coverage from Qatar.

Founded in the early 1920's, Barmby Moor Football Club is one of a small handful of clubs from East Yorkshire who currently ply their trade in the York Football League. Indeed, neighbouring villages and fellow rivals Wilberfoss, Stamford Bridge and Elvington Harriers are all within a five-mile radius of this former market town situated off the main A1079 which connects Market Weighton to York.

Even with the assistance of my trusty SatNav Serena, the ground itself is not that easy to find as I soon discovered. Football neutrals should follow the B1246 (last exit) through the village before taking a sharp left turn down the extremely narrow Flat Lane - it's immediately opposite St Catherines's Church (a grade II listed building) on the junction of Main Street and Hall Spout which provides a most useful landmark. The hand painted road name sign is affixed to the side of a residential building but is so high up it is not immediately visible as you approach. Drivers should beware - you will really need to slow up as this junction is almost like coming around a blind corner with hidden traffic approaching! I was most grateful to the careful lady owner of a Land Rover for pulling to the side of the road and allowing me to get past. The cynic in me felt that she was more worried about getting her shiny new vehicle scratched than doing me a favour! Phew! From here continue around a couple of tight bends before passing the Barmby Moor CofE Primary School where the road then becomes an unmade bumpy 'suspension testing' track for the last hundred or so yards. The ground ahead is visible to the left and with a car parking space at a premium, its best to pull up on the grass verge outside the field.

The football club has played here since the mid 1970's when land at their old site on Vicarage Field was used to build a school along St Helens Square (back down the lane). It now shares its facilities with the local cricket team as you can see from the wonderful array of pitch covers, site screens and groundsman's (or should that be grounds person?) equipment held in a storage container, dotted around the perimeter of the enclosed field. It's a tidy little set up for this level with a modern changing pavilion complete with veranda situated in the far corner. A couple of large floodlights attached to the roof allows players the chance to train in the evening or during the winter months. A number of bench seats are set out in front but are not really suitable for watching football as the main pitch is marked out a couple of hundred yards away on the far (left) hand side of the field where a tall, manicured hedge spans the entire length of the touchline. Here, a smart, eye-catching breeze block stand painted in green with corrugated roof and some

seating, doubles as a shared dug out for players and spectators alike, offering cover for about thirty or so people. A smart un-painted metal post and rail fence is also found in situ erected in two sections either side of the stand. Considering the heavy downpour which had fallen in these parts at midday, the pitch looked in pretty good nick with no sign of standing water, a feature of the local roads that I had driven along to get here. You can also appreciate the rural surroundings and rolling hills of the neighbouring East Yorkshire Wolds which appear in the distance beyond the adjoining fields. If you get chance, spare a moment to catch a glimpse of the splendid St Catherines Church, also visible on the horizon.

Today's game saw the visit of Marton Abbey to the Barmby Moor playing fields. The hosts, currently joint top (with Knottingley Albion and York Shamrocks), looked favourites, on paper at least, to beat their mid table opponents. However, to be fair the visitors looked a half decent side when I saw them in York Junior Cup action only a few weeks ago when they beat Hamilton Panthers (on penalties) at Little Knavesmire.

The league table doesn't lie, does it? The high-flying hosts were simply too good for their lacklustre opponents from Selby this afternoon: two goals up inside ten minutes, establishing a six-nil lead by the break, and adding a seventh midway through the second half, Barmby Moor ran out comfortable winners. They deservedly earned their three points, taking them to joint second behind Knottingley (who had beaten Selby Olympia 5-1 coincidentally in a game I had considered attending when I drew up my short list a few days ago). It could have been more had it not been for the heroics of the Abbey stand-in keeper Joe Richardson who baled out his defenders on several occasions particularly in the second half. For the record it was Moor's twin strike force of Jack Creaser and Danny Atkinson who led the scoring charts each grabbing themselves a hat-trick with Curtis Barker scoring from the penalty spot. As the final whistle sounded and the home celebrations began, it was sad to see the Marton skipper publicly berating his players at pitch-side. Surely it doesn't help to point the finger and yell at a group of dejected players and tell them how badly they had performed at the end of a match - they know that already and surely this really doesn't help!! On a more positive note, credit must go to referee Mel Deighton who, now in his seventies and with over thirty years of experience, controlled the game superbly with his warm wit. During a stoppage in the game, he was heard replying to one of visiting players who had just been clattered: 'we don't want hear anymore about it, thank you John Motson!' I'm not sure the youngster will appreciate his retort as much as I did.

The match played in a mixture bright sunshine and showers which afforded some contrasting and picturesque skylines throughout, was attended by just over twenty spectators, most of whom stood close to or underneath the confines of the stand, particularly towards the end when the temperature dropped quite significantly. It was absolutely freezing. I managed to have a brief chat with some of the older fans who told me how the club almost folded a few seasons back when lack of personnel threatened its existence. Luckily it was saved thanks to former

player Paul Travers who encouraged the club to develop younger players and create a youth team, something that has since paid off. Indeed, there are now several junior sides playing in local football, using pitches on the adjoining field, helping to maintain a proud tradition of representing the village team. Visitors here will be forgiven for occasionally taking their eye off the ball during matches as they marvel at the number of planes passing overhead from the nearby Pocklington Gliding Club. It's certainly a wonderful sight watching the motorless machines twist and turn high up in the sky. How do they do it?

It had been another enjoyable hop and I would recommend a visit to Barmby Football Club to all fellow travellers. You will certainly receive a friendly welcome when you take in one of their games. By the end of the afternoon, it was great to get back home and feel the warmth again. In fact, with clear roads, I got back earlier enough to watch the final stages of the first knockout game between Netherlands and USA on TV. It does make me smile when I see the fans, all dressed in T-shirts and shorts, cheering on their teams inside a large, air-conditioned stadium. By contrast, my wife Frances reminded me that I was still sitting in my woolly hat, thermal gloves and anorak!! The joys of winter hopping in Yorkshire continue. Enjoy your travels and remember to keep wrapped up...

FGIF Match Rating: 3 FGIF Ground Rating: 3**



R No.17: WebEd - Saturday 26th November 2022; **Bishopthorpe White Rose** (v Hemingbrough United); York Football League Division One; Kick-Off: 2.13pm; Venue: White Rose Park, Tadcaster Road, Dringhouses, York, North Yorks, YO232UB; Result: 1-2; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 7.

ON THE RIGHT PATH

Travellers with a keen interest in the York Football League may be interested to learn that Bishopthorpe White Rose Football Club has been playing matches at its

new White Rose Park for just over a year now. Having passed the ground only a few weeks back on my way home from a hop to Little Knavesmire, I was suddenly filled with enthusiasm as I cast a fleeting glimpse over this verdant pasture set down in a hollow below road level. Like any avid ground collector, I knew that a visit was going to be on the hopping cards, sooner rather than later.

The ground is located close to the Askham Bar Park and Ride, a busy intersection linking the A64 southern dual carriageway and A1096 Tadcaster Road. On a day when the traffic around the city was heaving (isn't it always?), I was really lucky to get my footy fix this afternoon. Leaving *FGIF* HQ with plenty of time to spare I was making pretty good time until reaching the A19 at Crockey Hill where a two-mile tailback leading up to the A64 roundabout slowed my progress. As I crawled up to the busy junction, I still had another three miles to travel before reaching my destination. By now there was only twenty minutes to kick-off. Thankfully the traffic congestion eased and as I finally pulled off the by-pass it was just a case of finding the ground. By sheer coincidence the last set of traffic lights had just turned to show red, bringing me to a halt. However, this gave me just enough time to spot a large navy-blue road sign directing travelling spectators for BWR FC to the public Park and Ride where the club has its own free dedicated car parking spaces (in zone 7), allocated at one end of the site. Had I not stopped at the lights I'm sure I would have gone hurtling past and missed the sign altogether! With only fifteen minutes to spare, I needed to use all my rudimentary orienteering knowledge and skills in finding the ground from here.

Armed with camera bag, rucksack and folding chair, I hastily crossed the Park and Ride which by now was literally packed with cars and shoppers queueing for the buses heading towards the city centre retail stores. At this point I spotted another couple of familiar navy-blue direction signs marked with large arrows affixed to the fence pointing the way. They simply read: '*BWR FC Pitches*' which was just the info I needed. I quickly heeded their advice which led me from the roadside down a steep embankment, through a short tunnel (which I later discovered was called The London Road Underpass) and along a narrow track surrounded by bushes and trees. Still filled with some doubt, I wondered where I was heading as this surely had to be oddest and longest route (at least five hundred metres) that I had taken to reach a football ground?! In hindsight I needn't have panicked though as the pitches soon came into view on the right...phew!

Founded in May 1999 BWR FC has been members of the York Football League for over twenty years. Apart from catering for open age football (first team and reserves), the club now has a thriving youth section and is one of the largest junior football clubs in Yorkshire with approximately five hundred players, representing some thirty teams including those for boys and girls as well as two disability sides, aged between 8 and 19, in total. It was also named by the Yorkshire and North East Region FA as the Charter Standard Club of the Year for 2017. Realising the club's potential and not having adequate facilities at their modest Ferry Lane recreation ground in the village (only a couple of miles from here), a decision was made to develop their own purpose-built venue to accommodate training, matches and social gatherings, in other words create a focal point for the community (instead of

having to use five different sites within the catchment area which had hitherto been the case).

The new facility has achieved this. Originally an area of derelict wasteland and open fields, the vast White Rose Park site was opened just over a year ago in Autumn 2021, having been developed for the club with significant support from the Football Foundation, City of York Council and the football club itself through fund raising events. It is found in a neat, landscaped setting bordered on all sides by wooden fences, hedges and trees with an environmental pond area at the furthest point. At an estimated cost of over £1m, it comprises of eight football pitches all of which are highlighted on a map/legend board visible inside the entrance - one of the pitches is set on a raised plateau, no doubt created after the land was excavated and levelled during the building phase. I am led to believe that the grass consists of a specialist mixture of sports turf and soil which is costly to maintain and there are strict rules which remind players and spectators to avoid goal mouths when warming up or attempting to take a quick short cut across them!

A smart, modern clubhouse/pavilion stands just inside the entrance. Made from a combination of brick and cedarwood, it houses several changing rooms for both players and officials - a white board inside the foyer details the allocations on matchday. Catering facilities are provided by a café area located at one end of the pavilion which helps to generate a modest income stream and assists with necessary site maintenance (sadly, it was closed today) with a storage area for grounds' equipment at the other. There are several picnic benches arranged on a patio area outside, all close enough to watch the game from which today took place on pitch 2 (the main one nearest the pavilion).

Despite my hesitations about missing the kick-off, I noticed upon arrival that the referee hadn't yet arrived, apparently according to club officials, he had taken a wrong turning off the A64 and it would be at least another ten minutes wait before he got here. Thankfully he did and the match started promptly at 2.13pm (what would *FGIF* supremo and stopwatch stickler Keith Aslan have made of such tardiness?). Today's game featured two sides currently sitting in mid-table and separated by only a couple of points with Selby-based Hemingbrough having the slight edge. As expected, the match turned out to be a tightly contested affair with the visitors claiming the honours with a 2-1 win, all the goals coming inside the first half. Hemingbrough opened the scoring when Jamie Pickles (21) prodded the ball home from close range after the hosts had failed to defend a corner from the left. Within ten minutes the scores were level as Jack Heath (33) beat his marker at the near post to slot home from a tight angle. United restored their lead moments before the break as Aidan Butler (42) found himself with plenty of time and space to turn, steady himself and tap the ball into the empty net. In fact, he had so much time he could have tied his laces in the process. Despite plenty of pressure on their goal late on, Hemingbrough managed to hang onto their slender league and claim victory as well as all three points.

The game played on what was a soft, well grassed surface in bright but increasingly chilly conditions, attracted only a handful of fans to White Rose Park,

my lowest attendance counted (it didn't take long) so far in this campaign. I wonder if the grand opening of 'Santa's Wonderland' just up the road had anything to do with it?! The constant background 'white noise' humming sound of lorries and cars which could be seen passing on the adjacent flyover was slightly distracting but you do get used to it. During the match I got chatting to one of the visiting coaches who, like me, couldn't believe that there wasn't any dedicated car parking space actually at the ground. Considering the large amount of land space on site, he did have a point. Surely thirty or so cars wouldn't take up much room to accommodate everyone that had turned up at White Rose Park this afternoon. Apparently building a link relief road from the by-pass to the site would have proved too difficult and costly. Being granted the land was one thing, dictating the plans and terms was another ball game (pardon the pun!). C'est la Vie!

It had been another enjoyable afternoon's entertainment for this happy ground collecting neutral. I was back home within the hour and just in time to watch some more live World Cup action on the TV. Despite all the (justifiable) hype over human rights issues etc in Qatar, I am really getting into the football competition now it's finally started. Should I feel guilty in saying that?

It goes without saying that a visit to the superb White Rose Park home of Bishopthorpe White Rose Football Club comes highly recommended. Bearing in mind my tribulations in getting there this afternoon, I would urge all hoppers and footy fans alike to set off a bit earlier and give yourself plenty of time to park up and walk to the ground. The clues are there, you've just got to follow the arrows!!

FGIF Match Rating: 3 FGIF Ground Rating: 4**



R No.16: *WebEd* - Saturday 19th November 2022; **Langtoft AFC** (v AFC North); East Riding County League Division One; Kick-Off: 2pm; Venue: Rudston PF, Burton Fleming Road, Rudston, Driffield, East Yorks, YO254UG; Result: 4-2; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 17.

JUST FOR THE RECORD

I'll start my ramble off this week with a bit of a quiz question. What is a monolith? Never heard of it? No, I didn't think so. Neither had I. It's a tough one. I suppose if you hazard a guess then you might think it has something to do with the prehistoric age perhaps, and in truth, you wouldn't be far out. So, if you're wondering what all this has got to do with my footy fix this afternoon, let's put some meat on the bones (pardon the pun), for you.

A few weeks ago, I made an aborted trip up to the Yorkshire Wolds to take in a game between Langtoft and Withernsea which was sadly, unbeknown to me, called off at the last minute by the non-travelling visitors (see *R No.11* below for more). Today I'm making amends for this by returning to the village, located midway between Driffield and Bridlington, to tick off the ground. It's a familiar route and with clear roads, makes for a pleasant, stress-free journey. Reassuringly, as I drive up to the recreation ground on Burton Fleming Road, I notice that both sets of players are already out on the field going through their respective warm-up routines. With a good forty minutes still to go before kick-off I head back to the village crossroads and make my way to All Saints Church which is only half a mile away. Like many travellers, I like to find out a bit more about a place and see what else there is to do when making a fleeting visit, apart from taking in the football ground, time permitting of course. Thanks to *Wikipedia* I have done my homework in the days leading up to the game and have discovered that the tiny village of Rudston does have a very special place in history.

