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RAMBLINGS REPORTS 2026-27

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

updated on 26/10/26.

R No.14: ***WebEd*** – Saturday 24th October 2026; **Fishers AFC** v Wareham Forest; East Riding County League Junior Cup Round 2; Kick-Off: 2pm; Venue: Fishers Park, Courtland Road, Hull, East Yorks, HU6 8AW; Result: 0-5; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 20

REPORT TO FOLLOW

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

R No.13: ***WebEd*** – Saturday 17th October 2026; **Bradley** v Louth FC; East Lincs Combination Football League Town Trophy Q-F; Kick-Off: 2.15pm; Venue: Oasis Academy Wintringham, Weelsby Ave, Grimsby, North Lincs, DN32 0AZ; Result: 3-4; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 14

REPORT TO FOLLOW

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

R No.12: ***WebEd*** – Saturday 10th October 2026; **Bishop Auckland** v Newton Aycliffe; FA Vase First Round; Kick-Off: 3pm; Venue: Heritage Park, Stadium Way, St Helen Auckland, Bishop Auckland, Durham, DL14 9AE; Result: 3-1; Admission: £7 (concession, OAP); Programme: Yes, 36pp, £2.50; Attendance: 598

REPORT TO FOLLOW

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

R No.11: ***WebEd*** – Saturday 3rd October 2026; **Barton Town** v Chorley; FA Cup Third Qualifying Round; Kick-Off: 3pm; Venue: Matte Black Surfacing Stadium, off Falkland Way, Barton-upon-Humber, North Lincs, DN18 5RL; Result: 1-4; Admission: £7 (concession, OAP); Programme: Yes, 16pp, £3; Attendance: 1029

A BIT OF HISTORY IN THE MAKING

There are some days in the life of a self-confessed grounds collector when the thought of travelling miles just to tick off a new ground, in a different place, does not really seem to get the hopping juices flowing as much. Often, the lure of the game and the sense of occasion that surrounds it might in fact be much more appealing. This afternoon, I'm making the short trip over the Bridge where NCEL-side Barton Town FC is about to embark on one of the greatest ever days in its history, having reached the FA Cup Third Qualifying round for the very first time.

As you can imagine the build-up for this must-see game against Chorley, of the National League North, has been off the scale in recent days: apart from the intense TV and press coverage, the club's socials have been in melt-down all week as the club expects a much larger than normal crowd to be in attendance at the modest Matte Black Stadium off Falkland Way. Although I've been to the ground a few times already over the years (its regularly used as the HQ for annual Humber

Bridge Sportive cycling event), I've only watched one game here before – it was back in August 2018 when The Swans lost 1-3 to Yorkshire Amateur in an NCEL Premier fixture (attendance: 121).

Since that time the ground has improved quite a bit: although the pay booth is still in the same place, a new access road and entrance have since been constructed, located in the opposite corner of the ground off a separate junction called Falkland Way. In addition, a new outside refreshment access point (hatch) for the tea bar and kitchen has also been installed in a small bit of land behind the main dugouts. Another nice touch includes the impressive array of advertising boards displayed around the ground. Look out too for the Swans Forever Wall next to and inside the turnstile block. However, there's still no escaping the fact that the club has suffered, not for the first time, with unwanted drainage problems as evidenced by the deep grid-like lines that plague almost the entire top surface of what appears to be quite a deep rutted pitch. The hot and dry weather over the summer months did not help their cause either with the club having to play their first few competitive home games at neighbouring Bottesford, Brigg and Winterton. Following much remedial treatment in recent weeks, thankfully the grass is now starting to grow back again, and club can hopefully put this episode behind them (fingers crossed).

Back to the game. Before reaching today's historic Third Qualifying Round tie the Swans had already played in five rounds of the FA Cup to get here. Their FA journey started back in early August with a ten-goal thriller down in Peterborough where they beat Deeping Rangers (3-7) before going on to knock out Eastwood Town (0-2), North Ferriby (0-0 and 2-0 after a replay) and Boldmere St Michaels (3-1) here in the previous round. Opponents Chorley, like all other teams in the National League North, only entered the competition in Second Qualifying Round and travelled to Warrington Rylands to win by the only goal of the game played three weeks ago.

So, with kick-off fast approaching and fans taking up every available inch of space in the tiny stands and around the perimeter fence, you could palpably feel the excitement growing as the players finally took to the pitch. The question that everyone was asking: could the Swans win once again and reach the next round of the cup? For the home fans the answer was a definite yes, why not? Anything can happen. For the neutral observer though, many felt that Barton were the clear underdogs with Chorley being a much tougher opponent and one ranked many places higher up the non-league pyramid than any they had faced so far.

The result, as expected, went to the visitors who showed their class to dominate proceedings and claim a place in the next qualifying round. But they were made to wait until the half-hour mark before taking the lead after Sam Fielding got on the end of a cross directing his flick into the path of Elliot Taylor (35) who headed home in the six-yard box. The visitors added a second barely two minutes later as Max Wilson (37), on loan from Preston North End, received the ball from Taylor and struck it quite brilliantly past unsighted keeper Joe Cracknell. With the Swans on the back foot and really struggling by now, Chorley took advantage adding a third: an Adam Blakeman corner was flicked on at the near post by captain Mike

Calverley to Max Hunt who, waiting at the far post, rifled home to give his side a three-goal lead going into the break.

Hunt (61) then headed home following another corner, just after the hour mark, to claim his second goal of the game and give the Magpies an unassailable lead. Despite being under relentless pressure Barton kept plugging away and got a late consolation goal when substitute Lewis Stephens (90+4) found the net from close range deep into added time. Sadly though, for the Swans and all their staff and supporters, their fine FA Cup run had come to an end. Despite a spirited fight, everyone agreed that they had found their match and were for the most part outplayed this afternoon.

The game, played in bright sunny conditions, on what was a bumpy and rutted surface, was attended by just over a thousand supporters, their highest crowd for years. Amongst this number I noticed several fans, wearing their pro-team club colours, had come to watch the match as their teams were not in action due to international weekend duty. Barton had definitely organized their big day very well and will no doubt go on to reap the rewards courtesy of the FA coffers – they looked after the fans too by hiring more catering vans which were on hand to provide additional hot and cold refreshments to those in the club's tea bar. A glossy, colour, 'souvenir' programme sold for £3; although heavy on adverts and lacking in any recognizable content, design and layout which you would have expected in a typical matchday magazine, it offered instead a few lines from each of the coaches and one or two players who added words of encouragement ahead of the big day. Having said that, my favourite bit, found inside the back pages, had nothing to do with football or the game at all, but makes reference to Elswick Hopper, the once-famous cycling manufacturer, whose factory was apparently once based down Marsh Lane, alongside the ground, before the First World War…hmmm.

I really enjoyed my short trip over to Barton this afternoon. As every football traveller to Marsh Lane will tell you, this is a very friendly club who go out of their way to welcome fans to their ground. It was also exciting to take in a cracking cup tie in a fixture that will long live in the memory and in the record books. Have fun wherever you go even if it's not going to be a new ground!

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

R No.10: ***WebEd*** – Saturday 26th September 2026; **Sutton Rovers** v Swineshead Institute; Lincolnshire FA Junior Cup Round 2; Kick-Off: 2.30pm; Venue: King George V Playing Field (Sutton-On-Sea), Furlongs Road, Sutton-On-Sea, Lincs, LN12 2JQ; Result: 9-1; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 42.

A GOAL FEST BY THE SEA

I don't know about you, but I just love watching county cup matches. There's something wonderful about taking in one of these ties - it's the chance to watch an intriguing game of football involving teams playing in different leagues that you wouldn't normally get the chance to see. For the keen hopper it also provides an exciting hoppertunity to tick off a new ground somewhere in a different area which always makes for a welcome change. Today is one of those days, as I set off from *FGIF* HQ towards the Lincolnshire coast for my eagerly awaited footy fix - a trip to Sutton Rovers FC, members of the East Lincs Football Combination, has in truth, been on my radar for some time, so I can't wait to get there.