The churchyard is in fact home to what is known as the Rudston Monolith. At over twenty-five feet (7.6m), it is the tallest megalith (single standing stone) in the United Kingdom. Located alongside several head stones and only a few metres from the church itself, the impressive monolith is fashioned from gritstone. Having a flat appearance, it currently measures almost six feet across and just over three feet thick, weighing in at a mighty forty tonnes. That's pretty big then. Protected by a metal cap made of lead at the top, it is thought that part of the stone seems to have broken off, in which case its true height would have to be nearer twenty-eight feet or 8.5m. After it was erected surveyors believe that its depth down into the ground may be as much as its height.

Archaeologists date the stone back to the Neolithic or Early Bronze Age suggesting a time somewhere around 1600 BC, which tallies to when the greatest megalith erecting activity took place. An inscription at the base of the stone reads:

'This monolith standing at almost 26 feet above ground level was hewn and brought here in the late Neolithic period possibly circa 2000 BC. It consists of a slab of moor grit conglomerate as found in a widespread area of the Cleveland Hills inland of Whitby'.

Historians also believe that the stone was dragged here from neighbouring Cayton or Cornelian Bay almost fifteen miles away on the outskirts of Scarborough. There is a smaller gritstone in the nearby cemetery, along with a slab cyst grave. An oft-quoted legend recounts how the Devil may have once thrown the stone at the church and missed! The Norman church was almost certainly intentionally built on a site already considered sacred, a practice common through the country - indeed the name of Rudston comes from the Old English "*Rood-stane*", meaning "cross-stone", implying that a stone already venerated was adapted for Christian purposes. So, there you go, that answers the quiz question - everything you wanted to know about monoliths. Photos of the stone can also be seen in the album gallery covering the game. So, after snapping away with the camera from several different angles, I decided to make my way back to the ground where it's time to focus on the football (not another pun!).

Langtoft Football Club plays its games at the Rudston Playing Fields located off the Burton Fleming Road and NOT in the village of Langtoft (about seven or so miles away) from where they moved at the turn of the millennium. It was a good decision as the club could take advantage of the much-improved facilities, including a better pitch as the one they had been using in the village was not up to the required standard. The club shares the self-enclosed site with the local cricket, bowls and tennis teams to become a real sporting hub in recent years. It's not easy to find the entrance if you are driving as access to the ground is on foot with players, coaches and spectators having to walk across a small footbridge (over a stream) in one corner of the field. Car parking is allowed along the grass verge opposite instead.

All the facilities here are found along one side of the field. To the immediate left (nearest to the road) is a bowling green which is completely enclosed by a wooden

panelled fence. Alongside is a smart whitewashed pavilion with gabled roof which was opened in May 1984 with assistance from Humberside Leisure Services, East Yorkshire Borough Council, the Sports Council and Rudston Parish Council for the use of local sports clubs. This naturally provides changing accommodation and has two small, function rooms with plenty of framed memorabilia (mostly cricket-related) displayed on the interior walls. A small hut decked out in the same colour scheme and used for storing grounds equipment stands adjacent. At present a cricket sightscreen and a couple of portable pitch cover units are parked up nearby waiting for the new season to start once again in Spring. In the far corner (over to the right) is a single hard concrete surfaced tennis court laid out inside a mesh cage. The main un-ropeed football pitch is marked out on the far side of the field beyond the cricket square and runs parallel to the road. As expected, there are no dug outs or any spectator cover at pitch-side. Visitors will appreciate that this is quite an open, rustic location with views over the gently rolling Yorkshire Wolds stretching out into the distance beyond the far touchline. Look out too for the spire and ornate clock from All Saints Church appearing over the treetops behind the goal at the far end.

After making a cracking start to the season, the hosts currently sit in second place in the league table behind Sculcoates Academy, who by comparison have played more matches to date. Today's game sees the visit of Bransholme-based AFC North to the Rudston Playing Fields. By coincidence I had already seen them on my travels only a couple of weeks ago when they went down 5-4 in a thrilling match played at Roos (their last game ahead of today). For the record, the hosts maintain their unbeaten record with a comfortable 4-2 victory (2-2 at the break) in what turns out to be a rather bad tempered and feisty contest, particularly in the second half when the visitors (after going behind) are reduced to nine men after receiving two red cards for dangerous play. Sadly, it spoiled what had been, up to that point, a really absorbing and entertaining end to end spectacle. Special mention must go to referee Lee Baker for asserting his authority at a time in the game when it really was required the most. Without his expert and much needed intervention. I did fear that the game would have bitten the dust prematurely.

The match played on a well grassed pitch in sunny but very cold conditions attracted almost twenty spectators. I was lucky enough to have a quick chat with the home gaffer Russ McDonald who told me during a break in play that his team had adapted well to life in Division One (the second tier of ERCL football) after achieving great success last season by 'doing the double' - winning both the Second Division title (losing only two games all campaign) and lifting the ERCL Junior Cup (beating Hull United Seniors Development 4-2 in the final played at Queensgate). I was also indebted to his son Jack, the club's social media officer, for posting some of album photos onto the club's *Facebook* and *twitter* accounts.

It had been a superb hop in what is a lovely part of the East Riding of Yorkshire. I can thoroughly recommend a visit to the Rudston Playing Fields, home of Langtoft Football Club to all footy travellers and fans alike. I could now put my hopping records in order and sleep more easily at night after finally managing to tick off

the ground. Above all, it was also rewarding to find out more about the Rudston Monolith, something I had, up until a few days ago, never even heard of. It's true what they say, you do learn something every day, even at my age. Have fun wherever you go...

FGIF Match Rating: 2 FGIF Ground Rating: 2* FGIF Monolith Rating: 5**



R No.15: *WebEd* - Saturday 12th November 2022; **Hallam** (v Bury AFC); FA Vase Round 2; Kick-Off: 3pm; Venue: Sandygate, Sandygate Road, Crosspool, Sheffield, South Yorks, S105SE; Result: 1-1 (1-4p); Admission: £5; Programme: 28pp, £2; Attendance: 660. REPORT TO FOLLOW.

FGIF Match Rating: 5 FGIF Ground Rating: 5**



R No.14: *WebEd* - Saturday 5th November 2022; **Roos** (v AFC North); East Riding County League Division One; Kick-Off: 2pm; Venue: Roos PF, Main Street, Roos, Hull, East Yorks, HU120HB; Result: 5-4; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 8.

EVERY CLOUD AND ALL THAT...

Local history tells us that Roos derives its name from the *de Ros* family, born of Anglo-Saxon heritage, who lived as barons and lords in and around the area during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Also, according to popular culture it is said that some inspiration for JRR Tolkien's book *The Lord of The Rings* came when the author and his wife once visited a neighbouring wood. It was the discovery of some foul smelling and poisonous hemlock that helped to create a romantic verse used in the novel. Now there's something I bet you didn't know...

With a population of no more than two thousand, Roos has to be one of the smallest villages in East Yorkshire to host county league football. Located on the plain of Holderness about three miles inland from the seaside town of Withernsea (and ten miles from Hull), the village boasts a church (All Saints is grade I listed), two pubs and a primary school, and that's about it.

Joint first team coach Lee Sennett, who also works as the chief sports editor for the *Holderness Gazette*, told me that the club was first formed back in 1946 playing matches in local football. In more recent times Roos FC has gradually worked its way through the ERCL pyramid moving from Division Four back in 2008-09, up to Division One where it has remained over the last five seasons. Some of its greatest success came in 2014-15 when they finished as runners-up (to Hutton Cranswick) in Division Three and then three years later in 2017-18, when they were beaten 3-2 by Stamford Bridge, in the East Riding Junior Country Cup Final played at the Roy West Centre in Inglemire Lane. An array of framed team photos and press cuttings detailing a potted history of the football club can be found affixed to the walls of the Black Horse public house which doubles up as the post-match HQ and is within staggering distance (or an easy two-minute walk if you prefer a softer drink) of their modest recreation ground along Main Street.

After first dropping my daughter Steph in the city, I re-joined along the A63 coming off at Hedon on the outskirts of Hull before taking Fieldend Road towards Burton Pidsea and then continuing on to Roos. It's a relatively short journey but can be slow moving once you're out in the sticks, taking roughly just over forty minutes to complete. Although it is not immediately visible from the road, the playing field is well signed with a large white welcome board edited with black lettering, partially obscured behind a hedge, being displayed at the entrance. An adjacent red (not cream, as is the norm in this part of the world) phone box also provides a useful landmark if you need one. A long straight cinder-based driveway leads you down to the playing field and car park which are found at the end. Surrounded by open fields (with several wind turbines in situ) on three sides and a mini-play park at the far end, a combination of low fences and hedges border its perimeter to give a nice, enclosed feel about the place. As you can imagine, facilities here are basic but homely with a brick-built pavilion providing essential changing accommodation for players and officials. Although, as you would expect at this level, there are no proper spectator facilities apart from a single memorial bench, the club does have access to two modern wooden framed Perspex dug outs, placed facing each other at either side of the half-way line. The main un-roped pitch is marked out towards the far end of the field, some fifty yards from the pavilion.

Today's game saw the visit of Bransholme-based AFC North to the Roos playing field in what was by and large a mid-table encounter. A quick glimpse of the current league table shown on the informative *FA-Full Time* before setting out, revealed that both sides had won two games apiece (with the visitors two points better off) so far this season, which suggested to the enthusiastic hopping neutral that a close, open game of football was likely to be the order of the day.

I wasn't wrong either as this turned out to be an absolute (nine goal) thriller of a game despite the foul weather conditions which contributed towards make things difficult at times. At first it didn't seem that such an outcome was possible as the hosts, who took their chances (all against the run of play) soon established a comfortable well-earned lead. Dylan Harman (13) struck first with a close-range header before Matt Dixon (30) drilled the ball home from the edge of the box. Danny-Uscroft Mould (39) then scored from the penalty spot to make it a resounding 3-0 score-line. The visitors managed to reduce arrears seconds before half-time when Ellis Edmonds (44) beat his marker, turned and fired the ball past keeper Daniel Collinson from a tight angle at the back post.

Incredibly a resurgent AFC North side (no doubt the result of a firm ear-bashing from the gaffer) somehow managed to turn the game around, making it 3-3 before the hour mark. Edmonds (51) added his second, a long-range effort before Harry Parsons (56) toe poked the ball home from six yards out. It was a terrific fight back. The visitors could have taken the lead for the first time in the game after accomplished referee Gary Tindal awarded them a penalty for clumsy foul just inside the area. However, Collinson dived the right way and easily saved Parson's (58) tame spot kick. Within a minute the hosts were back in front again after

Robert Eldon-Smith (61) beat the offside trap to make it 4-3. But it wasn't over just yet (sounds like something the famous Kenneth Wolstenholme would have once said in commentary - I'm really showing my age here) and with just five minutes left on the stopwatch, there was still more excitement to come. The hosts added a fifth through Uscroft-Mould (84) who completed his brace, side footing the ball past James Grayson. Roos looked to have won it before North went back down the other end and scored when Jordan Smith (88) headed home from close range, two minutes from time. It was a breathless, frantic finale as the visitors looked to have levelled matters only for Smith to watch his quick-fire shot re-bounce off the outside of the post. What a difference ten centimetres of wood can make to a game! Roos managed to hang on for the victory, one they will remember for some time to come, that's for sure. To rub a bit more salt into the wounds, the result also lifted them above their East Hull opponents in the Division One table. It had been a superb afternoon's entertainment and a great advert for grassroots footy - even in the rain!

The match, played for the most part in unpleasant squally showers and a stiff biting breeze, sadly attracted only a handful of spectators - incidentally my lowest attendance recorded so far this campaign. For the avid snapper it certainly hadn't been the best conditions for taking photos either, especially as the light, which faded quickly towards the end, was pretty poor throughout a dull, overcast afternoon. At times, my attention was diverted towards an adjoining field behind the goal where a young couple were training their border collie as it weaved its way through, up and over a varying series of obstacles - this was true dedication (or sheer madness) considering the horrid conditions at the time. Although I was invited to go for a drink afterwards, I declined, preferring to get out of my soaking layers and head straight back to *FGIF* HQ in the relative warmth of the car. Cheers for the hospitality though fellas.

The thought of standing alongside an un-roped pitch in the middle of a murky, wet playing field certainly didn't sound that appealing before I set off at midday. Even for a seasoned hopper. However, I stuck with it, got lucky and really enjoyed my visit to Roos Football Club this afternoon. The facilities may be modest, in fact very basic and a million miles from anything resembling the world of professional football, but I received a lovely warm welcome, saw a belter of a game with plenty of goals thrown in for good measure. This was definitely grassroots at its best and a great advert for county league football. Bring it on!

FGIF Match Rating: 5* *FGIF* Ground Rating: 1*



R No.13: WebEd - Saturday 29th October 2022; **Hamilton Panthers** (v Marton Abbey); York FA Junior Cup; Kick-Off: 2pm; Venue: Little Knavesmire Sports Pavilion, Knavesmire Road, York, North Yorks, YO231FA; Result: 0-0 (4-5 pens); Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 22.

A CLUB TO BE PROUD OF

After the disappointment of missing out on a game here last month, I'm pleased to say that it was second time lucky after my trip to Little Knavesmire proved highly successful today. It's always satisfying to finally tick off a ground when your previous plans have been scuppered by either a postponement or a 'no show' as I found out to my peril when the visitors failed to turn up after forfeiting the game in September (see *RR No.8* below for more details).

Hamilton Panthers Football Club was first established over thirty years ago back in 1988 when a couple of regulars at the Puss in Boots pub in Holgate decided to form a new football club set up primarily for their children and all the other youngsters living in the area. It was through the tireless efforts of founders Phil Sanderson and Barry Casterton who first got the ball rolling (pardon the pun) in making their dream a reality. A name was chosen to reflect the pub and its location in *Hamilton Drive* with the *Panther* seen as more suitable title for a football team than using the word puss!

The club played its games using pitches on the Little Knavesmire alongside York Racecourse, conveniently located only a mile or so from the Puss in Boots pub. The former clubhouse and changing pavilion were part of some old, dilapidated buildings belonging to the Royal Observatory Corp, dating back to the 1940's. I have reason to believe that the basement was also used as an air raid shelter during the war effort. With the annual club membership rapidly growing in size a successful application was made to York City council to improve the facilities so they would be more fit for purpose. Work began in 2013 to replace the old building with a new state of the art pavilion including four modern changing rooms; two referee's rooms as well as a storage space for ground equipment; a club room and a spacious café. The overall cost of the new community facility was estimated at £600,000 with the council contributing £100,000 with further funding shared by the Football Foundation, Premier League and FA Facilities Fund, Sport England and

other interested parties from within the local area. In addition, work to improve the drainage and levelling of the surrounding pitches was also undertaken.

Fast forward to the present day and the club, which has since gained FA Charter status, has gone from strength to strength now fielding no fewer than twenty teams, ranging from Under 6's up to Under 19's and Seniors (details of which can be found on the club's excellent website). The stats really do speak for themselves with an estimated 4000 people, including children from nearly thirty schools in the city, having played for Hamilton Panthers FC over the years, making it a truly inclusive project.

Today the pavilion is not only used by the club's many football teams but also acts as a larger hub with facilities open to local groups such as the York Schools X-Country runners, York Carers and York NHS as well as the general public. In terms of sustainability the use of the café and multi-use function space provides the club with a modest income stream which subsidises running of the club and assistance with maintenance costs. From first impressions the building, which has won many prestigious design awards, is not only eye-catching but blends in well with the surrounding landscape. Set at an elevated level, it is clad with cedar panelling and has large windows to let in plenty of light. Signage referring to the club's name can be seen on the outer walls - check out the large silver block lettering along the side (facing the road). Inside it is clean, bright and roomy, and neatly finished off in the club's colours. It's obviously something the community can be justifiably proud of. I was well impressed and can say it is one of the best set ups that I have seen in the YFL so far.

The new sports pavilion is easily accessed from the main Tadcaster Road and is about a mile from York city centre. It is a stone's throw (well, about five hundred yards) from the main grandstand at the adjacent York Racecourse and is clearly visible beyond the field at the far end of the road. The site occupies a large green space with pitches marked out for both football and cricket (used by Ovington CC) and is bordered by some very expensive-looking Victorian properties off Albermarle Road. In the distance it also possible to pick out some more modern apartments with a large ornate clock in situ; known locally as The Residence, this iconic grade II listed building was once the site of Terry's factory, maintaining the city's proud heritage in the chocolate making industry.

As I arrive for today's game it is refreshing to see both teams already out on the playing field, warming up ahead of this afternoon's cup tie. Club official Dave Morris is also busy trying to clear a thick a swathe of leaves which have recently fallen onto the pitch from a long belt of trees along the adjacent Knavesmire Road. His cordless blower works well to reveal most of the pitch markings before the match starts but it still looks a difficult task to complete the job fully at this time of year.

It is going to be an interesting cup tie with both sides going well in their respect divisions of the York Football League and I can't wait for the action to start. On paper the Panthers (from Division Three) may have a slight edge over their

opponents Marton Abbey (Division Four), but it's a close call. As expected, the contest is a tight one with both sides creating plenty of chances at either end. Although the hosts have most of the possession, it's Marton who look more dangerous on the counter-attack. As the players begin to tire and wilt on what is a large strength-sapping playing area neither side look likely to break the deadlock as the game nears its conclusion; unsurprisingly then the tie ends goalless at ninety minutes.

Like many competitions these days extra time is (thankfully) not deemed necessary - going straight into a penalty shoot-out is a much better way of deciding a winner, in my humble opinion. Thankyou York FA! With both sides scoring their first four spot-kicks (all terrific shots by the way), the Panthers George Simpson guesses the right way to save the fifth and gives his side the edge. However, young referee Matthew Huffer, who has had a splendid game so far, notices rightly that the keeper has moved off his line too soon and immediately calls for the kick to be re-taken. It is converted now giving the visitors an advantage. Under pressure Ben Thornton needs to keep his side in the tie but unfortunately nerves get the better of him as he fires the ball straight at the crossbar; the Marton players can't hide their excitement as they celebrate their victory, and with it, a place in the next round!! It had certainly been nail-biting stuff for those looking on from pitch-side in the fading autumn light.

The game played in mainly dull and overcast conditions attracted just over twenty spectators, slightly disappointing really and the lowest attendance I have been part of on my hopping travels so far this season. A range of hot drinks and food were available from the kitchen area in the pavilion throughout the afternoon. It was also lovely to meet Sally Sanderson, mother of club co-founder Phil, who was keen to show me Hamilton, a sturdy (and life-like) replica model of a black panther, standing proudly on display on one of the tables, as well as some of the trophies won by the club in recent times. Top notch stuff!

This had been a superb afternoon's entertainment. A visit to Hamilton Panthers FC and the Knavesmire Sports Pavilion is highly recommended to all footy travellers. There's no doubt that you will receive a lovely warm welcome when you come here for a game. It was also rewarding to finally get the ground ticked off and tame that Hamilton beast! The joys of hopping have definitely returned...have fun wherever you go...

FGIF Match Rating: 3 FGIF Ground Rating: 4**



R No.12: WebEd - Saturday 22nd October 2022; **Campion** (v Bacup Borough); FA Vase Round 1; Kick-Off: 3pm; Venue: The Players Car Stadium at Manningham Mills Sports & Community Association, Scotchman Road, Bradford, West Yorks, BD95DD; Result: 1-3; Admission: £5; Programme: 12pp, £1; Attendance: 105.

IT'S THE MAGIC OF THE VASE

The club was first established by Michael Mahoney in 1963, with players coming from the St Edmund Campion Youth Club in Bradford. In 1975 they joined Division Four of the Bradford Sunday League, and the following season also entered a team into the Red Triangle League, a local Saturday League. By 1979 they had reached the league's Premier Division, finishing as runners-up and winning the Premier Division Cup in 1979-80.

In 1981 Campion moved up to the (now defunct) West Riding County Amateur League. Although financial difficulties led to them dropping back into the Red Triangle League for the 1985-86 season, the club returned to the West Riding County Amateur League for the 1986-87 season. In 1989-90 the club were Division Two champions, also winning the divisional cup. They went on to win Division One and the divisional cup in 1992-93, earning promotion to the Premier Division. Campion won the Premier Division Cup in 2003-04, and then three times in succession between 2005-06 and 2007-08.

In 2015-16 the club made its first successful application to join Division One of the Northern Counties East League, which was achieved after finishing in third place of the WRCAL. They remained in the NCEL (Division One) for the next five seasons - up until the end of the COVID-19 affected 2020-21 campaign when, after finishing runners-up (with only eleven matches being played), the club was transferred to Division One North of the North West Counties League. After winning only half of their games and finishing a lowly sixteenth (out of nineteen clubs) a decision was made to transfer back over to the NCEL once again for 2022-23. Judging by the current stats highlighted in the programme this now seems like an excellent move with the club leading the rest of the early pacesetters at the top of the table.

Campion AFC plays its matches at The Manningham Mills Sports Association Ground which is found in the north-western area of Bradford. Its easily reached from the M62 by taking the M606 (at junction 3) into the city and following signs for Shipley/Keighley. Its quite a hilly route before reaching the ground in Scotchman Road, a busy residential area made up of smart Victorian semis in the Manningham district of the city. You don't immediately notice the main entrance (or have any inclination where the ground is) until you get almost within touching distance. The Sports Association buildings (also home to Heaton Juniors FC and Manningham Mills Cricket Club, next door) which incorporates a local day nursery, are fashioned from a cream sandstone blocks. Built in 2006, it has separate access points at the front providing entry to the main (upstairs) bar and lounge as well as a turnstile and payment hut further along the street. For the avid hopper it is quite uplifting to get your first glimpse of the ground which soon comes into view through the ornate wrought iron gates (players entrance and car park) where you can pick out the name of the club neatly displayed across the front railings.

Visitors enter the ground in one corner, alongside the main club buildings which dominate the site at this end. A collapsible red cover opens out to form an expanding portable players' tunnel as the teams enter the pitch. Above, and unique to non-league at this or any level is a digital news feed (ticker-style) which displays (in bright red lights) today's match details, operated from behind an upper window inside the building. Alongside is a spectator tea bar where hot/cold drinks (only) are served directly from a hatch. Hot food is available, but you need to go inside the pavilion into a separate snack bar found upstairs where there is also an adjoining bar on the first floor.

So, from first impressions, this appears to be a basic but homely set up, all fully enclosed with a wooden panelled fence surrounding the perimeter with a belt of trees at the far end. The only stand is found along the left-hand side, and this runs from the corner to the half-way line; it has a low flat roof with a white fascia containing the fading letters of the club's name on the front and is supported along its entirety by thin metal posts, providing tiered seated cover for about one hundred spectators with two (in some places three) rows of white plastic tip up seats in situ. The steps of terracing continue over to the right to provide an uncovered section of hard standing. This vantage point also offers some superb views of the surrounding countryside visible in the valley below and the unmistakable and impressive chimney from the Manningham Lister Mill which dominates the skyline. This beautiful historic building dating back to the late 1800s produced the majority of Europe's silk at one time; according to local sources the chimney itself stands at an incredible 250ft tall and was built out of 8100 tonnes of Yorkshire Sandstone. A concrete perimeter path offers further standing in the remainder of the ground. Two permanent dug outs fashioned from breeze blocks are positioned close to half-way along the opposite side. To finish things off a neat post and rail fence encloses the pitch which I must admit has a distinct slope dropping down from the left to the right side of the playing area.

Today's game featured two in-form sides from the second tier of their respective leagues, each battling it out to reach round two. In the last stage of the competition (2nd Qualifying round) Campion had beaten Heaton Stannington 2-0 on the road with Bacup beating fellow NWCL side Stockport Town 1-0, at West View. The visitors couldn't have got off to a better start when tricky winger Alex Mellor reached the by-line and cut the ball back for Toby Wright (1) to calmly side foot the ball home past Bradley Emmerson in the Campion goal. Incredibly we had only just kicked-off with the timing of the goal being recorded at a mere thirty-four seconds. Wright (25) then doubled his side's lead from the spot after being brought down in the area. Despite his shot being saved, he reacted quickly to blast in the rebound.

The game burst into life just before the break as Campion got themselves onto the scoresheet with Aidan Day (41) smashing the ball into the net from 12-yards out seeing his effort squeeze through a group of players to go beyond stranded keeper Mason Walker. This certainly raised the energy levels of all home fans at the Players Cars Stadium. Sadly, for the hosts this was only short-lived though as Borough replied almost immediately as Mellor (42) finding himself with acres of space was allowed to drive into area and unleash a stunning strike from an acute angle making it 1-3 going into the break.

As expected, it was one way traffic in the second half as Campion worked tirelessly to get back into the game, sending a barrage of crosses into the Bacup box. The visitors stood firm throughout assisted by courageous defending particularly from Ryan Siddle and Gareth Wager who put both their bodies on the line to prevent a goal. There were jubilant scenes at the end as the club from Blackburn celebrated its victory. Special mention must go to manager Brett Peters who is acknowledged to be one of the longest serving managers in football, having been at the helm of Bacup Borough for over 25 years, clocking up 1000 games during his career in charge at the club. Wow, what an achievement that is!

The match played in warm, sunny conditions attracted just over one hundred spectators. A very basic 12-page (unstapled) colour photocopied programme was issued for the game and contained all the basics including a welcome page, history of both clubs, match stats and line ups. Interestingly, the club details on the front showed a club logo from fellow NCEL side Ollerton Town (rather than Bacup Borough) carried over from their last home game! Both tea bars were busy throughout the afternoon, but I decided to go with the healthy salad option prepared at home before setting off from *FGIF* HQ at midday.

During the game I got chatting with many of the friendly club members all of whom offered a warm welcome to one-time visitors like myself. The current Bradford FA Chairman Phillip Rhodes was eager to tell me about his formative years as a referee within the area - apparently, he was the recipient of a *Guinness World Record* after a memorable WRCAFL Premier Division Cup game between Littleton and Storthes Hall back in 2001. He recalled in detail events of the match played at Beck Lane, Heckmondwike, which ended 1-1 after extra time and went into penalties. Incredibly with all players, including both goalkeepers, taking

their turn to score, the game was level at 11-11. As the evening darkness descended and with there being no floodlights, he explained how club officials parked their cars with their headlights on, behind the goal allowing the shoot-out to continue. As the light diminished a decision was eventually made to abandon the match with the scores tied at 17-17** (and no penalties missed)!

Soon after Phillip (who was the league's publicity secretary at the time) had completed his match report of the game, news about this incredible fixture reached national TV and press, with the possible chance that a marathon of 34 unmissed penalties was a world record. Four months later the claim was acknowledged and officially recognised as such with details of the feat included in the subsequent 2003 edition of the GBOWR!! Further coverage was also included in *Football's Strangest Matches* written by freelance sportswriter Andrew Ward as the tale soon became worldwide news. As a souvenir Philip gave me a copy of the WRCAFL Premier Division Cup Final programme (Littletown v Route One Rovers on 04/05/19), the last one ever before the league folded, which contained a full-page article covering the record-breaking game.

I really enjoyed my visit to Champion AFC today. It's a lovely, friendly club with many dedicated and hard-working members striving to achieve success both on and off the field. For the ground collecting neutral, it's definitely well worth visiting. It was also uplifting to watch a terrific competitive game of cup football and as always matches in the FA Vase never fail to disappoint. After all these years I can honestly say the magic of the Vase continues!

**Note-Super hopper and one of *FGIF's* Senior TT Reporters Keith Aslan has since been in touch to say that the tie was in fact replayed, the only time in history that a drawn penalty shoot-out was settled by 90 minutes of football!!

FGIF Match Rating: 4 FGIF Ground Rating: 3**



R No.11: WebEd - Saturday 15th October 2022; **North Ferriby** (v Knaresborough Town); Northern Counties East League Premier Division; Kick-Off: 3pm; Venue: The Dransfield Stadium, Grange Lane, Church Road, North Ferriby, East Yorks, HU143AB; Result: 2-0; Admission: £5; Programme: 32pp, £2; Attendance: 526.

I don't say this very often, but I really did feel like throwing in the hopping towel today. Yes, you heard that right. I felt sick to the pit of my stomach after a catalogue of schoolboy errors, almost left me without a footy fix this afternoon. Upon reflection, I only have myself to blame for messing up my hopping plans. Worryingly, this was not the first time I had been in this situation in recent weeks...hmmm.

My first-choice game, the East Riding County League Division One fixture between Langtoft and Withernsea (played at the Rudston Playing Fields which are about five miles from Bridlington) had been at the top of my short list for most of the week. It was an ideal choice of game as the early 2pm kick-off also meant I would be able to pick up my daughter from work afterwards; she had just started a new job which just happened to coincide with a local bus strike, meaning Dad's Taxi Service was in high demand once again.

So, by midday, with my trusty Canon EOS 700D camera (other brands are also available) fully charged up, *FGIF* Match Stats Card and pen at the ready, and a few snacks packed for good measure, I phoned ahead just to check the game was still on. Despite trying a couple of times, I could not get a reply and, after a bit of hesitation and soul searching, I decided to set off anyway. It's always a bit of a risk I know but being a seasoned hopper, the chances of the game being off were pretty remote. In fact, out of all the matches I've attended over the years, I've only been caught out once before (in recent seasons) and that was on a trip to York just a few weeks ago (see *RR No.8* below). There's no way I was going to suffer the same fate again, was there? Besides, I would find another game if the worst came to the worst.

Within the hour I had completed my winding cross-country journey from *FGIF* HQ by-passing Beverley and Driffield, arriving at the ground in the heart of the beautiful Wolds, well ahead of kick-off. With unseasonably clear blue skies and warm sunshine set for the afternoon, what more could a grounds collector wish for? Indeed, they seemed perfect conditions for watching any football match.