It's a bit of a schlep too as I wind my way through the beautiful Lincolnshire Wolds navigating plenty of tiny villages each with its own with variable speed limit to keep you alert on route. The last leg of the journey finally takes me along the coastline diverting around Mablethorpe town centre where plenty of day trippers and holidaymakers are busy enjoying some late summer sunshine, before finally arriving at Sutton-On-Sea, which is only a couple of miles down the road.

The King George V Playing Field is located close to the seaside along Furlongs Road, a narrow lane characterized by its neat colourful rows of beach huts and niche shops which line the pavements. It is literally only a stone's throw from the beautiful, sandy beaches and the adjoining North Sea. The tiny car park is already full when I arrive so it's a case of copying the other spectators and parking up on the grass verge alongside the road. Unlike other council owned sites, the brick-built pavilion found just inside the front entrance doubles up both as a changing facility as well as a clubhouse with tea bar and smart lounge which looks out onto the field around the back. There's certainly no mistaking where you are as the

club logo and name signage fashioned in blue and white is clearly visible on the outer walls.

The enclosed playing field, bordered by some local housing and trees, has two pitches on site with the main one running parallel and next to the pavilion. It's nice to see a well-manicured grass surface for a change, on what looks in places to be quite an undulating surface. A few wooden benches are placed along the front of the clubhouse which faces the pitch but apart from the club-themed corner flags there is no dedicated spectator cover, dug outs or even a perimeter rope here, making it what you would describe as a true, grassroots set up.

Sutton Rovers FC have been members of the East Lincs Football Combination since the club was founded in the pre the Second World War era. Indeed, records detailed in the league's downloadable handbook show that Rovers were first division champions as long ago as the 1937-38 season. First team coach Mark Turton and his assistant Sam Jones both tell me that the club has grown massively in recent years; they now operate a reserve side as well as a number of junior teams. Although non-football related, there's even a Walking Rugby (played on half a pitch) session held here during the week. They also explain that after a couple of dreadful campaigns, good times may just be around the corner after a new management team and entirely different playing squad have been brought in this season. Before play begins, signs are encouraging as they currently head the first (top) division of the ELFC (a competition which has sadly now been trimmed down from three to just two divisions for 2026-27). Visitors Swineshead Institute, a club who hail from the outskirts of Boston have, by contrast, endured a difficult start and, without a win so far, occupy one of the relegation places at the foot of the Boston and District League Premier Division.

The match, played in beautiful, warm sunny conditions throughout, goes completely according to the form book. Apart from the early exchanges, Rovers totally dominate the game and turn out (very) comfortable winners to progress into the next round of the cup. With the result never in doubt, it's certainly a goal fest for the football neutral as the hosts hand out a crushing 9-1 defeat to their opponents this afternoon. I must admit that my trusty *FGIF* Match Stats Card got quite full by the end of play. For the record Kyle Seabrooke bags himself a superb hat-trick, Liam Stynes and Jamie Bosworth both net a brace with Drew Wyer and Alex Carter completing the scoring. Swineshead did grab a consolation immediately after the break, through John Smith who got his name on the scoresheet – his boss Sam Ali admitted afterwards that although his side were totally outclassed, it didn't help their cause when many of the squad cried off the day before leaving what he described as a depleted reserve side, something he said wouldn't have happened only a few years ago – he was also at pains to say that playing in the county cup used to be the highlight of the year – maybe that's no longer the case. I imagine from his tone that he couldn't wait to get changed, get back in the car and make the ninety-minute trip back home to Boston again!

A visit to this friendly, welcoming club comes highly recommended to all hoppers and footy fans alike. Details of the club's fixtures and results can be found not only on the FA's generic Full-Time site but also on their own dedicated Facebook page. It seems that after a difficult couple of years Sutton Rovers FC are heading in the

right direction once again. I will look forward to checking out their future progress not only in the league but also the county cup – certainly based on this showing they might go quite deep into the competition. Watch this space!!

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

R No.9: ***WebEd*** – Saturday 19th September 2026; **Patrington Stanley** v Cross Keys; East Riding County League Division Three; Kick-Off: 2pm; Venue: Patrington Playing Field, Welwick Road, Patrington, East Yorkshire, HU12 0RB; Result: 1-3; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 22.

A WINDY FOOTBALLING OUTPOST

Today I'm visiting one of the county league's newest clubs and I can't wait to get there. Although it's only about twenty miles from home, the slow winding route takes more than half an hour to complete. The rural ground is a bit of a footballing outpost being based in the sticks, some four miles from Withernsea in an area known as Holderness. Thankfully, I'm quite familiar with the place, having made a similar journey just a few weeks ago during stage three of the men's Tour of Britain cycle race: the peloton came through here on route to the east coast before tracking inland and finishing at Beverley racecourse. For those with a geographical bent, the Prime Meridian (a line with zero degrees of longitude) runs just to the east of the village. Thanks go to Wiki for that little known fact.

The ground, found on Welwick Road, is clearly marked with plenty of club signage which helps to create a nice welcome feeling for the neutral football traveller and leaves you in no doubt as to where you are. An old wooden beacon is also located just inside the main entrance and car park. Navigating the facilities, found on opposite sides of the recreation ground, requires a bit of basic fitness and endurance. There are three pitches marked on the large playing field with a modern brick built changing room block and tea bar positioned over to the

immediate left – as in keeping with the rest of the décor, a large bright club logo fashioned in the club colours of red and black adorns the end of the nearside wall. The main first team pitch is found on the opposite side and runs parallel with the perimeter fence – two separate corrugated metal dugouts (marked home and away) are placed either side of the half-way line to provide a bit of shelter from the strong blustery sea breeze which apparently is a key feature here all year round (and would make it a particularly uninviting destination in the winter months).

Before kick-off I manage to have a quick chat with the personable Rich Snaith, one of the club coaches here. He tells me that Patrington Stanley has been going for over ten years now (founded in 2015) and during this era, this is in fact the first season that the club has entered an adult team into the county league. Encouragingly, they have also doubled up by running a reserve team too, which supplement the many junior sides that come under the wider Stanley umbrella. He points to the many mini pitches dotted around and says that the place will be heaving with the large number of youngsters and their parents who will no doubt temporarily descend onto the field tomorrow!

Stanley welcomes Cross Keys (a pub sponsored side from the Endike Lane area of the city near to the Hull Uni) for their first proper competitive home game of the season. There's plenty of excitement pitch-side as both clubs come into the match unbeaten after success in their previous games. With a strong wind at their backs, it's the hosts who take an early lead when Harvey Clarke (14) slips the ball under the advancing keeper to make it 1-0. Despite being on the backfoot for most if the half, the visitors surprisingly draw level when Alfie Sizer (45+1) beats the keeper from close range in what is their first real shot of note on target. In a complete turnaround Owen Fletcher (46) gives Keys (dressed in their distinctive checked shirts) the lead only a few seconds after the break, by completing a terrific run from almost half-way to cut inside before scoring from a tight angle. It's a cracking goal. With both sides creating plenty of chances the result is in some doubt until Conor Gooch (79) taps the ball home from the edge of the six-yard area to give his team a 3-1 lead, enough to seal the win and leapfrog their opponents in the twelve-team table.

Watched by just over twenty fans (mostly supporting the away side), the game is an entertaining contest played on a large well-grassed pitch (at last) in sunny but very blustery conditions which do on occasion affect the players' ability to control the ball. For the non-league footie snapper, the beautiful St Patrick's Anglican parish church, a grade I listed building, completed in 1410 makes for a terrific backdrop to the action. The Queen of Holderness, as it is often referred to, is a superb example of medieval architecture.

A visit to this lovely, friendly club in a beautiful part of the world is highly recommended to all football fans and travellers alike. Like all new clubs joining the county league, I wish them every success and will follow their progress with keen interest in the coming weeks and months. The joys of hopping in remote outposts continues. Have fun, wherever you go.