However, as I crossed the narrow footbridge (over the ditch) at the entrance and turned into the playing field, I quickly sensed all was not well. The place was completely deserted - eerily so. Apart from myself there wasn't a single soul at the ground. My heart started pounding and I could feel my face flush as it became clear my chosen game had, for some reason, just bitten the dust. With an air of total disbelief, I was absolutely gutted. I now needed to find a backup plan and do it quickly. It now was 1.45pm and, sadly, I didn't have one. Without confirming the game was on before leaving home, I knew that I had taken a risk, yet again - I had got away with it in previous weeks but this time it had backfired on me. The inquest would have to wait till later though.

So, it was now onto forming a makeshift Plan B. In an effort to find something else nearby, I pulled my phone out of my rucksack and began (all fingers and thumbs) to scroll hastily through the other county league fixtures that were also starting at two o'clock, hoping for the best. Sadly, my search revealed that none of the neighbouring clubs (to Driffield or Bridlington) were playing at home this afternoon. Sods Law! It was my own fault and something that was bound to happen sooner rather than later for taking things for granted. At this low point I really did feel like driving home and calling it a day. *Sky Sports News* on the sofa suddenly seemed more appealing...

However, being a self-confessed ground collecting addict, my OCD soon took over and kicked this fleeting thought out of my head, replacing it with the faintest of hope that I could muster up a Plan C from somewhere. Perhaps there was still a chance I could get to a match starting at 3pm (my only self-enforced hopping rule is to get there before kick-off)? This would essentially mean a re-visit but as *FGIF* maestro Gary S always says it's always better to get to a game than not, even if you have ticked it off before. Sound advice indeed and besides beggars can't be choosers, can they?

So, with just over an hour to play with, my choice was now down to games taking place in the NCEL. Although newcomers Beverley Town FC were on the road at Dronfield Town, I noticed that both North Ferriby and Goole were on home soil this afternoon. Looking at the time, I reckoned that a re-visit to Ferriby looked the best option of the two and if there weren't hold ups along my route, then I would get there before kick-off (just). With the ground post code firmly uploaded into the car sat nav, I restarted the engine and set off with purpose back towards the banks of the Humber, almost retracing my journey home, to get my unplanned footy fix.

Within the hour I had successfully arrived at my destination and found a decent parking spot just two minutes' walk from the main entrance in Church Road. I passed the fabled allotments (reference to which is made in the club's excellent fanzine - *From the Allotment End*) before joining the short queue waiting at the turnstile. With just ten minutes to spare, I managed to get hold of one of the last (but two) copies of the club's superb matchday programme. Finally, and with great relief, I could now draw a long steady intake of breath ahead of the game. Phew!

Although I first visited the ground some forty years ago now, this was only my second hop to Church Road to watch the newly established North Ferriby Football Club (founded in 2019) after the now defunct North Ferriby United FC had folded. Since I made my last visit here just over a year ago in August 2021 (*see RR No.x*) the club has made great strides both on and off the field under the indefatigable stewardship of Chairman Les Hare and his fellow directors Martin Lauer, Jim Dick OBE and Simon Lunt. For the sake of avoiding repetition, I will let the photos in the album offer a much better description of the Dransfield Stadium, one of my favourite grounds and, no doubt, one of the best in the NCEL.

After joining the Northern Counties East League Division One in 2019-20, the club finished in a creditable fourth place in their inaugural season and repeated this again in the following campaign, despite both being affected by the COVID-19 pandemic which led to a reduction in the the number of games being played. However, The Villagers created some new club history last season by finishing as runners-up to Hallam and gaining promotion to the Premier Division. As the stats reveal it was a tremendous achievement by Chris Bolder's boys, having won 30 (out of 40) games played, scoring over 100 goals and amassing a total of 96 points.

It is evident that the club has responded very well to its relatively new status in the top-flight of the NCEL and has continued to make the same excellent progress on the field so far this season. Before today's match North Ferriby sit proudly on top of the table having won every home game and suffered only two away defeats, giving them a three-point cushion over second placed Emley, who have played one game more. By contrast today's visitors Knaresborough have struggled to find their best form so far and are currently down in sixteenth (out of twenty clubs) albeit quite a few points above those sides in the drop zone.

For the record it was Josh Whitely who netted both goals in a 2-0 win to maintain The Villagers lead (by point points) over Emley at the top of the table. His first after just ten minutes was a simple tap in from close range after some good work by frontman Danny Earl. The opportunities kept coming for Ferriby who had plenty of possession and played some slick stuff, always creating enough chances to extend their one goal lead before the break. After a tight start to the second half Whitely grabbed his second of the game on the hour mark - it was a brilliant finish into the bottom right-hand corner after a superb, lofted pass from Jamie Forrester. The result was left in no doubt as Ferriby easily managed to keep out a plucky late Knaresborough fight back. Winning manager Chris Bolder said afterwards: 'We're delighted with the three points...the first thirty-five minutes is possibly the best we've played in a while...it was a gritty performance'.

The game played on an excellent surface in sunny but cloudy conditions was attended by a healthy crowd which exceeded the 500-mark. In fact, this was the third highest attendance recorded at the Dransfield Stadium this season (after seeing 675 v Goole and 533 v Yorkshire Amateur). Having said this, it did make me smile when I saw a dozen or so 'non-paying spectators' straining to watch the action on tip toe from behind a breeze block wall in the far corner of the ground. A superb 32-page glossy programme, priced £2, was issued for the game. It is beautifully designed, and credit must go to editor James Barwick who (with plenty of willing contributors) crams in so much interesting content into each issue (including newsy articles, colour photos, reports and the vital match stats) to keep his readers happy at every home game. A wide range of hot and cold food and drinks are also available from two outlets: the main 'Chuckwagon' found on the concourse at the entrance side and a smaller (drinks only) Mini Chuckwagon squeezed into the right-hand corner at the far end.

It had definitely been quite a stressful hopping (substitute similar sounding words here) afternoon and I was more than relieved to get back to *FGIF* HQ by the end of

it all. A quick glimpse on the ERCL *FA Full-Time* website revealed that my first-choice game at Langtoft AFC had in fact been declared as a Home Win after their opponents had cried off the night before. In hindsight I should have picked another game but it's easy to say that now. Luckily, from experience there aren't too many matchdays that leave you feeling so frustrated. On a positive note, I should be grateful to get to a game at all (thanks North Ferriby) and know that there's always next week to look forward to!! The trials and tribulations of hopping continue....

FGIF Match Rating: 3 FGIF Ground Rating: 5**

PARK LIFE

R No. 10: WebEd - Saturday 8th October 2022; **Goole United** (v Telegraph); East Riding County League Premier Division; Kick-Off: 2pm; Venue: West Park, Shaftesbury Avenue, Goole, East Yorks, DN146UU; Result: 6-0; Admission: None; Programme: None; Attendance: 26.

It's a lovely warm, sunny, October day and I'm making the relatively short journey along the M62 to Goole for my footy fix this afternoon. Indeed, it's my second trip to the port town this season after taking in an FA cup tie here just two months ago when Goole AFC recorded a shock 4-1 victory over Consett in an exciting Extra Preliminary Round tie at the Victoria Pleasure Grounds (see *RR No. 1* below for more). My destination is the beautiful West Park, a leafy oasis, which is home to the county league new boys Goole United Football Club. Apart from slow-moving traffic in the final couple of miles due to roadworks, contraflows and a minimum 30mph speed restriction, the result of ongoing repairs to the Ouse Bridge where cracks have recently appeared on the eastbound section (help!), I make good progress. From here I also manage to get a good view of the ground over to my left - it is easy to spot from the westbound carriageway, before you come off the motorway at junction 36.

West Park is a lovely tree-line green space found inside a smart residential housing area along Shaftesbury Avenue and is well signposted from the main arterial A614 Airmyrn and Boothferry Road approaches. It occupies a large woodland area, linked by paths which continue around the perimeter, and is popular with families, dog walkers as well as providing sports pitches for some of the local teams in the town. A smart legend inside the entrance and car park provides a map showing visitors all the amenities on offer. A spacious modern visitor centre incorporating the West Park Café offers an indoor place to relax and enjoy some refreshments from a varied menu. For those preferring the takeaway option, there are plenty of additional picnic benches available outside on the patio area. Adjacent is a well-equipped children's play park which as you can imagine is bursting at the seams on a glorious Saturday afternoon.

As expected, the main facilities for football here are pretty basic with a sizeable area of the council-owned park over to the left allocated for football with one full-size and two mini pitches marked out on the grass. The main un-roped football pitch, running at a right angle to the visitor centre, is bordered by a single band of trees with a long purpose-built gravel skate park running parallel beyond the left

touchline. The players change inside a small brick-built pavilion tucked away behind some trees about 200 metres from the pitch. Although there are no spectator facilities a number of benches placed along the perimeter paths are near enough for you to watch the action. There are no dug outs either and the only reference made to the football club is found on the mini-logos which appear on each of the royal blue corner flags.

According to assistant manager and committee member Darren Ramskill, Goole United FC was formed back in 2012 following a merger between two local sides, Viking Raiders FC and AFC Woodlands, both of whom were competing in the ERCL Premier Division (based at Parkside School) at the time. After an encouraging start to life as a new club, they have since struggled, both on and off the field, particularly in more recent times (possibly since the COVID-19 pandemic).

After a successful application, the first team joined the HPL Division One, winning the title in their first campaign, playing matches initially at the Victoria Pleasure Grounds. At the same time, they also fielded a reserve side who continued to play in ERCL, using the old school base. They achieved notable success the following season (2013-14) finishing sixth in the Premier Division, their best ever placing in the club's brief history. They continued to play in the top-flight for the next four seasons before dropping down to Division One again in 2018-19. Like many clubs, United struggled during the next two COVID-19 hit seasons and played their last ever game at the VPG on 17/10/20 beating Brandesburton 2-1 in a league fixture there, before being evicted. It was a difficult time for the club who found themselves homeless when football made a brief return in the following April; they fortunately managed to play out a handful of games using the Kent Road playing fields as a temporary base to see out another pandemic interrupted season. Although the club managed to find some stability by relocating to West Park at the start of 2021-22, it didn't end well with the first team finishing rock bottom of the HPL. A decision was made to resign their membership with immediate effect and drop down to the ERCL ahead of the forthcoming campaign.

Despite the unforeseen turmoil over the last couple of years, Goole United Football Club have re-grouped and made an impressive start to life in the Right Car East Riding County League Premier Division (yes, the competition has a sponsor for the first time). To date they remain unbeaten having scored eight and conceded only one goal in the first two league matches, establishing themselves as one of the early favourites to win the title. By contrast, visitors, Bridlington-based Telegraph FC come to West Park with only one point to their name following a 1-1 home draw to Hessle Rangers Juniors who they played on the opening day of the season - they have played two other matches, both cup ties, one of which saw them beat Leven MC 4-3 at Burton Agnes, a week ago - so they have shown some good form so far.

United made it three wins out of three with a superb display of attacking football, coming out 6-0 winners this afternoon. I was particularly impressed by their neat inter-passing and ability to use the full width of the pitch which saw their opponents stretched to the limit on many occasions. For the record it was tricky young striker Cole Gibbon who managed to bag himself a hat-trick (it could have been four, but one was disallowed for offside), all goals coming from crosses fed to

him from outside the box. The result puts United three points clear (over second placed North Cave) at the top of the ERCLP table.

The game, played on a well grassed pitch attracts over twenty spectators, possibly more, as fleeting visitors to the park take a few minutes to watch the action before continuing on their walk. During the first half I got into conversation with Cole's father, who acknowledges that the club, despite trying, has struggled to find a ground (apart from the VPG) with decent facilities over the years. He told me that a recent application to play at the town's cricket ground half a mile down the road in Carr Lane was turned down by the committee who didn't want to share one blade of grass with the football club. He also mentioned that his son had just returned to playing after falling out of love with the game. Like many talented youngsters these days he looked to have a promising career ahead of him before being released whilst playing in the Leeds United FC Academy. Sadly, he only happened to find this out whilst watching *Sky Sports Football* on TV when a breaking news post came up along the bottom of the screen giving details of those players that had been let go by the club. Sadly, he happened to be one of them and it came as devastating news to both player and parents who have invested so much time in pursuing a football career. Is there any wonder why so many young players are suffering from mental health issues?

Whilst standing pitch-side you soon become aware of the constant low humming noise in the background; it's the sound of vehicles travelling in both directions along the M62 motorway which can be seen on the horizon, being no more than a couple of hundred yards away from the park. I was also distracted by some activity (partially obscured) taking place beyond a shallow belt of trees behind the far goal during the game. Alerted by sudden and intermittent blasts of an ACME Thunderer whistle (other brands are also available) when anyone approached, it turned out to be a group of local toxophilites honing their archery skills and making sure that any passers-by weren't kebabbed! I didn't hear any loud screams so assumed, it all ended peacefully.

To find out more about Goole United FC check out the *FA Full-Time* site covering the latest pages on the ERCL or the club's regularly updated twitter account. Despite failing to charge my camera battery properly before setting out (what a schoolboy error, doh) and being unable to take any match photos for the first time in ages, it had still been another enjoyable afternoon's entertainment for the football grounds collecting neutral. I was home surprisingly early and back in time to watch all the match results appearing on *Sky Sports News* ahead of the latest round of Strictly. Well, you can't have everything, can you...

FGIF Match Rating: 3 FGIF Ground Rating: 2**



R No.9: WebEd - Saturday 1st October 2022; **Alford Town** (v Wyberton); Lincs FA Junior Cup Round 2; Kick-Off: 2.30pm; Venue: Alford Town FC, East Street, Alford, Lincs, LN139EQ; Result: 0-11; Admission: None; Programme: None; Attendance: 26.

HOPPING IN A WOLDS WONDERLAND

After last week's hopping horror show in York, I am pleased to report that my trip to Alford Town FC today was a much more enjoyable experience than the one just seven days earlier, as I succeeded in putting my hopping demons to rest. I had not left anything to chance this week after confirming the game was on, setting off in plenty of time from *FGIF* HQ and having earmarked a Plan B match at neighbouring Sutton-on-Sea to fall back on, which collectively contributed to making it a stress-free afternoon. Above all, the 'hoppertunity of watching a game in the Lincolnshire Junior Cup, one of my favourite all-time competitions in non-league football, was simply too good to miss.

The small market Town of Alford is located at the foot of the beautiful Lincolnshire Wolds and lies about six miles inland from the sandy Lincolnshire coastline midway between the seaside towns of Mablethorpe to the north and Skegness to the south. Records date the town back to 55AD with settlements occupied by the Romans and many years later by the Angles and Saxons. Its history can be explored today at the Alford Manor House, Corn Exchange and St Wilfrid's church (named after a seventh century bishop), three major local landmarks. The town also has many local independent shops and holds regular open-air craft markets in the free to park Market Square. However, it is probably best known for its five-sailed windmill, a grade I listed tower mill built by Sam Oxley, an Alford millwright in 1837. In its heyday 4-5 tons of corn were ground each day before closing in 1955. Within a couple of years, it was restored back to its working order and used commercially to produce stone-ground organic flour and cereal. At the time of writing, I understand that the mill is undergoing a period of refurbishment and is temporarily closed to the viewing public.

To reach the town I followed the A16 from Louth as far as the Ulceby Cross roundabout before completing the final part of my journey using the A1104 to Alford. As far as grounds go, this has to be one of the best club set ups that I have

seen the East Lincs Combination on my footy travels. Located on East Street, a continuation of Station Road as you come out of town on the Mablethorpe Road, it is adjacent to the Alford windmill and café which provides a useful landmark if you need some help in finding your way. The entrance is marked on either side by a smart club banner/sign painted in red featuring the windmill logo, with a straight narrow tack running alongside a couple of junior pitches leading you down to the car park. The tree lined setting showcasing some spectacular colours looks pretty at this time of year. A smart red bricked club house runs parallel to the road and houses changing rooms at one end and a smart well-stocked tea bar with serving hatch named 'The Robin's Nest' bar, at the other. A veranda created by the sloping roof also provides ample cover for spectators in the event of poor weather along this side. A smart welcome sign attached to the end of the building contains the words '*Home to The Beautiful Game*' which immediately creates a warm homely feel about the place.

The club has access to two immaculate pitches here, marked side by side and both were in use this afternoon. The main 'first team' pitch, nearest to the pavilion, has a 'players tunnel' fashioned neatly at angles to the pitch by a perimeter rope guided through some bright fluorescent yellow plastic posts placed at intervals on this side. Both ends look resplendent too with an array of colourful advertising boards attached to the wooden stakes to create a sturdy spectator fence at either side of the goal. Indeed, from first impressions you can tell that the club has very proactive links with the community judging by the vast number of local sponsors who have chosen to endorse their businesses here. From the far touchline, it is just possible to spy the top of the Alford Mill between the trees beyond the pavilion.

Alford Town FC unsurprisingly dressed in their all-red kit welcomed Wyberton, current holders of the Lincolnshire FA Junior Cup, to their East Street ground this afternoon. Although the hosts were given a bye in the first round of the competition, Wyberton were involved in junior cup action, defeating Deeping United 5-0 at the Causeway in early September, to get here. It was going to be tough work for the Robins who based on current form had yet to win a game in the East Lincs Combination, unlike their opponents who had won four of their opening five matches in their Lincolnshire League campaign so far.

As expected, the gulf in class clearly showed as the hosts were resoundingly thumped 0-11 (it could have been more) by a rampant, well-organised and hard-working Wyberton side. Rather than take their foot off the gas, having established victory early on, they put their opponents to the sword throughout the entire ninety minutes. In essence you could say that the game was more of a mismatch, as the boys from Alford offered little threat and were for the most part under siege defending wave after wave of attacks upon their goal. For the record, the visitors' Finley Jaques, wearing the number nine on his green and white shirt, managed to bag himself five goals, scoring his first after four only minutes and the last two minutes into second half stoppage time, making him my *FGIF* Man of the Match.

The game played on a superb, well-manicured surface in cloudy but sunny conditions, attracted almost thirty spectators which more than doubled by the end when the seconds had finished their match. Indeed, during a stoppage in play, I counted more than forty fans standing around the adjacent 'second team' pitch

where the Reserves' side were well beaten (0-6) by Sutton Rovers in a ELC Division Two derby match. It had certainly not been a good day the office if you played for Alford! A wide range of hot and cold drinks as well as snacks were cheerfully dispensed from the refreshment bar during the course of the afternoon.

It had been another cracking hop in a lovely part of the Lincolnshire Wolds. Travellers will definitely enjoy a trip to Alford Town FC where they will receive a warm welcome and tick off a tidy little ground. For more information including contact details, fixtures across all teams (the club operates over twenty sides at various levels) as well as travel directions, check out the excellent club website at: alfordtownfc.co.uk

FGIF Match Rating: 3 FGIF Ground Rating: 4**



R No.8: WebEd - Saturday 24th September 2022; **Rawcliffe** (v Easingwold Town); York Football League Premier Division; Kick-Off: 2pm; Venue: Rawcliffe Recreation Ground, St Marks Grove, Rawcliffe, York, North Yorks, YO305TS; Result: 2-1; Admission: None; Programme: None; Attendance: 43.

ANOTHER HOPPERTUNITY, ALMOST MISSED...

It's now 1.32pm. I'm sitting in the car by the entrance to York racecourse and my pulse is racing. I've just discovered that my chosen game featuring Hamilton Panthers FC* (v LNER Builders in a York FA Junior Cup tie), is off. A series of red plastic road cones have closed off the club car park, the shutters to the new changing room block are firmly bolted down and the teams haven't turned up for some reason. Apart from a young couple exercising their Labrador dog, the ground, on the Little Knavesmire, which looks in perfectly good nick, is totally deserted. With time rapidly ticking by (nearly as fast as my heart rate) and no Plan B to fall back on, I am literally right up against it (feel free to substitute any other words to that effect). The chances of finding another game in the area are now looking slimmer than slim. However, being 'a pint half full' type of hopper, at least I do have my mobile phone, trusty Sat Nav and the hopping gods on hand to help get me out of this situation. Or so I keep telling myself.

With a deep breath, I manage to steady my shaky hand and flag up the York Football League from the trusty *FGIF* home page (of course!) and scroll down the fixture list on my smart device. It's all now down to potluck and those hopping gods I've just mentioned. Although there are plenty of fixtures (mostly in the early rounds of the cup) to choose from, it's now a case of finding something close by and getting there ahead of the fast approaching 2pm kick-off deadline. Out of the clubs playing at home, I spot that Rawcliffe have a game, but my knowledge of the area is poor, and I don't know how far it is from here. From memory, I think it is on this side of the city centre, but I'm not entirely sure. After hastily entering the ground post code into my car computer, I fix my eyes on the bottom right-hand corner of the screen. It seems to take an age to upload (but it always does when you are in a rush). Eventually after connecting with the satellites, my onboard data reveals that I might, in fact, have a fighting chance of reaching the ground in time, from here. There's a faint glimmer of hope that things could just be looking up. It says that my estimated arrival time is 13.49. Without a second to waste, I re-start the car engine and with the mindset of Lewis Hamilton, begin to follow the purple route direction arrow on the screen. To be honest I haven't a clue as to where I'm heading, nor what the roads are like. With little to lose, I throw caution to the wind and decide to go for it. Using some simple mental arithmetic, I've basically got about fourteen minutes to cover a journey lasting just over four miles. It's now 13.35.

From past experiences York can be a nightmare to drive through at the best of times, particularly near to the busy city centre or close to the racecourse when flat race meetings are on. Or when the annual fair is taking place - which just happens to be, today. You couldn't make it up, could you? I can see that the immediate area over to my right is jam-packed with cars and people heading for the white-knuckle rides on an adjoining part of the racecourse, about a hundred yards from here. I just about manage to edge my way carefully past the traffic queuing to get in and head steadily through a couple of narrow back roads which are punctuated with meaty speed bumps, before joining the main A59 Tadcaster Road.

With one eye on the traffic and another on the Sat Nav, I manage to keep up to speed with the journey planner remaining unchanged, that's until I reach Water End in Clifton where everything comes to a standstill. Sods Law - I am now less than two miles from my destination. The traffic begins to crawl slowly bumper to bumper through three separate sets of lights along what is an horrendous half mile drag that seems to take forever. It costs me valuable time. As I repeatedly check the Sat Nav it shows I've now lost almost six minutes and there's only five minutes to go, ahead of kick-off. With a sweaty palm, I move up through the gears as the traffic begins to return to a decent speed once again. I manage to reach Rawcliffe village and work (slalom style) my way through a maze of narrow streets zigzagging from left to right (and back again) before arriving at the ground in St Marks Grove. It is now 13.58 and as I park up, I can just see over my shoulder that the players are leaving the changing rooms to take their positions to the field. I've made it, but only just!

Rawcliffe Football Club has played at the village recreation ground since its formation, back in 1983. The site, which shares its facilities with the local tennis club, belongs to land owned by the Rawcliffe Parish Council. The large field, or

Rob Winspear Rec, as it's called on the tall name sign standing just inside the entrance, is bordered along both sides by rows of neat suburban semis. A long, tarmacked communal path on the right (near side of the ground) runs from the fenced entrance to the far end of the field away in the distance. Pride of place here goes to two impressive red brick club buildings which are located next to the car park (behind the top goal) used not only as changing rooms for sport but for a wide range of functions organised by the local village council. Unusually several robust electric scooters are found parked in a small bay on the edge of the car park. The main pitch, which is roped on both sides, is marked out parallel to the residential properties which back onto the field. Although there is no dedicated spectator cover at present, two portable synthetic nylon dug outs, with room for bench seating inside, are placed on opposite sides of the halfway line - strangely, the larger one (on the far side of the pitch) is set up for the opponents to use.

Today's game sees the visit of Easingwold Town to the Rawcliffe Rec. With both sides currently sitting in mid-table, boasting almost identical records, the stats show that they have only won one game each so far, predicting a close encounter is in prospect for the hopping neutral. Incidentally, it's also the first time I have seen either club play a game in my footy travels since relocating up to 'Ull over four years ago now.

With barely five minutes gone on the stopwatch, it's Rawcliffe dressed in their Newcastle United lookalike kit who take an early lead through Harry McMillan (5) who is on hand to tap the ball home from close range following a counter-attack that starts back on the edge of his own area. The visitors are next to score, rather fortuitously, also against the run of play, before the half hour mark, when Josh Sargeant's (29) tame shot from ten yards out is fumbled by the keeper who allows the ball to somehow evade his grasp and trickle agonisingly past him over the line. It really is a howler and one he, like most keepers, will definitely want to forget in a hurry. The half ends level at 1-1 going into the break. With both sides creating plenty of chances, the result is eventually decided mid-way through the second half when Rawcliffe's tricky Harvey Stevenson (68) escapes his markers to slip the ball under the advancing keeper to make it 2-1 and in doing so give his side their first home win of the campaign. On balance I think this is just about a fair result in the end.

Apart from a short sharp shower which blows over ten minutes after my arrival, the game is played in mostly sunny but cloudy conditions on what is a well grassed (remember that) expansive pitch. In fact, it's one of the biggest playing areas I've seen for some time - no wonder several players were cramping up well before the end. Over forty spectators were in attendance including a fellow hopper called Dave who had come up by train to York from his base in Birmingham. Afterwards, I managed to have a brief chat with enthusiastic club secretary Ian Smallwood who told me that the club is enjoying its most successful period in years. Confidence is running high after the first team gained promotion to the YFL Premier Division, for the first time in its history, only two years ago before going on to win the prestigious League Cup last season after beating Dringhouses on penalties (FT: 0-0) in the final contested at the York Community Stadium at the end of May.

It had been another memorable hop to another friendly, well organised club in the YFL. A visit to Rawcliffe Football Club comes highly recommended to all travellers

who will receive a warm welcome when they go there. In hindsight, I only have myself to blame for pressing the hopping self-destruction button this afternoon on a day when I was more than lucky to get to a game of football. Notes to self: (1) always remember to phone the home club before setting out; (2) always have a Plan B, C etc, etc, just in case you need it and (3) set off much earlier from *FGIF* to get to a game. You would think that after forty years of hopping, I would have got the hang of it by now! It seems not...doh!

FGIF Match Rating: 3* *FGIF* Ground Rating: 3*

Note* Apparently the York FA Junior Cup tie was awarded as a home win to Hamilton Panthers FC after opponents LNER Builders forfeited the game (indeed the only one to be called off in the entire fixture list this afternoon!).



R No.7: WebEd - Saturday 17th September 2022; **Strensall Tigers** (v Cawood); York Football League Division One; Kick-Off: 2pm; Venue: Strensall Sports Club, Durlston Drive, Strensall, York, North Yorks, YO325AT; Result: 1-6; Admission: None; Programme: None; Attendance: 31.

RIP QUEEN ELIZABETH II

Well, what a week it's been. Who would have predicted such an historical event would have taken place in front of our very eyes in just a matter of days? I'm not a royalist and I've never met the Queen, but I certainly echo the sentiments of a nation and sympathise with a royal family in mourning, following her passing. I did start to worry about her sudden frailty when she met Boris Johnson and Liz Truss at Balmoral only two days before her death. No one can underestimate how many lives have been touched - witness the unprecedented press coverage and the heartfelt testimonials, the long queues lining the streets to catch a glimpse of her cortège for affirmation, if you need any. All the engagements, the pomp and ceremony which have taken years in their planning have passed with precision. I can't imagine standing in a queue for nigh on twelve hours to visit her body lying in

state at Westminster Hall, but it appears thousands have. Although I can't be there in person, I can still pay my respects ahead of her funeral to someone who has been our monarch for over seventy years.

Like many sports fans, I realised pretty soon after the Queen's passing was announced, that lots of events would have to be called off as a mark of respect to Her Majesty. But many disagreed. I'm not sure if you have a twitter account but the response to calling off sport over the weekend didn't go down well with lots of horrendous comments posted on social media. As much as I love football there are things in life that are much, much bigger than sport and have to take priority. To miss going to watch football for one Saturday, in respect of the Queen, is not a lot to sacrifice, is it?

After a two-week break, I'm heading out to York this afternoon for my footy fix. An unexpectedly long queue at the local petrol station and some very poor decision making (on my part) at two adjoining roundabouts along the city's outer ring road almost scupper my plans, but a well-timed U turn along the busy A64 manage to retrieve the situation and get things back on track. I arrive at the ground with only fifteen minutes to spare ahead of the 2pm kick-off.

Hoppers may be pleased to learn that Strensall Tigers FC have moved back to the Strensall Sports Club this season. Following a two-year absence which forced them to play home games just up the road on the neighbouring New Earswick playing fields, the necessary ground improvements have since been made and this afternoon marks a welcome return for league action at their Durlston Drive base.

Travellers here should come off the busy A1237 at the Strensall Road roundabout (third exit) in Earswick and continue past the Queen Elizabeth Barracks (appropriately named at this time) in Strensall Camp, before taking a left fork into York Road. After about two hundred yards take the second left turning (not the first) into Barley Rise, a well-heeled estate, before taking a right turn into Durlston Drive where the ground is located at the end of a cul-de-sac. Although the main entrance, fashioned from shiny metal fence posts, is hidden from view on your approach, look out for a row white lock up garages which provide a useful landmark next to the main driveway.

The site, bordered closely by some residential housing, the banks of the River Foss and the main York to Scarborough railway line (which incidentally is the same one which passed by their previous base at New Easwick), is all very neat, tidy and appealing. A small car park leads to the main facilities which are all situated (in parallel) immediately over to your right. As indicated on the smart white club welcome sign, this is also the base of the Strensall & Towthorpe Tennis Club who have access to three sets of floodlit tennis courts here. Adjacent to this is a smart brick club building which since refurbishment, houses several club changing rooms with a well-equipped function room/café situated at the far end. The hall seemed quite busy as a children's party was also taking place this afternoon. To round things off, a small caged floodlit multi use games area with low concrete walls (Astroturf pitch) is found beyond the pavilion, closest to the main pitch on the field.