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

R No.8: ***WebEd*** – Saturday 12th September 2026; **Garstang** v Shildon; FA Vase Second Qualifying Round; Kick-Off: 3pm; Venue: The Riverside, High Street, Garstang, Preston, Lancashire, PR3 1EB; Result: 0-5; Admission: £3 (concession); Programme: Yes, On-Line Issue, 28pp, Free; Attendance: 98.

THE MAGIC OF THE VASE

After booking our family break on the Fylde coast, the hoppertunity came to take in a new ground during our extended weekend staycation. In the days leading up to our trip I had a quick look, as you do, at the possible hop-tions all within a reasonable distance from our base in Blackpool. After much deliberation I decided that a visit to North West Counties League club Garstang FC, located on the outskirts Preston, seemed an ideal choice – it was within easy travelling distance (only twenty miles away) and the match featured a mouthwatering FA Vase tie against Shildon from the North East. As a consequence, visits to Poulton FC (West Lancs League) and Bamber Bridge (Northern Premier League) also making it on the short list, would have to wait for another day.

The ancient market town of Garstang lies equidistant (about ten miles) between both Lancaster and Preston and is easily reached from the main M6 and M55 motorways using the A6 as a link road. The club plays at The Riverside ground which is located just off the busy High Street (B6430). Unusually there are two available main points of access: firstly, off the roundabout junction (alongside the Banking Hub) which leads to a designated car park (for spectators) or 50 yards further up the road which is restricted to players and committee members only (a sign on the way does explain this). Without noticing the warning I took this one by mistake, drove up to the entrance and managed to find a space without any problem – maybe as the advert says ‘I should have gone to Specsavers’ - oops!

As it turned out I had conveniently and without thinking parked in error at the far end of the ground close to the main facilities which include a tea bar (in a small portakabin), changing rooms and two-storey clubhouse which ran in tandem behind the goal. The town's cricket ground is found in the adjacent recreation field with terrific scenic views of the hills rising in the distance beyond. The Riverside is quite a compact tree-lined (in places) venue with a neat red and white post and rail fence surrounding much of the perimeter. Only two quite small, low covered stands are in situ – both positioned at the opposite ends of the terrace behind the far goal with the one to the left having the benefit of some bench seating for spectators. A gently sloping shallow grass embankment runs along the far side close to the dug outs with a tall hedge separating the local tennis and bowling clubs visible beyond here. Interestingly a very tall union jack mounted on a large flagpole also adds a splash of colour to proceedings as it flutters in the wind to complete the vista.

It's always exciting to take in a Vase game featuring clubs from different leagues. Both teams had come into the game on the back of contrasting fortunes: the hosts had not had the best starts sitting, without a win, in the relegation zone of the First Division North whilst their opponents Shildon were the much in form side lying third in the Northern League Division One table. Although there appeared to be optimism amongst the travelling faithful, they admitted that fatigue could play a big part amongst their ranks today after making the long trip to Warrington just three days ago where they suffered an FA Cup First Qualifying Round replay defeat and not arrived home until the early hours of the following morning.

However, buoyed by their large raucous travelling support (who had made the two-hour journey over to Lancashire), they didn't look too tired after their midweek exertions and put in an excellent performance to progress comfortably into the next round of the competition. For the record The Railwaymen dominated the game and built up a two-goal lead going into the break before adding three more before the end – it was Joe Posthil (26 and 77) and Jack Blackford (85 and 90+3) who caught the eye each claiming a brace with Alfie Steel (33) getting the other. Shildon will now meet Sheffield-based Handsworth at home in the next round of the competition to be played on October 10th.

The game, played mainly in drizzle at the start before the sun came out late on, was watched by almost hundred spectators with the majority coming down from Durham to lend their support – they certainly made their presence felt from the clubhouse balcony where they had draped their club flags and banners. The club issued an on-line digital programme (28pp, free) made available as a downloadable pdf from the club website. To be honest it was a decent read with plenty of useful content about the club, visitors and the game – mind you like many hoppers I would have preferred a paper copy – it would have made a welcome change from having to look at a mobile device.

Before signing off I would just like to pay a special mention the Garstang Chairman Adrian Wilding who kindly helped me to get close to pitch-side to take some photos for FGIF. He went out of his way not only to check it was ok with the match officials but asked the visiting keeper's father for permission to include his son

(who was underage) in the pictures. He even sourced a brightly colour bib from the changing rooms so that I could did not blend into the background. What a lovely bloke!

Needless to say, I really enjoyed my hop to Garstang FC and found it to be a lovely warm and friendly club. It was also fun visiting a new ground in a part of the world that I don't often travel to and of course watching a game in the FA Vase which is still one of my all-time favourite competitions. It had been a terrific afternoon and just the tonic before heading back to the north shore beach to partake in a bit of sunbathing in my new Tiger-themed (of course) mankini - only joking by the way!

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

R No.7: *WebEd* – Saturday 5th September 2026; **Northside Sporting** v Kingfields; East Riding County League Division One; Kick-Off: 2pm; Venue: Newington Recreation Park, Massey Street, Hull, East Yorkshire, HU3 3LA; Result: 3-2; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 23.

THE TALE OF THE UNWANTED TRAVELLERS

I am always indebted to the ever-hard-working county league secretary Roger Smith who, without fail, provides me with a copy of the latest official East Riding County League handbook, at the start of each new season. Containing the current club directory, it details and lists all the important information, including contact numbers and ground addresses, making it an extremely useful resource for the intrepid football neutral looking for any hopping help they can get. When we met recently, I mentioned briefly that I might make a visit to Division One club Northside Sporting FC who, by chance, had just relocated to Newington Park, a

new venue on the outskirts of the city centre. I sensed an element of caution in his words when he explained there could be a problem watching a game there due to an ongoing issue with the local travelling community (not the football kind I hasten to add). Wise words, indeed.

After a quick, check phone call, I completed the short ten-minute drive along Hessle Road arriving at the Newinton Park ground off Massey Street shortly ahead of kick-off. I was met by Mark Pacey the Northside Sporting FC secretary who was busy completing his pre-match routine (putting up the nets, sorting out the kit, clearing the pitch of dog muck – someone has to do it – amongst other things). He told me that today's fixture, the club's first of the new season, had been in doubt up until about a week ago when an influx of travellers (gypsies) had completely taken over the field in the preceding weeks. Thankfully they had since departed, meaning that the site had become available once again, allowing the match to go ahead as scheduled. As a consequence, there just hadn't been enough time for the council to bring in a mower to cut the grass back, leaving it still quite long and straggly over most places on the pitch. Despite this setback Mark was still upbeat about playing here in the coming months – it was certainly an upgrade from their former home at the Costello Playing Fields - having a more enclosed feel and much better facilities with its sizeable changing room block and working kitchen area.

Today's game saw the visit of Kingfields FC to Massey Street. Interestingly despite both sides being in the same division of the County League last season they never actually met each other as both games were declared as a win to Kingfields. Strange but true. Despite fielding weakened teams due to player availability (many still enjoying their holidays) this afternoon, this turned out to be a really enjoyable match and a terrific advert for the league.

It was the hosts who adapted to the tricky pitch conditions first and fared better by scoring either side of the break to claim a valuable two-goal lead. The visitors who never really looked threatening in the first half responded within ten minutes by pulling one back directly from a corner kick. With only ten minutes remaining the scores were level as a revitalized Kingfields equalized following a sublime acrobatic overhead kick/strike from just inside the penalty area. Just when it looked as though the visitors, dressed in their striking gold and red shirts, would find a winner, Northside turned the tables, making the most of rare counter-attack into the opposing half to take the lead once again. In a frantic, last few minutes with the ball hitting both goal frames to add to the excitement, the game ended with a full-on twenty-two-man brawl in the centre circle following a high tackle – thankfully young referee (and schoolteacher) Lewis Sparkes kept a lid on things relying on his red card to dismiss the culprits and restore order before blowing his whistle to signal for full-time. Phew!! The match, played in beautiful warm sunny conditions, was attended by some twenty or so spectators who enjoyed the late summer heatwave at pitch side.

Football ground enthusiasts will enjoy a visit to Newington Park. It's found behind the large ASDA superstore on the bustling Hessle Road shopping complex. Turn left at the traffic lights along St Georges Road (next to the Wyndsor shoe store) and the park soon becomes visible on your right. There's plenty of parking down Massey Street alongside the beautiful St John the Baptiste Anglican church

providing a wonderful landmark and making for a backdrop to the venue. It really is a hidden gem and worth observing.

Sadly, the game won't only be remembered for the events taking place on the field, but for those happening off it as well. Whilst sitting close to the corner flag taking some photos towards the end of the first half, my attention was quickly drawn to a noisy gathering of youths standing on the pavement and behind the outer perimeter fence railing to my left. Within a couple of minutes one of them had somehow pulled out an angle grinder and began cutting through one of the metal posts. With sparks flying in all directions, it wasn't long before he repeated the deed a bit further along the fence before removing the entire section completely and throwing it on the grass beside him. By now he had created a sizeable gap big enough for a convoy of white vans towing caravans, horse boxes and cars (which had been queueing up the street for the last ten minutes along the main road) all of which began to mount the pavement and enter the park in large numbers. This was quite a surreal moment to say the least.

By half-time the entire perimeter of the field had been taken over by these vehicles (and animals). On the plus side (if there is one) they didn't park on the pitch as many had feared possibly causing the game to be abandoned. It soon became apparent that the 'travellers' who had been removed from the site only a week ago had returned once again. It seems there is nothing that can be done by the powers that be to remove them immediately as they apparently 'know their rights.' I really feel for the local residents here who cannot as a consequence use their own recreational space and of course for the football club itself who will be unable to play here for the foreseeable future owing to the disruption and the likely threat of it happening again beyond that. I certainly do hope that this friendly, welcoming club can resolve these ground issues and make Newington Park their new home.

Footnote – according to the league's *Full-Time* website it appears that Northside Sporting FC have in fact moved back to the Costello Playing Fields off Boothferry Road. Their upcoming fixtures (covering the next few games) certainly confirm this. If that's the case, then Roger was certainly on the ball (pardon the pun) when he warned me what to expect. Let's hope that the ground has not been consigned to the non-league history books…

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

R No.6: ***WebEd*** – Saturday 29th August 2026; **Stocksbridge Park Steels** v Runcorn Linnets; FA Trophy First Qualifying Round; Kick-Off: 3pm; Venue: Bracken Moor House, Bracken Moor Lane, Stocksbridge, South Yorkshire, S36 2AN; Result: 1-2; Admission: £8 (concession); Programme: Yes, 40pp, £3; Attendance: 177.

AN ABSOLUTE GEM OF A GROUND

For the first time in weeks, it's absolutely belting down with rain outside *FGIF* HQ. Although it's long overdue and we do need lots of the wet stuff to fall at the moment, the latest forecast suggests that it could be hanging around for most of the day; such a scenario leaves the intrepid football neutral scratching his head as he mulls over the important footie 'hop-tions' for the afternoon. After much soul-searching, I decide to take the plunge (pardon the pun) and look for a 'proper' ground with plenty of cover so I can escape the worst of the downfall – my mind is made up and a trip to the Bracken Moor home of Stocksbridge Park Steels FC is the number one choice. It's also somewhere that I've been wanting to visit for some time but as the saying goes, never got around to it, until now. Bring it on!

As many travellers will testify, Bracken Moor is an absolute gem of a ground and one of non-league's greatest must-see venues. Indeed, I was drawn some time ago to the fabulous book *British Football's Greatest Grounds* written in 2020 by author Mike Bayly who with some impressive photography details and describes the ground perfectly. Selecting it as number 37 in his own list of *100 Must See Football Venues* (contained within its highly inspirational and beautifully written pages), his review is absolutely spot on in portraying the venue in terms of history, layout and design as well as the immediate impact it has made on football fans and the local community over the years.

As Mike summarises, Bracken Moor, formerly a cricket pitch, until shortly after the Second World War, was later purchased by a local steel making company and with help from The Steel Works Social Services Club, converted into a football stadium. A stand with wooden seats, terracing and a changing room block were all erected in the mid 1960's. The main stand itself, which has a distinctive angled awning extending from the fascia and seats, came from the neighbouring Sheffield Wednesday's Hillsborough Stadium. Later additions including floodlights and extra seat cover came before the end of the century giving the venue a capacity of 3500. One side of the ground, adjoining the cricket pitch, was separated by a dividing fence – when the cricket club vacated the ground it became a permanent feature, essentially becoming a three-sided playing area. It has changed little in recent times and is regarded fondly as the epitome of a terrific northern football enclosure.

So back to my hop then. As I make my way towards the ground this afternoon, I really am left in no doubt as to just how steep the approach roads are – this is very much a ground on the very top of a hill. Despite the driving rain and mist I am in virtual appreciation of what would otherwise be (on a sunny day) the perfect rural vista at the top of Bracken Lane in South Yorkshire. There's no time to waste though as I try to escape the monsoon and quickly park the car close to the main entrance and join the temporary queue of visiting fans who have just got off the

supporters' bus – they are in high spirits after their long journey from the outskirts of Liverpool, all dressed in varying shades of green and yellow, their tribal colours. As I get close to the turnstile one young chap thinks it's great fun to moon at the camera whilst I'm busy taking a few snaps of the main entrance – for the record I don't press the shutter, but he thinks I have and, as a result, is none the wiser!

Once inside I manage to grab myself one of the last few matchday programmes (a rare occurrence for me these days) from the lady desperately sheltering under her brightly coloured club-themed brolly standing close to the pay booth. From here you can appreciate the quirky two-tier nature of the ground spreading out before you. What a vista! Still at street level there's a small room in the stone building to my right which doubles up as a tea bar and club shop, access to the main clubhouse is a bit further along with a small open-covered (Perspex panelled) standing area in front which leans out slightly over the adjoining balcony – there are a number of name plates attached to the outer façade in memory of Allen Bethell, a founder of the club, and other associates.

Despite the murky conditions there is a lovely view of the rest of the ground from here – the main stand, fashioned with blue and yellow wooden seats, takes pride of place and seems popular given the driving rain. It is aptly named The Jamie Vardy Stand in honour of former pro footballer who after being released by Sheffield Wednesday at the age of sixteen, began his senior career with Stocksbridge Park Steels. He broke into the first team in 2007, spending three seasons here before joining NPL club FC Halifax Town in 2010. Scoring twenty-five goals in his debut season, he won the club's Players' Player of the Year award before moving on to Conference Premier club Fleetwood Town in August 2011 for an undisclosed fee.

I digress. The far end running from behind the stand to the far-left corner flag is set on a gently rising grass embankment offering open standing on the adjacent path only. Notices politely asking fans to Keep Off the Grass are placed strategically along this side – it's a bit of overkill really, as I can't think anyone is going to stand on a soggy inclined patch of land to get a good soaking this afternoon. The full length of the left touchline is out of bounds separated from adjoining land and outside perimeter wall by a continuous row of advertising boards. As I make my way down the concrete steps to pitch side there is a lovely low open covered terraced stand positioned to my left which is directly behind the nearside goal – with only a few minutes into the game it's already home to the fifty or so travelling fans who have camped here. I make a bit of a wasted trip over to the main stand just after kick-off but find that it's not the ideal place to watch the game from as the very low roof and obstructed sight lines behind the dug outs don't help one bit so make an immediate return to join them out of the rain.