The football club has developed its junior programme in recent years and has a new mini pitch dedicated to the younger age groups found directly in front of the changing rooms. The main first team pitch is marked over on the far side of the field. Roped in part, it is both well grassed and extremely undulating in places, judging by the rise and fall of some of the white light lines painted on the surface. Check out those still fashionable and smart (old Subbuteo style) 'World Cup' goals decked out with black and amber nets supported by thick sturdy wooden poles to give a unique rectangular shape to them. If you find yourself along the grassed embankment behind the furthest goal look out too for the step ladders placed next to the safety fence in front of the railway line. An accompanying piece of carpet (rug size) also sits on the fence waiting for any intrepid club official or player designated brave enough to straddle it in comfort and retrieve any lost balls (pardon the pun) which could lie perilously close to the tracks. Dare I say it, as far jobs for volunteers go, this is definitely not one for the faint hearted. Ouch!

According to the detailed archives found on the excellent York Football League website (click on the *League Tables* tab on the main home page menu at the top for more), records show that a team representing the village first competed in the YFL, possibly called the York and District League then, shortly after the First World War. It was in the 1923-24 season that a club named Strensall United FC finished in third place behind R St Lawrence WMC and South Bank WMC in Division Two, then comprising of eleven teams. Despite a brief change of name to Strensall St Marys FC in the early 1930's, the village continued to compete in the YFL before resigning its membership in the early 1970's. After a break of almost twenty years Strensall returned to the league for the 1992-93 season and have competed in the competition ever since, flitting mainly between divisions two and four. The Tigers achieved their highest position in 2020-21 when, after a season curtailed by the recent COVID-19 pandemic, they finished eighth in the Premier Division after playing only a handful of games.

Back to today. After a brief two-year spell plying their trade in the top-flight of the YFL, Strensall find themselves fighting it out in First Division once again for this coming season. Although they almost avoided the drop, pipped by Kirkbymoorside who clung on to their place by virtue of a single point, it was seen as a dreadful campaign with the club losing every match from early March onwards until the bitter end. This afternoon the visitors are Selby-based side Cawood FC, a club who, by coincidence, could have gone up to the Premier Division themselves but fell short on gaining promotion by just two points last time out. So, with both sides unable to play last week (when all games were called off as a mark of respect following the Queen's passing), this is their first league game of 2022-23.

Before a ball was kicked a minute's silence was impeccably observed by all those gathered either around the centre circle or standing at pitch-side. For the record, an under-par Tigers' side, missing several key players, found the going tough, particularly in the second half. With the scores remaining level, at 1-1, going into the break, Cawood stamped their authority on the game to run out comfortable 1-6 winners by the final whistle. Young Ryan Glover was their star turn bagging himself a well-earned hat-trick, with all his strikes coming from tap ins inside the six-yard box. The turning point in the game came on the hour mark when Strensall keeper Ben Marshall had to be replaced, having turned his ankle reaching for a

high ball following a corner. Up until then the Tigers certainly looked to be in the contest. Incredibly Cawood were to be denied top spot in the table after Tockwith beat Duncombe Park 7-1 in one of the other Division One matches.

The game played in cloudy but sunny conditions was attended by just over thirty spectators. This number included an assessor (or 'observer' as *FGIF* maestro Sir Keith calls them, these days) from Grimsby who, using his National League refereeing experience, had come over to watch one of his young protégés, budding match official Isaac Stephenson. I do hope he gets some rewarding feedback - considering he is still only seventeen I thought he controlled proceedings very well and kept a lid on things when they got feisty - as we really do need to hang on to our referees without whom there would be no games at all. It was most interesting to watch the high speed Transpennine Express trains come thundering past at break-neck speed behind the far end of the ground at various points during the game. Although I'm not into trains like many of my fellow members of the 'hopperati' who simply love everything about them, it's certainly quite a challenge trying capture these fast-moving engines inside the camera viewfinder making for what can be an intriguing backdrop to the action.

As I managed successfully to negotiate the busy York ring home on my way home, I found out over the radio waves that my beloved Hull City had lost 3-0 at Swansea. As I said in my last report (see *RR No.6* below), the Championship is not an easy league to play in, and each defeat is a harsh lesson to learn at any level - ask head coach Shota Arveladze, who seems to cut a very dejected and lonely figure right now. With millions of pounds to spend on gathering a large squad of players, I shouldn't think he will get as much sleep or sympathy as the Strensall boss who also faced a heavy defeat today. Sadly, it had not been a good afternoon to be a Tiger...but then in the great scheme of things as we've seen this last week, there are more important things in life than a game of football.

FGIF Match Rating: 3* *FGIF* Ground Rating: 3*



R No.6: WebEd - Sunday 4th September 2022; **Hull City** (v Sheffield United); Skybet Football League Championship; Kick-Off: 3pm; Venue: MKM Stadium, Walton Street, Hull, East Yorks, HU36HU; Result: 0-2; Admission: £20; Programme: £3; Attendance: 20426.

A WONDERFUL SURPRISE

A cracking surprise birthday treat! Having just returned home from Selby after completing a superb cycling Sportive event in the morning, I was thrilled to learn that my daughter Steph had unexpectedly booked us a couple of seats for this afternoon's Championship match. With enough time for a quick shower (I needed one), I grabbed my stuff and headed over to the Priory Park and Ride around the corner to catch our bus to the ground. Phew!

It has been a busy summer for the club, with Tigers' ambitious owner Acun Ilicali and his head coach Shota Arveladze working hard behind the scenes to strengthen the first team squad. With the much-publicised sale of playmaker, Hull-born Keane Lewis-Potter moving on to Premier League side Brentford for somewhere in the region of £16m (possibly reaching £20m with add-ons), no fewer than sixteen new players have come through the doors of the MKM Stadium during the summer transfer window. Indeed, four of these only arrived on Thursday, transfer deadline day. Amongst the new additions are Tobias Figueredo (from Notts Forest); Cyrus Christie and Jean Michael Seri (both Fulham); Oscar Estupinan (Vitoria Guitumares SC, Portugal) and several who were playing in Turkish league football last season: Adama Traore (Hatayspor), Dimitros Pelkas and Ozan Tufan (both Fenerbache), Dogukan Sinik (Antalyaspor) and Benjamin Tetteh (Yeni Matayaspor).

There is without doubt a feeling of renewed optimism about the club and the city these days. The new regime has become popular in the short time since taking charge of the Tigers back in January. Although it may not happen as quickly as hoped for, the Turkish owner and media mogul Acun Ilicali has set his sights on building a club good enough to return to the Premier League one day.

But it's not all been about spending vast sums on bringing new players into the club. Obviously, it helps to have a strong squad, but since coming here, he has been proactively involved, using his charisma and presence (call it what you will), in trying to reconnect with the fans, many of whom lost faith and literally walked away when the Allams were in charge. It's not just about bringing those supporters back but also in attracting many new fans through the turnstiles. Things have changed: new sections of the ground, like the West Upper Stand, have been re-opened; ticketing prices have been slashed markedly, especially for juniors who as Ilicali believes, are going to be the next generation of fans part of building foundations of what should be a true family focused club. Apart from creating a feel-good factor about the place on matchday, he has offered holidays to fans through prize draws and more recently subsidised the price of coach travel to away games - when QPR charged visiting supporters an eye-watering £36 for a ticket, the owner immediately put his hand in his pocket and paid half of their bus fares to get them down to Loftus Road.

With an hour to go before kick-off we have a bit of time to nip into the Viking Fish Bar on Anlaby Road to buy some tasty fish and chips, before heading back to the ground to pick up our tickets. We eventually manage to navigate our way up several flights of steps and find our seats in the lofty heights of the Upper West Stand. With a big sigh of relief, we can now begin to soak up the atmosphere ahead of kick-off. As the players enter the field, the whole place is buzzing. Most home fans expect the in-form Blades to provide a stiff test for the Tigers who have several (eight) players missing through injury (notice I've got the excuses in early!) this afternoon - they come to the MKM having lost only one game so far in the opening few weeks this season. Although Hull failed to pick up a point on the road at QPR in midweek (3-1), they do boast an unbeaten home record which will offer much encouragement to the faithful.

Alas it was not to be. A goal in each half from Olli McBurnie and Sander Berge helped to seal a first away victory of the season for the Blades. Hull City had two glorious chances in the first half when Oscar Estupinan and the returning Ozan Tufan failed to take them and were punished by a United side who went to the top of the table above overnight leaders Norwich.

A loose ball through midfield saw Ghanaian international Tetteh overstretch and go down to the ground with a hamstring injury before being replaced. The visitors took the lead through McBurnie (20) who drove the ball low from the edge of the box to beat keeper Matt Ingram at his near post. City then had a glorious chance to level. Ozan's instant pass forward freed Oscar to race away one-on-one against Foderingham, he took an age to shoot before firing at the goalkeeper, it bounced back out and the Colombian's effort was blocked again by United's number one. Just before the break, Oscar then turned provider to turn it through for Ozan who tried a delicate first-time lob over Foderingham, only to see it land on the roof of the net.

After the break a big spell of pressure came for City, who couldn't find that killer final ball in and around the box. Arveladze brought on Seri for his return and Tyler Smith. Seri showed a couple of nice touches before giving the ball away on the edge of his box and was royally punished by Berge (75), who via a deflection made it 2-0 fifteen minutes from time after a really good spell from the home side.

It was another harsh lesson for the Tigers in taking chances against a well-organised, well-drilled side likely to be near the top again when the medals are dished out come May. The game was marred when I later discovered that one of United's players had been racially abused whilst warming up by someone in the crowd. When will all this sort of behaviour end? There's no place for it in the game - these people are not fans, just kick them out for good. Rant over.

The match attracted 20,246 fans to the MKM this afternoon. This was the best attendance for a league game in over five years, since Spurs thrashed Hull 7-1 in the final PL fixture here on Sunday 21st May 2017, in front of 23,804. No doubt a new wave in interest and a feeling of excitement around the ground, the new low pricing structure and maybe playing on a Sunday all helped to boost the crowd. A glossy, 60-page, full-colour programme (which will take at least a week to read) entitled '*The Tiger*' sold for £3. For me there are far too many adverts which, although important to advertisers in raising much needed revenue, seems to detract from the overall content and something I don't need.

So, how would I sum up our overall experience visiting the MKM today? It was definitely a wonderful occasion and one not to be missed - the atmosphere inside an impressive ground; the feeling of tribal celebration, and a chance to watch a game of football played at a more intense level made for an excellent change. Even though Steph and I had travelled only a few miles from home to get to the match, it seemed a much longer and more tiring day out, than the ones I am normally used to these days. Having taken advantage of the park and ride bus, sorted out food, a programme, tickets, found our seats and watched the game, by the end it felt like we had done a gym workout (mind you that could be down to my old age and in hindsight having taken part in a bike event in the same day, didn't help either!). Despite the result, it had been a superb experience and one not to be forgotten. As far as belated birthday treats go this was certainly right up there with the very best of them. There was just enough time to polish off that triple chocolate cake smothered with full fat cream, to end what had been a perfect day!

FGIF Match Rating: 4 FGIF Ground Rating: 5**



R No.5: WebEd - Saturday 3rd September 2022; **Gunness & Burringham** (v Glennys); Scunthorpe & District League Division Two; Kick-Off: 2.30pm; Venue: Gunness Playing Field, Old Village Street, Gunness, Scunthorpe, Lincs, DN158TW; Result: 0-5; Admission: None; Programme: None; Attendance: 30.

A PIECE OF CAKE

I really do love this time of year. It signals a time of change, and with autumn fast approaching there's a noticeable chill in the air, early golden leaves are beginning to fall from the trees and nights are growing dark, that bit earlier. For the avid grounds' collector, it's also a chance to find a game in one of the much smaller 'grass roots' competitions which finally commence their programme of league fixtures around this time, an added bonus with more, what I call, 'local' games to choose from.

I've got to take things a bit easier and save some energy today. No, that's nothing to do with the soaring price of gas and electricity but comes ahead of the gruelling Selby Three Swans Sportive, a cracking cycling event that I've entered. The exciting thirty-mile challenge, held on a flat and fast course gets underway early tomorrow morning starting at the abbey. I'm in luck as the Scunny League starts its new season this afternoon which fits the bill perfectly for the hopping neutral not wanting to stray too far. With a journey time of no more than twenty-five minutes I'm crossing the Humber into North Lincolnshire for my much-awaited fix at Gunness and Burringham FC.

With plenty of time on my hands and light traffic on the roads, I decide to take a more leisurely, scenic and winding route through South Ferriby and Thealby, skirting the river before heading down towards the western fringes of Scunthorpe. The small village of Gunness, located about three miles from the main town centre and running close to the banks of the river Trent, is easily reached from the Neap House roundabout along the B1216. The ground is found off Old Village Street, a horse-shoe shaped road which joins the approach on Station Road at both of its ends -although I took the first turning next to Empson's timber merchants and continued through the housing estate, it's probably quicker, as I found out, to take the second turn further along, which works out to be much closer to the football ground.

The lovely tree-lined venue, owned by the parish council, is very neat and tidy. A large welcome sign incorporating the club's name and logo is affixed to the outer fence next to the entrance and main car park. Just in case you were wondering, the adjoining village of Burringham which forms part of the club's title, is only about two miles south from here. The site containing the playing field and well equipped children's play park, is quite spacious. A large modern brick building, opened in 2015, accommodating both the village hall and changing rooms, looks a picture, adorned with an array of decorative plants and hanging baskets around its perimeter. Travellers here will not fail to miss the ornate metal forged 'Halloween' themed weathervane, complete with a witch sitting astride a broomstick, atop of the tiled roof. The two large flags unfurled at full mast are a reminder of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee celebrations, held here a couple of months ago at the beginning of June. The (only) main un-roped pitch is marked out

in the field beyond the changing rooms. Although there are no dedicated spectator facilities at present, the club has invested in a couple of brand-new Perspex dug outs, positioned close to half-way along the right-hand side touchline.

According to the busy club chairman Adam Donskey, Gunness & Burringham Football Club was formed only a couple of years ago, playing initially as a junior side at under fifteen level. A decision was made to form an open-age team, which came to fruition when a successful application was made to join the S&DL last season. The club really struggled in their inaugural campaign and the stats make for some grim reading. Finishing next to bottom in the third (lowest division), they lost eleven (out of twelve) matches, recording many heavy defeats along the way and scoring the fewest goals in the entire division. Indeed, their only victory came when they beat rock bottom side and perennial whipping boys, Santon FC, in a game that ended 7-2 back in March. So, with renewed optimism and a few new faces brought in to strengthen the squad over the summer, you would hope the lads could do better this season.