Onto the game. It's an East versus West fixture with today's opponents, each representing different divisions of the NPL, aiming to advance into the next round of the FA Trophy. For the record, there is heartbreak for Steels as the Linnets strike twice in the closing stages to win 2-1 and book their place in the next round of the competition. After a goalless opening forty-five minutes it is home substitute Finlay Dyer (60) who reacts quickly after seeing his header saved by the keeper Calvin Hare to stab home the rebounded ball home at the second attempt. Linnets refuse to give up and rally late on to overturn the lead in dramatic fashion

– firstly through Connor Day (89) smashing the ball home past unsighted keeper Ben Townsend before Nick Rushton (90+6) completes a similar move to get on the end of a loose ball to complete the scoring in what are the dying minutes of added time, ending Steels FA Trophy hopes.

The game, played in a mixture of heavy showers and a blustery wind throughout, is attended by a decent sizeable crowd, including many visiting fans who help to create a lively atmosphere. A superb 40-page full colour programme with a neat, blue and yellow cover and plenty of interesting content inside is issued for the game. Interestingly it contains many action photos taken by Mike Bayly who lives locally and who is coincidentally one of the club snappers – by chance he's here for the game so I manage to have a brief chat before he dons his waterproofs and heads pitch side with his trusty camera gear to take plenty of action shots during the match.

And finally, I cannot end my review without a special mention about the catering here. I must confess that the meat and potato pie served with a generous helping of mushy peas and gravy (at the tea bar) is without doubt the best I have EVER tasted in my footy travels over the years. Sourced by local firm John Crawshaw Quality Butchers, one of the loyal club suppliers and shirt sponsors stretching over many years, the pie is a well-regarded and highly acclaimed award winner not only with football supporters here but also within the local community. If you come here, you must buy one!

Despite the incessant rainfall this had been a cracking visit to what is without doubt one of the most friendly and welcoming, and well-run football clubs. If you haven't ticked off the ground yet, the chance to attend a game at Bracken Moor comes highly recommended to all footy fans. As Mike concludes in his lovely book: 'The ground may be a legacy of a Britain that no longer exists, but the close-knit spirit of those former days lives on here'. A fine testament indeed.

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

R No.5: ***WebEd*** – Saturday 22nd August 2026; **Seamer Sports** v North Cave; East Riding County League Premier Division; Kick-Off: 2pm; Venue: Pindar School 4G, Moor Lane, Scarborough, North Yorkshire, YO11 3LW; Result: 2-5; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 26.

WHEN YOU NEED A BIT OF LUCK

As all groundhoppers worth their salt will tell you, it definitely pays to do your homework before setting out to a game of football. If you don't, then you could get caught out, just like I almost did to my cost this afternoon, on trip up to Scarborough. In fact, it was all going so well…until I arrived at the ground just before kick-off, that is.

After setting off in good time from *FGIF* HQ, the roads seemed pretty clear for most of my 50-mile journey on what was a really lovely, sunny afternoon. I even managed to negotiate the scary, imposing and renowned Staxton Hill (no joking, there is steep 20% gradient in some places) without any trouble before reaching the village of Seamer located on the outskirts of Scarborough, well ahead of kick-off. There was even time, upon arrival, to take some photos of the main entrance and signage at the well-appointed Sports Association. As I continued along the main driveway a game of cricket was already underway on the cricket club ground on the front field – not a problem though as the football club play on a pitch behind the clubhouse over at the opposite end of the site. Although the place was heaving by now, I was lucky enough to find one of the last available parking spaces nearby and got ready for my football match to start with a good twenty-five minutes to spare. However, all was not what it seemed.

As I got out of the car and walked the short distance over to the adjacent football field it quickly dawned on me, given the time of day, that the place seemed eerily quiet. I asked myself: were the players still in the changing rooms (maybe), had the kick-off changed (perhaps) or had the game actually been called off (I hope not)? At that moment, another visitor who had parked up near me got out of his car and came over to find out what was happening.

Like me, he was also here for the game and assumed rightly that the match was still on and had no reason to think otherwise. We both thought it was strange at this stage that there wasn't any sign of the players and that neither of the goals had been wheeled into place nor the corner flags put out. He then suggested that we go into the clubhouse to find out if anyone in there knew what was going on. At this point I had a strong suspicion that the game may have been called off and thought hastily about finding another one in the area. Given that it was now 1.40pm, I didn't know the geography well enough to make an informed decision. To tell the truth I had no realistic back-up option, quietly resigning myself to missing out on my footy fix altogether this afternoon.

However, all was not lost. My newfound friend came back out of the clubhouse with some favourable news. It quickly became apparent that the game had been switched at the last minute to the local Pindar School where the match was now taking place on the new floodlit 4G pitch. To allay my fears, he told me that he knew the area well and that the school was literally only five minutes up the road

from here. Without further ado he suggested that I follow him as he would kindly escort me there. How lucky can you get? We both dived into our cars and set off (more quickly than normal) convoy style! Having no real idea where I was, I just hoped that we wouldn't become separated at any of the junctions or sets of traffic lights that were no doubt going to appear en route! We didn't and as promised got to our new destination within five minutes. Game on!

After getting out of our cars and walking over to pitch side, it was time to properly introduce ourselves to each other. I found out that my new companion Stephen was in fact a committee member for neighbouring county league division three side Eastfield AFC (which we had passed only five minutes earlier on our way here) as well as the former Scarborough & District Football League chairman. Without his side having a game until the first week in September he had chosen to watch this one out of interest. After chatting to one of the home fans, he also confirmed the game had been moved due to the dangerous state of the pitch. Like many others up and down the country at the moment having not seen any rain for weeks, it was absolutely rock-hard and deemed unplayable. Mystery solved!

Back now onto today's game. Seamer Sports (founded in 2000) came into this fixture on the back of two defeats to face a North Cave side who were competing in their opening game of new campaign. As Sports' manager Jack Adams explained to me just before kick-off his young side had found the going tough since winning the Championship (second) Division title only last season, saying that the step up was harder than he had first expected. He wasn't wrong either with his side falling behind after only two minutes of the match played. Despite drawing level within ten minutes, they were soon in trouble again just two minutes later trailing 1-2, a score that stood going into the half-time break. The visitors were on the front foot for most of the second half, adding three more goals to their tally. Although Sports pulled one back late on, it was scant consolation for what had been another difficult afternoon, a result that now left them adrift at the foot of the table.

The game, watched by just over twenty fans (all from Scarborough), was played in beautiful sunny conditions, but due to a strong breeze coming in from the sea felt really chilly. I wondered why all the locals were wearing coats. Although Sports do play on this ground from time to time it is more commonly used by Edgehill FC, new members of the Humber Premier League promoted after winning the county league Premiership title in May. A dedicated spectator viewing area found partway along the entrance side allows fans into the cage for a closer view of the action. The site is hemmed in closely by the school buildings and sports centre at one end and a couple of business outlets situated along the far side. If you look out beyond the goal at the far end there's a pleasant rural vista which lies only a few miles from the coastline itself.

And finally…although I had assumed that the game was going ahead at The Seamer Sports Association as scheduled, I didn't really expect that venue would have changed so late on. Maybe if I had actually phoned ahead before setting out, then I would have known what was happening – so I've only myself to blame!! Yes, it's my bad and definitely a lesson learned even after all these years of groundhopping!! Fellow travellers should take note, and remember to avoid complacency at all

costs! It just remains for me to say a massive thanks to Stephen for helping out in my hour of need. Cheers fella for everything!

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

R No.4: *WebEd* – Saturday 15th August 2026; **Hessle Rangers** v Filey Town; East Riding County League Premier Division; Kick-Off: 2pm; Venue: Wolfreton High School 4G, Well Lane, Willerby, Hull, East Yorkshire, HU10 6HB; Result: 1-1; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 13.

HOME FROM HOME

With a masters' (OAP) athletics event taking place in York tomorrow, I'm planning to conserve a bit of energy this afternoon and decide not to travel too far for my footie fix. By chance it's the start of the new county league season and there are several Premiership (top division) matches to choose from that are all within easy reach of *FGIF* HQ. After scrolling through the fixtures, I notice that Hessle Rangers FC are playing at home on the impressive Wolfreton School 3G in Willerby – although it's a revisit for me, it's still makes for an ideal choice and its somewhere that holds many fond memories being part of the area in which I grew up in and went to school.