Judging by this performance, the answer is a resounding, no! In truth, the hosts were never really in it from the off, as the visitors Glennys, named after a bar with the same name in Scunthorpe town centre, were in full control throughout the entire game. Tyler James (17) put his side into the lead poking the ball home through a group of players inside the six-yard box before Aaron Lidgett (31) doubled the score sending larger than life keeper Jon Fowles the wrong way from the penalty spot just two minutes later. Glennys went three up before the break, again as a result of some slack defending, when Josh Housam (33) was allowed time and space to tap home from close range shortly after the half hour mark. Within five minutes of the restart, it was Kane Henderson (50) who stole in at the back post beating the offside trap to drill the ball home following a corner, one of many set piece plays chalked up during the afternoon. Substitute Adam Simmons (74) came on to complete the rout netting his side's fifth goal, beating the advancing Fowles, in a one-on-one contest, to complete what had been a thoroughly miserable afternoon for Gunness. Despite picking the ball out his net more times than he would have liked, I voted the bespectacled keeper (aka Jonno - check out his name ironed onto the back of his jersey) the Man of the Match, after making some heroic last gasp saves to prevent the final score from reaching double figures. Although it seemed easy pickings for the visitors, I thought overall that they looked a decent outfit and wouldn't be surprised if they improved on their fourth placing from last season (like Gunness, it was also their first campaign in the S&DL). The game, refereed expertly by match official Stephen McManus, his first in the league since moving up here from Kent, was played on a surprisingly well-grassed pitch. According to my headcount, made during the second half, about thirty spectators were in attendance.

The league is one of the smallest in the country and, like many of its kind up and down the land, supplements its fixtures by organising several cup competitions. As much as I enjoy watching games in this league, I do worry about its future longevity and ultimate survival. If you don't know much about the S&DL, I can confirm that for the current 2022-23 season, it will be contested with just two divisions (and not three). With some teams leaving and fewer new applications, restructuring over the summer has meant that twenty-four clubs have now been reduced to nineteen, with ten teams in Division One and nine, in Division Two.

Losing four teams might not seem that many, but if this pattern continues at the same rate, then a once proud competition boasting thirty-one teams just ten years ago, could be struggling to make up the numbers and like many former leagues disappear altogether, one day. Let's just hope for the good of the game that this situation doesn't happen.

It had been another lovely afternoon's entertainment, spent at a most welcoming, friendly club. A visit to Gunness & Burringham FC comes highly recommended to all fans of 'grass roots' football. I nearly forgot to mention that I'm also celebrating my birthday today - doh. What a shame that very large slice of triple chocolate cake with helping of full-fat cream poured over it for good measure, will just have to wait until I've finished my bike ride tomorrow. Hmm. Until then, how about a few lines from that famous Beatles song: *'When I'm Sixty-Four...?!'*

FGIF Match Rating: 3 FGIF Ground Rating: 3**



R No.4: WebEd - Saturday 27th August 2022; Middleton (v Leeds Medics & Dentists); Yorkshire Amateur League Supreme Division; Kick-Off: 2.00pm; Venue: Leeds South Hub, Middleton Road, Belle Isle, Leeds, West Yorks, LS103JA; Result: 3-2; Admission: None; Programme: No; Attendance: 41.

MAKING A LEAGUE DEBUT

It's something a little bit different for the hopping neutral from the East Riding today. With nothing really standing out in the Bank Holiday fixtures this weekend, I eventually decide to pick a game in the Yorkshire Amateur League, a competition which I know very little about having never crossed my hopping radar before. Yes, this is a definitely a new one for me. With participating clubs predominantly based in West Yorkshire, I find a couple of games in Leeds which are both within easy reach of *FGIF HQ*. and after a bit of faffing about finally prime the Sat Nav for Middleton Football Club (over my second choice Alwoodley FC which is a bit further afield requiring a longer journey around the city's northern ring road).

The club is relatively new having been established five years ago, back in 2017, and only joining the YAL a year later. Formally known as New Middleton, the first team have achieved huge success in their very short history winning the Yorkshire Amateur League Division Three title and Hancock Cup double in their debut season which resulted in them being promoted four (yes, four) divisions up to the YAL Premier section. After suffering only one defeat and amassing a positive goal difference of over 100 goals, Middleton lifted the title in 2020/21 moving up to the Supreme Division, thereby gaining Step 7 status. Incredibly, they finished as runners-up, behind Huddersfield based side Littleton FC, and went on to win the Leeds & District Senior Challenge Cup.

The club also runs a Reserve team formed in 2020-21 which now competes in the YAL Championship after winning the Division 2 in their debut season. In addition, they also operate a 'Flexi' team which participates in the West Riding FA Flexi League (be honest, I bet you had never heard of it either). They joined the competition in 2017 winning it three times: in 2017/18, 2018/19 and 2020/21 and went on to win the West Riding FA Flexi Summer Cup in 2018/19. Hoppers may be interested to note that the Flexi games are played on Thursday evenings at the West Riding FA ground in the Oulton area of Leeds.

The club plays its games at the South Leeds Hub, an activity centre for youngsters located in the Belle Isle area of Leeds. It's in the adjoining district to Middleton itself and not far from both the M621 and M1 which run close by. After leaving the M62 junction at junction 30 my westerly route by-passes both, taking a more circuitous journey from Castle Gate through the sticks via Carlton and Rothwell before arriving at the ground off Belle Isle Road. As you approach, the entrance and car park can be seen on the opposite side of the carriageway which means that you need to drive past it, turn at the Belle Isle Circus (next) roundabout further along and come back on yourself to get there.

The first team and reserves both play matches on a 4G pitch inside the multi-use games area (or cage to you and me) which is next to the car park and runs parallel to the main road. The playing surface here certainly seems less springy than the 4G rubber crumb version used by Nunsthorpe at the FDC in Bradley where I attended a game in the Lincolnshire League last week. In fact, I'm still finding bits of the black crumb inside my trainers from my hop a full seven days later. A separate walkway/spectator viewing area runs almost the entire length of the pitch (along the left touchline) inside the green wire mesh fence perimeter. There is no spectator cover or dug outs on site at present. Apart from buildings belonging to the youth centre, a row of semi-detached houses overlooks the far end of the playing area. The players use changing rooms located inside the dedicated sports department/faculty of the SL Hub, an impressive new brick building with slightly curved roof which stands beyond and to the left of the main car park, some 100 yards from the pitch.

This afternoon Middleton are taking on Leeds Medics and Dentists: a great name for a club, by the way. Once made up of such learned professionals, it is no longer the case today, as the membership is open to all according to one of the subs who happened to be a PE teacher. Check out their interesting club emblem (in the album gallery) ironed onto their shirts - I hope that the skull and crossbones doesn't truly reflect the current state of the NHS, or we are all definitely in

trouble! With a couple of league games having been played already, the hosts have made a terrific start to the new campaign sitting joint top of the table on maximum points whereas their opponents find themselves next to bottom, yet to record any points to their name. On this evidence *Wraybet* would be foolish to predict anything other than a comfortable home win.

Not a bit of it. After taking an early lead when the unmarked Jordan Walker (12) found himself with the easiest of taps in from six yards out, it looked as though the hosts would go on to dominate the game. How wrong can you be? In fact, it was the visitors who ended the half the strongest, taking a well-deserved lead into the break. Firstly, Jack Helliwell (17) levelled matters five minutes later when his direct free kick, taken just inside the Middleton half, surprised everyone including keeper Harry Bradley who seemingly unsighted at first, saw the ball too late to keep it out. Next it was Nathan Brady (23) who put his side, dressed in all-purple, ahead, when his well-placed shot from the edge of the box comfortably sailed past the outstretched arms of Bradley and into the back of the net.

Moments after the break it was Walker (58), nicknamed 'Horse' by his teammates, for reasons I can't go into here (!!), scored his second goal of the game, firing an unstoppable and thunderous drive into the top right-hand corner of the goal frame which helped Middleton to draw level. Inspired by this the hosts then scored what proved to be the decisive winning goal just five minutes later, as the ball took a wicked deflection off the three-man wall lined up to face a direct free kick (OG-64) - leaving the keeper stranded - desperately trying to change direction, he could only look on as the ball crossed the line. As the final whistle sounded it signalled the end of what had been a thoroughly absorbing end to end contest. With Middleton consolidating their top of the table position, somehow you really couldn't help feeling a bit sorry for the Medics who battled hard throughout and deserved to get at least a point for their efforts.

The match played in lovely warm sunny and, at times hot conditions, attracted over forty spectators to Middleton Road (address given for the main part of the Hub at the opposite side the campus). Neither programmes nor refreshments were made available during the afternoon. But it mattered not a jot to me as the club officials, players and fans made me feel very welcome on my short stay and I would recommend a visit here to fellow travellers. Special mention must go to the affable manager Reece Mudd and his assistant Don Chadwick who kindly fielded all my questions about the club and allowed me to access all areas for the photos.

In fact, I certainly wouldn't hesitate attending future games in this competition, details of which can be found on the formative *FA Full-Time* website and on social media where most clubs have *twitter* accounts to keep you informed about their progress these days. If you get chance, why not throw caution to the wind and attend a match in a new league. Like me, you might really enjoy it!

FGIF Match Rating: 4 FGIF Ground Rating: 2**



R No.3: WebEd - Saturday 20th August 2022; **Nunsthorpe** (v Immingham Town); Lincolnshire League; Kick-Off: 3.15pm; Venue: Bradley FDC - 4G pitch, Bradley Road, Grimsby, North Lincs, DN370AG; Result: 1-3; Admission: None; Programme: None; Attendance: 46.

COMPLETING THE SET

My hop today involved making the relatively short trip over the Humber Bridge to Grimsby, a journey taking about forty minutes to complete, from *FGIF* HQ. This was in fact my third visit to the FDC in Bradley having previously taken in games to watch Grimsby Borough FC here last season and, before that, former tenants Cleethorpes Town FC in their ground share days, back in 2018. This afternoon it was with eager anticipation that I took in a game 'next door' on the adjacent, 4G pitch which occupies part of the football hub. I'm not really sure how fellow travellers would judge this, but I considered it to be a new ground 'tick' with the added bonus of finally completing visits to all current Lincolnshire Football League club venues thrown in for good measure - a two for one offer, if you like.

The FDC covers a vast area and provides a wide range of community pitches used by players of all ages and abilities. Check out the framed legend near reception which highlights all the pitches on site. Although Borough and Nunsthorpe share the main facilities (social club, tea bar, changing room area and toilets), each of their grounds are self-contained and quite distinct from one another inside the complex. I tried, a couple of times, to get a peek of the action over the panelled fence (Borough were playing Hebburn in a NPL fixture) but couldn't see very much at all. Indeed, spectators watching Nunsthorpe actually come in through a separate entrance to access the floodlit 4G playing area, situated over to the left. Running parallel to, and behind the pavilion, this has its own concourse (outside the perimeter fencing) which continues along the whole length of the pitch. Although fans are not allowed inside cage itself, there is an open section/viewing area complete with comfort rail found just to the left of the players' dug outs.

Today's game saw the visit of local club Immingham Town to the FDC. Despite having only played one game to date, both sides come into the match unbeaten - the hosts overcoming Brigg CIC 6-0 here last week to go top (yes, I know it's very

early days...) with the Pilgrims winning on the road, earning a 1-0 victory over Skegness Reserves. For the neutral observer a feisty 'derby' encounter is definitely 'on the cards' this afternoon.

The game which started later than normal (at 3.15pm to accommodate a children's party booking on the 4G) did not fail to disappoint. Once the eagle-eyed referee was happy that the four corner flags were eventually located and hastily placed in situ, the game started at what was a frantic pace. The visitors bossed the early stages and deservedly took a first-half lead when Lucas Meredith (19), with his back to goal, flicked the ball up, turned and blasted it over the keeper James Fenty from a tight angle, at position just within the bright white lines marking the six-yard box. Meredith himself then became provider with a defence splitting pass to find Callum Degruchy (55) who calmly slipped the ball under the advancing Fenty to make it 0-2, barely ten minutes after the re-start. The Pilgrims effectively wrapped the game up just after the hour mark when Ollie Graham (64) capitalised on a mix up in the Nunsthorpe defence to expertly steer the ball home despite the best efforts of Fenty to close down the cavernous space left in front of him by his defenders. The hosts did manage to get themselves on the scoresheet when Luke Spreadbury (67) prodded home from ten yards out, a few minutes afterwards but it counted for little, as Immingham held onto their two-goal lead to claim victory and three more valuable points. The result now moves them to the top of the table, a ranking they currently share with Wyberton, Lincoln Moorlands and Tetney Rovers, all of whom have gained maximum points at this early stage of the campaign.

The game played in lovely, warm and sunny conditions attracted, judging by my rough head count, nearly fifty spectators although the *FA Full-Time* website states that only 20 were present. I don't know why there is always such a discrepancy, I can never understand this, can you? I was joined fence-side by fellow hopper Pete who had travelled over from Chesterfield and was excellent company to be with. As expected, the club doesn't issue programmes, probably like most others in the league, unless Immingham still do...if you do know of any, please drop me a line.

During a stoppage in play, I managed to have a quick chat with enthusiastic club manager Davie Cooper who gave me a useful potted history about Nunsthorpe Football Club. Established back in 2014, they started out as Nunsthorpe Tavern FC - the village is only a few miles away from here - with a strong social bias, formed by Davie and his assistant Ash Ballard. They gained early success competing in the Grimsby Sunday League finishing as runners-up in Division Five in 2015 before moving up to take both league and cup honours in Division One, only a short time later. After playing in the Premier (top) Division for three seasons, a successful application was made to join the Lincolnshire Football League. Despite a disrupted 2020-21 season (caused by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic) which saw the club finish in the mid-table after only playing a handful of games, they did manage to lift silverware, winning the Lincolnshire League Supplementary Cup beating Louth Town 3-2 after extra time in the final played at Skegness Town FC. This was a terrific achievement considering it was only their debut season at this level. With the competition now gaining Step 7 status in the pyramid, the club was 'strongly advised' to drop the 'Tavern' bit from their name this campaign, in line with Lincolnshire FA rules which bar pub teams (pardon the pun) if they wanted to

continue at this level. Sounds like a bit of arm twisting behind backs, if you ask me. Reluctantly they did, and here they are today.

Davie went on to explain that the fanbase is growing in numbers, but attendances here can often depend on whether other local sides are also playing at home (in the area) on the same afternoon. When you consider that Grimsby Borough, Grimsby Town and Cleethorpes were all playing home games this afternoon (what are the chances of that happening?), attracting a crowd of nearly fifty offers plenty of encouragement for the future.

To find out more about Nunsthorpe FC check out the *FA Full-Time* website covering the Lincs League or, view the club's *twitter* account where updates on fixtures and results are added on a regular basis. If you are into match photos then check out the excellent feed of Tony Cox, the club photographer, who covers most home games here. Needless to say, a chance to take in a game at this friendly club is to be recommended to all grounds' collectors. The joys of completing another football league continues...have fun wherever you go...

FGIF Match Rating: 3 FGIF Ground Rating: 2**



R No.2: WebEd - Saturday 13th August 2022; **Wakefield AFC** (v Armthorpe Welfare); Northern Counties East League Division One; Kick-Off: 3.00pm; Venue: The Millennium Stadium, Featherstone Rovers RLFC, Post Office Road, Featherstone, South Yorks, WF75EN; Result: 5-0; Admission: £5; Programme: 32pp, £2; Attendance: 248.

A LOFTY CONVERSION...

With an athletics competition taking priority over my groundhopping duties two weeks ago (what a part-timer, I hear you say!), an opportunity to take in Wakefield's first competitive game in the Northern Counties East League was, temporarily, put on the back burner (no pun intended despite the hot weather). In true hopping style I'm making amends for this today, by heading with mega enthusiasm, over to Featherstone, for my belated fix.

My journey along the M62 is an easy one and after dropping my daughter Steph at the Junction 32 Outlet retail park in neighbouring Castleford to grab the latest bargains, I arrive at the home of Featherstone Rovers RLFC, off Post Office Road,

with plenty of time to spare ahead of kick-off. The place is buzzing as fans head through the turnstiles and onto the main concourse. As you can imagine (if you haven't been here yet) the rugby ground, also known as the Millennium Stadium, is very impressive with a vast amount of seated cover (if you didn't yet know some of it was transported here from Scarborough Town FC) on three sides, and a large open terrace on the other. Suffice to say, with a capacity of 7000, it more than outweighs the needs of any football club playing in the NCEL, possibly even the National League, which makes a visit here seem quite surreal, if I'm being honest. The photos in the album gallery will provide a much better description of the ground, than I can in writing.

However, here are a few observations which might help. From first impressions, you can't help feeling that you are in a large rugby (not football) ground and rightly so. The history of Featherstone RLFC dominates proceedings here - check out the brown ground direction sign on Post Office Road; the grand lettering splashed across the stands and over the seating and, the terrific mural documenting the history over the years stretching along the end terrace - there is no mistaking that you are in rugby league territory. As a result, the presence of a football club, namely Wakefield AFC, is still very much low key, with little or no signage to give them any sort of identity here. Except for a few flags draped over the front seats in the home stand before the game starts, it would be hard to make a case for them being here. But this is only the start of bigger and better things to come, you would like to think, and it will definitely take time for such an ambitious 'project' to move forward. Don't forget that progress on the field has been startling and it is hard to believe that the team was playing in the second tier of the Sheffield County League just a few years ago (see below).

Many older (and perhaps a few younger) members of the hopping fraternity may remember that a former club Wakefield FC (nothing to do with the present set up) existed, having played in the Northern Premier League between 2007-2014. The club had strong ties with Emley FC who, after facing eviction from their Welfare Ground home, due to stringent NPL ground grading restrictions, moved into Wakefield Trinity's RLFC Belle Vue ground in 2000-01. After being renamed Wakefield & Emley FC, many supporters felt alienated at the change, and with lower attendances, left the club bottom of the NPL Premier Division. Although there was a further change in title to Wakefield-Emley FC in 2004-05, disgruntled fans needed a team to replace their reserves side who had been disbanded leaving the village without a football team to call its own. When a new club AFC Emley was formed in 2005, many fans parted company with quasi-Wakefield-Emley setup, returning to watch football in the village instead. After relegation to the NPL 1, the club dropped the Emley part of its name, simply becoming called Wakefield FC. Struggling to build a proper fan base in the city, the club moved to College Grove in Wakefield before resigning from the NPL and being wound up altogether in 2014.

So, what's the back story with this new club, Wakefield AFC? It appears that a group of businessmen first founded the club back in 2019. Initially playing its home games at the Dorothy Hyman Sports Centre (inside the running track) in Barnsley, the club competed in the Sheffield & Hallamshire County Senior League Premier Division. However, during this time the COVID-19 pandemic struck, and it was decided by the league in consultation with the FA, that the season would be

cancelled and all results for the matches played in 2019-20 would be declared null and void.

With the pandemic still prevalent and lockdowns being enforced, only a handful of games were played during the following campaign, with the club finishing in the top half of the table (sixth out of fifteen clubs in the division) by the end of 2020-21. However, off the field, an ambitious deal had been made by Wakefield AFC to enter into a groundshare agreement with Featherstone Rovers RLFC allowing the football club to play its home matches at the Millennium Stadium. By November 2021, VO2 Capital, an American, Connecticut-based family-run firm, had taken a majority interest at the football club, announcing at the same time, a merger with Wakefield Trinity Ladies Football club, thus creating a new women's section for Wakefield AFC.

By January 2022, Chairman Guilherme Decca appointed Gabriel Mozzini as first team manager as part of several measures taken by VO2 Capital to re-organize the club structure. Under Mozzini's, guidance, the team went on a remarkable run of seventeen unbeaten games, including six consecutive clean sheets, to finish what was a most eventful and successful season. On May 14th, Wakefield AFC finally won their first league title after beating Barnsley based Dodworth Miners Welfare 2-0 at home in the last game of the season (in front of a massive 608 spectators!!!!), thereby gaining promotion to the NCEL within three years of first being established, which is a truly remarkable feat, it must be said...

Today saw the visit of Doncaster-based Armthorpe Welfare to the Millennium Stadium for a NCEL1 fixture. After beating Glasshoughton here by a 3-1 score-line on the opening day (the game I had originally planned to watch) and earning a 2-2 draw at Shirebrook last week, Wakey stood seventh in the table behind a clutch of clubs already on maximum points. By contrast the visitors had yet to record a single point having lost both of their opening games to date (H v Dronfield, 1-3 and A v Worsborough, 1-0) which left them in fifteenth place. As expected, the result went according to the form book with the homesters notching a resounding 5-0 victory (3-0 up by half-time) putting in a superb team performance. It certainly didn't help matters for Armthorpe when they were reduced to ten men in the second half. As each goal was banged in, there were some terrific graphics on the electronic scoreboard positioned in the far corner of the ground which naturally went down very well with the jubilant home fans and neutrals, like me.

The match played in very hot conditions (requiring several drinks breaks during the game) on a surprising well grassed, verdant surface, attracted an impressive crowd of 248 spectators. Most in attendance chose to watch the game inside the large main stand (a cooler option out of the strong heat) with the other areas remaining almost empty, except for a few who had gathered on the far side and on the open terrace to the right. It was interesting to note how many locals were wearing their white, red and blue replica kit shirts, perhaps a sign that an interest in supporting the club is starting grow.

A glossy full colour 32-page programme entitled: '*All Wakey Aern't We*', priced at £2, covered all the basics including a hefty four-page focus on the visitors and a further six devoted to their own pen pictures. Although I had left my reading glasses inside the glove box of the car (doh!), it didn't matter as the print size was so big, I didn't need them. A wide range of refreshments were available from

several mobile catering outlets parked up along the concourse behind the main stand. The club also sells a range of souvenirs available from the club shop and from a stall set up inside the entrance. Although I managed to pay cash admission upon arrival, the club also operates a ticketing system on their website where you can scan the bar code on your smart phone for entry at the turnstile. Unsurprisingly, the option to get in for free (as was the case last season) no longer exists!

I thoroughly enjoyed my short visit to the Millennium Stadium this afternoon. It had been a wonderful experience to take in such a fantastic ground, oozing with character and steeped in rugby league nostalgia. Without a doubt, it has to be one of the best venues to watch NCEL football, even non-league football higher up the pyramid, come to think of it. I was certainly made to feel very welcome by everyone I spoke to, and I wish Wakefield AFC the very best for the future and hope that they continue to sustain a football club, perhaps playing at a higher level than this one day. The joys of watching football matches in great stadia is definitely not to be missed.

FGIF Match Rating: 3 FGIF Ground Rating: 5**



R No.1: WebEd - Saturday 6th August 2022; **Goole AFC** (v Consett); FA Cup Extra Preliminary Round; Kick-Off: 3.00pm; Venue: The Victoria Pleasure Grounds, Marcus Street, Goole, East Yorks, DN146SL; Result: 4-1; Admission: £6; Programme: 20pp, £2; Attendance: 177.

A WONDERFUL TRIP DOWN MEMORY LANE

After a gap of almost thirty-three years, I have chosen to make a re-visit to the Victoria Pleasure Grounds, home of Goole AFC. Now don't get me wrong this is not the first time I have thought about taking a trip down memory lane to check out the ground - my last attempt was a couple of years ago during the pandemic when football viewing and travelling had been severely curtailed. It was during the second wave of COVID-19 when it was deemed necessary by our leaders and prominent medics to place certain parts of the country into tiers (depending on the rate of transmission) that I attempted to travel across East Yorkshire (and not an inch outside it) to get my fix. Alas I was denied access with preference going to home fans and season ticket holders only. Despite the looming health crisis, the

country was (or should that be is) going through, it almost made sense at the time...

According to my little blue hopping logbook, the first of many subsequent editions used to compile my hopping exploits over the years, it was back on the 17/12/88 that I attended the ground to take in an HFS Loans (Northern Premier League) Premier Division fixture against Southport. Reading the now almost feint entry written then in pencil on the fading yellow page, I can tell you that the game, my fortieth non-league match, ended in a 1-1 draw. Although I do remember attending the game, I can recall little about the match nor the ground apart from there being a running track, possibly a cinder variety of some description, surrounding the pitch, and a large water tower overlooking the site.

Fast forward to today. Filled with the wide-eyed excitement I turn down Carter Street and pull up into a prime parking spot literally just vacated by a local resident, which brings me outside the ground in the adjoining Marcus Street (the one given as the club address). The VPG is virtually shoehorned into its place with hardly the width of a 'fag paper' separating a sprawling myriad of terraced houses which back onto its four sides. This location dominated by row upon row of similar looking terracotta brick buildings each bearing almost identical sloping roofs, chimney pots, satellite dishes and gardens with lines full of washing hanging out to dry in the sultry air, give the place an instant and unique appeal, something that dare I say it, is possibly only found 'up North'.

I'll let the ground photos in the album provide a better and more detailed description than I can, but here is a brief summary to get your hopping juices flowing. From first impressions the site is vast. There is a feeling of symmetry about the place too with stands flanking opposite sides of the arena and both ends remaining open with plenty of standing room. A six-lane running track surrounds the pitch with the modern-day rubber crumb construction now replacing the old, dated cinder in-fill to give it a lovely, enclosed feel. As first imagined a large water tower and adjacent chimney (a rather phallic-looking red brick construction) totally dominate proceedings and clearly visible from all angles as the photos will testify to. Referred to locally as the Salt and Pepper Pots, I believe these buildings were originally old water towers serving the dockland area of Goole. It's hard not to be distracted by such prominent twin structures. A tidy main stand to the left complete with red corrugated metal fascia houses a large terrace covering at least a dozen concrete steps beneath. There is a section of seating at the far end. The stand opposite which replaced a former cover blown down by a storm back around the time of the millennium provides additional cover. A well-stocked club shop, manned by the ever-helpful Dave Oldridge, and tea bar are found at opposite sides of, and close to, the main entrance and turnstile block, another nice touch.

Although the club has firmly established itself in the NCEL, it has not always been plain sailing for The Vikings (pardon the pun) who have endured turbulent times over the years. Established by Mike Norman in 1997 as a replacement for the old Goole Town FC which folded at the end of the 1995-96 season, the new club immediately joined the Premier Division of the CML. It went on to win the division at the first attempt, losing only one league match all season, earning promotion to the Supreme Division. The following season saw the club win the Wakefield Floodlit

Cup and the League Cup. A third-place finish also saw them gain promotion into Division One of the NCEL.

In its first season the club won both the Wilkinson Sword Trophy and the Division One title, earning promotion to the Premier Division. In 2004-05 the club won the Premier Division, earning promotion to Division One of the NPL, and went on to lift the West Riding County Cup League two years later. League restructuring saw the club placed in Division One South for the 2007-08, and they remained in the division until being transferred to Division One North in 2012. Although they were moved back to Division One South the following season, the club were transferred to Division One North again in 2016. After finishing second-from-bottom of the division the club were due to be relegated until being reprieved when Ilkeston were excluded from the league. Sadly, Goole finished bottom of Division One North the following campaign, resulting in relegation to the Premier Division of the Northern Counties East League where they have remained ever since.

My visit today saw the visit of newly promoted NPL outfit Consett to the VPG which added much extra spice for the hopping neutral to this opening round FA Cup tie. The game was an absolute belter and provided one of the shock results of the afternoon with the hosts winning 4-1 to book their place into the next round. However, before a ball was kicked a problem with the shirts had to be resolved - there was a clash of colours, as Consett normally dressed in white tops were unaware that the hosts had elected to play the match wearing their newly designed centenary shirts, also in white. As a result, the visitors donned the red Goole away shirts instead, to placate the officials and add a bit of confusion to proceedings. I wonder what late comers thought after passing through the turnstiles upon seeing two teams dressed in Goole kit on the pitch?!

For the record it was Goole who took the lead just after the half hour mark from a corner with Sam Cable (32) raced into the six-yard box and headed the ball low into the net. Moments before the break The Vikings scored their second, without doubt the goal of the match, when Nathan Perks (42) seeing the keeper off his line following a poor clearance, fired the ball into an empty goal from just inside his own half. Despite some heroics from the home keeper Matt Zaniewski who had been called upon to make several fine saves at the start of the second half, Consett got back into the game when Kieran Aplin (65) scored straight from a corner with the keeper and his defence being helpless to prevent the goal. Within ten minutes Goole restored their two-goal lead when Joel Spence's lofted free kick was met at the far post by Dylan Collington who set up Josh Dacre (74) to head home on the line making it 3-1. The game was over when Luke Williams (90+2) chested the ball into the back of the net after an excellent Callum Petch cross to make it 4-1, just before the final whistle marked the end of what had been a pulsating cup tie.

The game played in beautiful warm and sunny conditions on a surprisingly, given the current drought situation, well-grassed pitch attracted 177 spectators including many visiting fans who had travelled down from Durham. A glossy full colour 20-page programme, entitled the '*Vikings Review*', was issued for the match and contained a mixture of news, past match reports, stats and an informative focus on the visitors. Although the tea bar was closed due to staff

sickness (hope it wasn't something they had eaten), a replacement mobile refreshment wagon was booked, arriving just minutes ahead of kick-off. Before then many had already nipped out to get some fried tuck from a chippy around the corner. At this point I would like to thank the old couple from Consett who found the large portion size too much for them and generously donated almost half their helping to yours truly and very tasty it was too. Before you ask, no, I didn't twist their arms in parting with it!

My visit to the VPG had been a lovely way to start the new season and I wish the Vikings well on their march to the arch where they will travel to Carlisle City in the next round of the FA Cup. For more information about the club visit the Goole AFC club website, *twitter* feed or the pages on the superb NCEL site where there will be updates on all essential stats covering The Vikings. The unbridled joys of re-visiting old clubs, checking out cracking grounds and watching FA Cup upsets definitely footballing things to saviour, made this an afternoon to remember!

FGIF Match Rating: 5 FGIF Ground Rating: 5**

End