Hessle Rangers FC was founded back in 1976 by a local couple, Janet and John Bilsden, who formed a junior team which first entered the Hull Boys Sunday Football League playing at Under 12 level. They adopted sky blue and white shirts after first seeing them displayed in a sports shop window in the town. Within ten years they had moved into adult football starting on the bottom rung (division seventeen!) of the Hull Sunday Football League. In the following two decades

Rangers achieved great success and worked their way up the divisions before gradually winning the league's Premier League title at the end of 1999-2000 - completing what can only be described as a meteoric rise. By 2005/06 the club joined the newly established Humber Premier League where they remained ever present over the next twenty years. Notably the team finished as high as fourth, its best ever position in the HPL, won the (league's) Whiteheads Fish and Chips Cup and knocked the highly regarded (at that time) North Ferriby out of the East Riding Senior Cup 2-1 in 2011/12.

After enduring a really dreadful campaign last season and finishing rock bottom of the HPL, Rangers now find themselves back in the county league for the coming season, something which comes as a terrific blow to everyone associated with the club. After bringing in many new players over the summer months there is, however, renewed hope that this will help to turn their fortunes around and lead to success once again. Today sees the visit of Filey Town to Wolfreton School 3G for their opening fixture on what is a really baking hot day (30-degree heat) at pitch-side.

Despite the sweltering conditions the game turns out to be a superb contest and great advert for the league. It's Rangers who open the scoring when Dan Wraith (27) is on hand to score from a tight angle only six yards out, a goal that separates the teams going into the break. Just when it seems that Rangers will hang on to record their first victory, they succumb to late pressure from the indefatigable seasiders who grab an equalizer with ten minutes remaining through Joe Gage (81) who fires the ball home from close range following a free kick lofted into the box. It's a frantic finale as both sides create further chances to win the game but, in the end, each has to settle for a well-earned point as the final whistle sounds. A quick word about the team shirts here: the hosts are still playing in their Argentina look-a-like strip with visitors adopting a trendier number featuring the names of all past and present players, printed in a small white font, alphabetically arranged in neat columns/panels is displayed on the back – a really nice touch!

The game watched by only a dozen or so souls who brave the heat standing pitch side was rightly broken up (in my opinion) with the obligatory hydration breaks – in view of the high temperature it was required more for safety reasons than to allow time for resting. Whilst moving around the inside perimeter of the cage with my camera I attempted to recreate (in my head) the layout of my old school upon which the floodlit pitch now stands. Although the place has changed beyond all recognition since the 1970's (well it is over fifty years ago that I attended my alma mater here), I could just about make out where the school pitches and athletics areas used to be on the field. As I cast my glance towards the neighbouring houses I could also spot the roof top of my old house in the distance. Although I know that the place has drastically changed and none of the people I once knew lived here anymore, who would have thought I would return to my old stomping ground after all these years? Happy days indeed…

Rangers is definitely a club on the up. Today it runs over fifty teams covering all ages, embracing juniors, girls, men's and women's as well as veterans and walking football run, by a dedicated group of coaches and volunteers. In recognition of their commitment, Rangers were recently awarded the Club of the Year Award at

the East Riding FA's Grassroots Awards. They also became a partner with *'Her Game Too'* creating a positive environment for women and girls in football which the FA's Wildcats program for girls aged 5-11 years formed a large part.

After taking over the former Hessle High (Lower) School site and its playing fields on Boothferry Road, a newly developed football hub was created, named Bilsdon Park, in honour of its founders. As the club goes from strength to strength, it has, after much fundraising and eighteen months of building work, just opened a brand, new clubhouse on the site. This is a terrific team effort in providing a permanent base that the club can maintain and invest in. It also ensures sustainability and further growth as well as creating opportunities for boys and girls and men and women of all ages and abilities to play football competitively or socially.

I'm not sure whether it will happen over the next twelve months but there has been some talk that Rangers' men's team could move over to the new site nearer to town, at some time in the future. Until then, watch this space. Needless to say, a visit to this wonderful up and coming club, found on the banks of the Humber, comes highly recommended to all followers of grass roots football. Have fun wherever you go!

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

R No.3: *WebEd* – Saturday 8th August 2026; **Immingham Town** v Goole AFC; Northern Counties East League Division One; Kick-Off: 3pm; Venue: Woodlands Sports Ground, Manby Road, Immingham, North Lincolnshire, DN40 2LG; Result: 0-3; Admission: £3 (concession); Programme: Yes (On-line), 14pp, Free; Attendance: 140.

RETURNING FROM EXILE

Immingham Town Football Club was founded just before the First World War started in 1912. Competing in many local leagues it continued to flourish for over fifty years before folding in the mid 1960's. It was re-established a few years later and achieved notable success in the Northern Counties East League, FA Vase and

FA Cup in the 1980's and 90's. During this time the club developed its Woodland Avenue ground (including floodlights) but sadly couldn't sustain itself and folded once more at the end of the 1994-95 season. The ground sadly fell into disrepair, and a fire years later saw the clubhouse burnt to the ground becoming an eyesore and a major loss to the community.

After a break of twenty years the club re-formed once again in 2016 and joined the Lincolnshire League playing home matches temporarily at the Immingham Sports Complex off Lydford Road in the town. In their first season the club finished in the top half of the league (seventh out of fifteen teams) and won the Supplementary Cup competition, beating Wyberton 3-2 in the final played at Eslaforde Park in Sleaford. In 2017-18 the club finished in seventh place and went on to claim more silverware by beating Horncastle Town 2-1 in the League Challenge Cup played at the Hawthorns (home of Brigg Town FC).

At the start of the following season (2018-19) the Pilgrims were on the move once again and began playing their home games at The Blossom Way Sports and Social Club located off Pelham Road, a neat and tidy multi-sport complex situated close to the town centre. Obviously, this was a big upgrade on their temporary base at the ISC and meant the club now had a permanent home for the foreseeable future and could develop all the teams under the ITFC umbrella. In the 2024-25 campaign they achieved success in the Lincolnshire League by finishing in third place (their highest position) after returning to the competition almost ten years ago.

However, there was still ambition and hope that the club could one day move back to their former base at Woodlands. In the intervening years there have been countless hours of hard work carried out behind the scenes by the local community and volunteers who have transformed the site. Their perseverance finally paid off when the ground passed an official grading by the FA at the start of March this year meaning the club could, after thirty years, finally return to its spiritual home, something they could only have dreamed of, until now. There was cause for a double celebration when the Pilgrims went on to win the Lincolnshire League (for the first time) and their application to join the NCEL was officially accepted.

So, what's the ground like at the moment? As expected, it looks neat and tidy but (as you can see from the photos in the album gallery) is still very much a work in progress. Fully enclosed around its perimeter with a new concrete path and red and white post and rail fence, facilities along the nearside are devoted to the spectators: from the entry pay booth (level with the edge of the penalty area) to your left there's a small, corrugated stand with three rows of terraced steps, positioned close to the half-way line, with a small temporary tea bar serving food and drink in the far corner. The opposite side is more player-friendly, containing a conjoined row of portakabin style units, painted in black, which are used as changing rooms and club offices both set back from the touchline behind the dug-outs in a landscaped area consisting of wood chippings. Both ends of the ground are open standing only, at present.

Before kick-off I manage to have a quick chat with Phil Graham, the hard-working club secretary: he tells me that the last few months have been really busy and how grateful the club is to the sponsors who have been instrumental in creating the

improvements – you can see this for yourself judging from the number of adverts dotted around the place. The floodlights (there are five pylons in total here) should be ready to use and switched on next month; a new tea bar serving draught beer is close to completion with the help of the Bluestone Inn, who also provide post-match food and drinks for the players and staff and there's talk about improving the main entrance. What's not to like? However, on the downside he did go on to say that following a recent break-in, thieves make off with a generator as well as other groundsman's equipment costing thousands of pounds, all of which has prompted them to employ a security firm to keep a watchful eye on the site.

For the second time this season I'm taking in a Northern Counties East League Division One fixture. My journey over the bridge to the south bank of the Humber takes less than thirty minutes to complete. The ground is found to the north west of town and can be reached from the main A180 (Scunthorpe to Grimsby bypass) by taking the second turning to Stallingborough. Although there is very little room to leave the car at the ground, there's plenty of street parking close by and within easy walking distance of Woodlands. It's another baking hot day and as I arrive notice just how poor the pitch looks – it's really bumpy, dry and cracked with only a very thin covering of grass that is still yellow and straw-like in appearance, all of which could prove tricky for the players as the game progresses.

The hosts welcome Goole AFC to Woodlands for this afternoon's league fixture – this will be the third game for both sides since the season started a week ago. The Vikings who are looking to build on their unbeaten/winning start (2-1 vs. AFC Wakefield and 3-1 vs. Hemsworth MW) will be a tough opponent for The Pilgrims (who beat Leeds UCFA 3-2 here before losing 3-0 at Winterton in mid-week). As expected, the visitors came out on top, scoring twice with both goals coming from Ross Duggan (24 & 45) before the break and adding a third from Callum Brooks (63) just after the hour mark to seal the victory, claim three more points and maintain their unbeaten start to the campaign. Although Town worked hard and had some chances of their own, they made too many basic errors. I imagine that it will be a difficult season for what looks like a young and inexperienced side at this level.

The game, played in hot and sunny conditions, required the all-important hydration breaks (one in each half) – I was sweating just watching from my low stool so can't imagine how uncomfortable the players must have been in this heat. The visitors brought a sizeable following with them from the other end of the A180 to add to the atmosphere and more importantly, contribute to the club coffers. Several other travellers were in attendance including hopping supremo Dave Garrow who had come over from Staffordshire for the game. He was in good spirits, having 'done' a few grounds up in the Highlands ahead of his forthcoming trip to the States in a few weeks' time. I also had a brief chat with the ever-helpful Roger Smith, the ERCFL secretary who, sitting close to half-way, was here in his other role as the referee's assessor, before the county league matches start in a couple of weeks' time.

The club are regular programme issuers for their matches; it's an on-line version which I don't mind now I have the 'technology' and know more or less how to download it on my smart phone. However, rather than scanning a QR code, you need to access the club's X (formerly twitter) page where a link to the programme

is given. Fourteen pages were produced for the match including a well-presented piece devoted to its successful return to Woodlands. A nice touch.

After facing such a long period of uncertainty, it's quite remarkable to think that the club has finally returned to Woodlands, its spiritual home. It is also testament to the hard work of the local community and all the volunteers who have made this possible. Although there is still plenty of things left to do, I am sure that the club has a bright future ahead of it and wish them all the best both on and off the field. I really enjoyed my visit and was made to feel most welcome here. Needless to say, a hop to Woodlands comes highly recommended to all footy fans and travellers alike. Don't you just love an uplifting football story to warm the cockles (and other bits of course!).

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

R No.2: *WebEd* – Saturday 25th July 2026; **Kinsley Boys** v Crowle Colts; Northern Counties East League Division One; Kick-Off: 3pm; Venue: Kinsley Timber Stadium, off Tombridge Crescent, Kinsley, South Yorkshire, WF9 5HA; Result: 1-3; Admission: £3 (concession); Programme: Yes, 8pp, £1; Attendance: 105.

GETTING THAT ILLUSIVE TICK

A couple of years ago I decided that I would make a detailed spread sheet to highlight all the clubs and grounds which I had visited so far during my hopping career. Although it was a fairly time-consuming task to complete the list, it has since proved to be an invaluable source of information, a life saver, you could say. Like many of the more senior hoppers out there I often find that my powers of re-call in trying to remember where I've been to over the years is not as good as it once was. It's hard enough trying to recount visits to clubs over the course of the last season, let alone those made well over forty years ago now. I can still tell you

with some degree of certainty which grounds I've been to but, when there are so many on the list now, the details can often become quite sketchy at times.

There has even been the odd occasion when I'm absolutely convinced that I've been to watch a game somewhere but, in fact, haven't. So, this is where my comprehensive all-singing, all-dancing spreadsheet – the perfect aide memoire, as I like to call it, comes to the rescue. With just a couple of clicks of the mouse button, it appears on the screen as if by magic. Kinsley Boys FC, for instance, demonstrates my point clearly. For some time now, I've come across the club whilst browsing through the fixtures, results and tables on various pages on the FA's *Full-Time* website, whilst searching for my next fix (as you do) and just glossed over them without hesitation. I've been totally happy in the knowledge that I've been there at some time in the past to watch a game, so don't really need to give them a second thought - until now, that is.

After logging onto the excellent Northern Counties East League website (it really is a superb read), I discovered recently that new club Kinsley Boys FC had been accepted into the league's constitution for the coming season after winning the Central Midlands Alliance League Premier Division North title at the end of May. It was only when I started checking out their dedicated club page that I began to wonder if had actually been there for a game at all. Something didn't quite add up and the ground address, even the place itself, didn't seem to strike a chord. After hastily flagging up my current and updated list of grounds, my spreadsheet instantly revealed that no such entry for the club existed, thereby confirming that I had definitely NOT been there before. How weird. I was so convinced that I had. With a mixture of total surprise and absolute joy, I was more than happy to say I had been proved wrong (not for the first time I hasten to add). More importantly, I could now pencil in a visit here onto my new hopping short list for the coming season. Bring it on!

The village of Kinsley, an ex-ming conurbation, located equidistant from Pontefract, Barnsley and Wakefield, is easily reached from either the M1, M62 or A1. I approached from the direction of Hemsworth town centre taking the B6273 Wakefield Road. Although the address is given as Tombridge Crescent you can't drive down here to gain access so need to find an alternative; thankfully, off-street parking is available in a small car park opposite the Kinsley Greyhound Stadium. A narrow track takes you around the back of some houses to the main entrance and pay booth where you can buy programmes and souvenirs (such as mugs etc) bringing you to the nearside corner of the ground. The whole site is enclosed for the most part by a substantial breeze block wall running tightly around the perimeter – this separates several rows of old terraced housing that back on to it – in contrast to this, a few more modern properties can be found running behind the near goal.

Once inside you'll notice a tidy yellow and blue rail and white concrete post perimeter fence which surrounds the edge of the pitch to add a bit of colour and symmetry. With space always at a premium here, a pathway immediately in front leads to the smart clubhouse and changing facilities that are situated in a well-appointed brick-built building stretching from here to a point level with the goal. Another route to the left takes you along and behind the nearside touchline where

a low (level with the height of outer wall) open-covered terraced stand, propped up by some metal girders, provides cover for about fifty people. With the rest of the ground mostly classed as open standing, this is the only cover available for spectators at the moment. On a lovely warm sunny day like today this obviously won't be of any concern, but when the cold dark and wet winter nights draw in, then it could be a different matter. Large sections of netting supported on a number of tall metal posts are positioned behind both sets of goals to capture any wayward shots that have evaded the target and prevent them from getting lost. To round things off a couple of modern-looking Perspex dugouts fitted around blue tubular frames are positioned close to and on opposite sides of the half-way line.

This afternoon Kinsley Boys welcome Crowle Colts to the Kinsley Timber Stadium (as it is referred to by the sponsors) in what is their opening day fixture and debut game in the NCEL Division One. A crowd exceeding the hundred mark is in attendance, including quite a few hoppers who have been attracted by the league's exceptionally early start date to the season (not uncommon these days) and probably the continued spell of sunshine. Indeed, the weather plays a massive part in deciding the outcome of the game which is played on a bone hard pitch that has not seen a drop of rain fall on it for weeks. The straw-coloured grass exposes a threadbare, cracked surface in places – as the ball lands on it, or a meaningful tackle goes in, a cloud of dust can be seen rising into the air. The players also have to negotiate a strong wind which is blowing lengthways down the pitch (directly towards the goal at the clubhouse end) which affects any decent control of the ball, or lack of it. This is clearly evidenced by long kicks from the keepers as the ball lands in or close to the opposing penalty area!

For the record the visitors from Scunthorpe win the game quite easily against a fairly young and inexperienced home side who having come through the ranks find the going tough, make too many errors this afternoon. Conceding a couple of very early goals inside the first ten minutes really does unsettle them and having to defend for the rest of the game, do well to only concede a third midway through the second half. They do manage to pull a goal back in the final minute, but it's only a consolation. As I often feel that the gulf in class between the CMAL and the NCEL is quite big and it will take time for these young lads to adapt to a much faster paced and skilful game going forward.

With the majority of clubs now taking the digital route into producing matchday programmes, Kinsley is one of only a few clubs in the league who actually print off a hard paper copy of theirs. Although it's an AI generated full colour edition and relies heavily on adverts, as is the current trend these days, it does contain all the important match details on the front cover, a brief history of the club inside and displays the line ups on the back and, as I always say, an effort to produce something is better than nothing in my book. It comes with the £6 (or in my case £3 for the aged) entrance fee. If you're feeling peckish the club also offers a range of hot and cold food and drinks which can be purchased from a tea bar area inside the clubhouse. I didn't partake today as the queue was a bit too long…

So, it had been another really enjoyable afternoon's entertainment for the neutral football fan and ground collector. A visit to this friendly, welcoming club in West Yorkshire comes highly recommended and I wish the Kinsley Boys FC well as they

progress in their first season competing at NCEL level. It was also a bonus to finally tick off the ground which had illuded me for so long up until now. Have fun wherever you go and, as the saying goes, never take things for granted especially as you tick off those grounds…

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

R No.1: ***WebEd*** – Saturday 11th July 2026; **Annan Athletic** v Ross County; Scottish Professional League Premier Sports Cup Group D; Kick-Off: 3pm; Venue: Galabank, North Street, Annan, Dumfries & Galloway, DG12 5DG; Result: 1-4; Admission: £12 (concession); Programme: Yes, 28pp, £3 (Double issue including next fixture vs. Dundee on 14/07/26); Attendance: 402.

HEADING BACK OOP NORTH

Where does the time go? Incredibly, it's almost ten years ago to the day that I last travelled up to Scotland to watch a game of football. Back then I took in two matches: at Airdrie (v Partick Thistle, 0-1) and Livingston (v St Mirren, 2-3), played on consecutive days as part of a tasty Bet Fred League Cup group stage double taking place over the weekend (15&16/07/2016). Since that time, and a few grounds later, I thought it was about time to go back up there and take in another game again. It would also help me to tick one more ground off my Scottish Football League 'to do' list which has understandably grown back up to almost double figures over the intervening years. With new clubs now joining the 42 each season, you never really get the job done, do you? In a way, it's a bit of a moving feast which for all ground-collecting obsessives, is a good thing of course.

With the League Cup starting early in the new football calendar once again, there's plenty of matches to choose from during the early round of group games. Most involve the teams playing in the lower divisions (along with a handful of Highland and Lowland League sides) before the bigger/European qualifying clubs come into the competition when it reaches the later knockout stages. I notice that Annan Athletic FC are at home in the opening round, and this seems an ideal choice – it's not far from *FGIF* HQ which means less driving and we can also make it part of a longer family weekend break away. With accommodation booked in the Dumfries and Galloway region from Friday, we all agree that it makes a welcome change for us to take our time and avoid any unnecessary rushing about getting to football – according to my wife who is, of course, right?!

It takes only fifteen minutes to reach Galabank which is conveniently located off the main A75 (Gretna – Dumfries) approach road on the banks of the River Annan. I take a slight detour bypassing the town centre and manage to park in a residential area which is close to the ground in North Street. Travellers relying on public transport will find it's only a 15-minutes to walk to get here from the station. It's easy to get in having already paid for a ticket on-line; I just flash my smart phone QR code at the scanner on the way in, and that's it. There's a problem though, as I quickly realise that I've left my wallet in the car and have no spare cash on me – there's none in my pockets and, with twenty minutes until kick-off, there's not enough time to go back and get it - I get lucky though as one of the stewards takes pity on me and kindly offers to buy me a programme, one of the few remaining at the turnstile. What a terrific gesture. There's plenty of room to move around at this end and I find a space in what is a standing covered terrace behind the goal.

As you will see from my photo album, this is a really neat and tidy three-sided stadium incorporating a 4G artificial pitch and does not fail to disappoint. Opened in 1953 and having a 2500 capacity, it has plenty of charm for a relatively small set-up. The far end, usually designated for away supporters, is an open terraced section. A modern-looking seated stand running partway along one length of the ground (opened by Glasgow Rangers in 2008 apparently) is decked out in black and gold, the club's colours. The other side of the pitch has a couple of dug outs for the playing squads close to half-way – there's just a wire mesh fence with some trees behind it along here. According to home fans Galabank also boasts an excellent clubhouse if you fancy a pre- or post-match pint with tea bars on the way in close to the turnstile; although I didn't try one, I was reliably informed that the meat and potato pies are top notch!

Today sees the visit of Ross County to Galabank for an opening Group D match. To be honest, after first reading this, I couldn't really believe why both these clubs have been drawn together in the same group. Surely, given the geography of Scotland, the early phase of the competition should be regionalized to avoid long trips like this? Why would a club based in the Highlands be expected to travel such a long way to play in the same group is beyond me. Maybe, I've got it wrong and perhaps many of players actually live much nearer to the big cities like Glasgow and it's not really that far to commute after all. Whichever way you look at it, it's still literally down to the luck of the draw at the end of the day. Just in case you

were wondering Airdrie, Clyde and Dundee are also in this group, one of eight such divisions, making up the overall total number of clubs in the competition.

The Staggies, who were relegated from the SFL Championship to Division One at the of end of last season, come into the game as firm favourites against their second division hosts this afternoon. The match played in bright sunny conditions is attended by a decent crowd including a bus load of away fans who have made the four and a half hour-hour journey down from Dingwall. The visitors are rewarded for their loyalty as their team romps home to a convincing 1-4 victory. New signing Brian Graham (31 & 48) grabs a brace (one from the spot before the break) with the others coming from an Aaron Muirhead (73) own goal and Conor Randall (75) two minutes later. Annan do manage to pull one back late on through Aidan Smith (85) buts it's only a consolation. On this showing County look a good bet for reaching the later knock-out phase.

A newsie 28-page full-colour programme, entitled the Galabankies, is a double issue covering the next group stage cup match against Dundee being played here in three days' time. Containing everything you need to know it includes editor's notes, focus on the visitors and team line ups on the back, where Ilike to see them. It's not a bad read with plenty of club themed articles and only five pages of adverts – there's even a page covering a brief history of the cup itself, with the header 'From the Vaults' which takes a look back from 1947, the post war era, when it all began. As programme editor Chris Tidmarsh writes: '*Every August when the first rounds kick-off and minnows dare to dream, Scotland remembers precisely why this old trophy still matters'*.

To sum things up, I really enjoyed my hop to Galabank today. For travellers and footie fans alike, a trip to this lovely little ground located on the banks of the River Annan is well worth it. You'll definitely receive a warm, friendly welcome here, something often lacking at the bigger clubs these days. I must admit that I still love taking in these early season cup games just as much as when I first started my journey around the Scottish clubs and grounds back in the late 1980's. Who would have thought that a midweek trip to watch Dumbarton (v St Mirren) played Boghead Park in the Skol Cup (remember that?) back in 1988 would have made such an impact on a naïve wide-eyed young grounds collector? The joys of hopping oop North continue…have fun the next time you go there!!

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

End