

**TT No.123:** *Brian Buck* - Wednesday 18th April 2018; **AFC Kempston Town & Bedford College** v Cranfield United; Bedfordshire County League Premier Division; Kick-Off: 6.15pm; Result: 3-1; Attendance: 30 approx.

This was my first visit to the hosts new Kingsfield ground and mighty impressive it is too. If you haven't been there and wonder what to expect then it's similar to a combination of Flitwick Town and Shefford Town & Campton's new grounds. There is plenty of scope to upgrade things here as well and the league is fortunate that they have these three Step 7 clubs who have been given the opportunity to move into these brand-new facilities.

The game tonight was keenly contested and it took Kempston just 11 minutes to take the lead. However, Cranfield were level seven minutes later. Then on 22 minutes there was a controversial incident when it appeared that Kempston scored, only for the ref to pull play back and give them a spot kick. I wasn't close enough to see what happened, but I suspect that the whistle was blown just before the shot took place. There was nearly more controversy when the resultant spot kick was almost saved after the keeper dived the right way. But the ball just slipped from his grasp. At the break a player from each side spoke to the ref together. I wasn't in earshot, but I did note that after the break he was much quieter. The defining goal came on 73 minutes, giving Courtney Boughton, his second goal of the evening. However, he missed a load more chances. Perhaps he needs to back to his former club, Potton United, to practice his shooting skills!

*contributed on 20/04/18*

**TT No.122:** *Brian Buck* - Tuesday 17th April 2018; **Albury** v FC St Johns; Hertford & District ORC Sports League Division 2; Venue: played at Brewery Field, Furneux Pelham; Result: 0-5; Attendance: 7.

When I saw that Albury had a home match tonight, my eyes lit up, as theirs is a ground I have been trying to visit for a few years now, but the combined factors of them not playing at home midweek much and me being unavailable, meant that our paths had never crossed, when they are the home side. So tonight, was supposed to be the night. But on checking out the match just after lunchtime I found out that my dream was to remain unfulfilled as the game had been switched to Furneux Pelham, as most games apparently have this season as the facilities at Albury got broken into and were trashed. There seems no likelihood of a quick return either, as the place was not insured and there appears to be no desire to repair it. But then you wonder why they still don't play there, as tonight's venue was basically a pitch in a field, named the Brewery Field, probably because it may belong to The Brewery Tap pub, just up the road. There are no dressing rooms here to vandalise and so most players just parked near the pitch and got changed in their cars, well outside them actually, because this was quite a nice night.

The pitch sloped up and down and slightly more so side to side. As I inspected the River Ash down the bottom I commented to two players who soon joined me that it wasn't looking that full. "We know," said one of the players, "We've come to help fill it up!" and they did! I knew the ref tonight. It was Bobby Scarth. We go back a long way, as some 45 years ago and counting, I used to watch Bobby play regularly

for the Spurs Youth sides. He never got into the first team though. Perhaps the fact that he is almost totally deaf didn't help. As for the match, it was easily won by the top of the table visitors and two of their goals were scored, firstly from about 45 yards out and secondly from the halfway line. This 40 minutes each way match was played in a good spirit apart from a suitcase incident just before the end when a stricter ref might have sent off three players!

*contributed on 20/04/18*

**TT No.121:** *Brian Buck* - Saturday 14th April 2018; **Kodak (Harrow)** v South Kilburn 3<sup>rd</sup>; Cherry Red Books Middlesex County League Division 1 West; Venue: played at Harrow Weald Recreation Ground; Kick-Off: 3pm; Result: 2-5; Attendance: 6.

Despite the late departure from my previous game, because due to a serious injury, the second half took 63 minutes to complete, I still arrived at my next venue with plenty of time to spare. Here I soon spotted the home secretary looking resplendent with his permed (or so it seemed to me) white hair and dark sunglasses. The conversation went something like this:- "Why did you move from your old ground?" (at Harrow View, where on 30 March 1989 I saw them lose 1-0 to Drayton Rangers in a Chiltonian League Division 1 match, att: 20 approx) "Because they built 900 houses on it!" "But you are here now, so at least you are still going." "It won't be for much longer though if we continue to play like this!"

Anyway, as the match was clearly on I headed off to the pub where on my arrival Chelsea had just pulled a goal back from 2-0 down. But by the time I got my pint and sat down they were winning 3-2! As for the match, on a very bumpy pitch, it wasn't great. I wasn't convinced that the players of both sides were giving it their all either, save perhaps for the visitor's number 8, who scored 4 goals I think. Kodak, who don't have a 'Development' side, took a 17th minute lead, but Kilburn were level immediately and were winning 2-1 by the 48th minute. Around this time a player got injured and like my previous match it took some time to get him off the pitch. Ultimately this half lasted 59 minutes. However, in the previous match the trainers were fully qualified. In this one the player was attended to by two attractive ladies who hitherto hadn't even been watching the game, one of whom gave the injured player a kiss as he was helped back to the sidelines! Meanwhile the match quickly slipped away from Kodak, with most of the goals being breakaways with them stranded upfield. It wasn't as though Kilburn were that good. It had more to do with Kodak being inept. At the end I sought out the names of the Kodak scorers. Their manager only knew them by their forenames, which was surprising, as one of them was his captain! But he did eventually find a photocopy of the team-sheet on his mobile phone. Then it was off to Wembley to watch Spurs succumb to Manchester City in much the same way as Kodak did to Kilburn. Apathy rules KO!

*contributed on 20/04/18*

**TT No.120:** *Steve Hardy* - Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> April 2018; **Dudley Town** v Tividale; West Midlands Regional League Premier Division; Kick-Off: 3.00pm; Result: 2-2; Admission: £3; Programme: £1; Attendance: 93 (h/c)

There is good news and bad news to report about Dudley Town. They are currently based at The Dell athletics stadium in Brierley Hill where they play on a grass pitch in the middle of the athletics running track. It would be fair to say that this ground has never been popular with groundhoppers, myself included, and the good news is that you won't have to put up with it anymore as Dudley Town are moving out and will be based at the old Oldbury United ground next season. The bad news is that if you haven't already seen a game at the Dell, then I am afraid you have missed your chance. Let me explain.

A few months ago, the grass pitch was invaded by badgers. Sounds ridiculous, doesn't it, but the fact is that these badgers have completely ruined the pitch and it is now unusable. They can't be evicted as they just keep coming back, so Dudley Town were left in the position of not being able to use the grass pitch, and with no prospect of sharing with anyone else at this late stage in the season. As a stopgap until they move to Oldbury, they have been given permission to use the floodlit 3G pitch in a cage that is also at The Dell site, and that is why I and several other groundhoppers were in attendance yesterday.

The visitors were local rivals Tividale, and the two clubs served up a full blooded Black Country derby which I, for one, thoroughly enjoyed. The kiddies of the Dudley team have struggled somewhat this season but gave this game everything and were royally rewarded with an early goal from a penalty on 10 minutes. They continued to look the better side, even after having a player sent off for a dreadful tackle on the half hour mark, and it was no surprise to me that they doubled their lead on 38 minutes, when a sublime free-kick bent round the wall and in. 2-0 and coasting. It was then that Tividale started to gain control. Just a minute after the second Dudley goal they pulled one back and at the break going in only 2-1 down looked a lot better than they had done at 2-0 down.

The second half was just as intense, and the large contingent of Tividale fans around me were very relieved to see the equaliser go in. As they pointed out, this was a game they really should have won on paper. In the end though they considered themselves very fortunate to have got a point.

For fellow completists, Dudley will be playing all of their remaining home games this season on this 3G pitch, so several opportunities to visit for a venue that won't be used next season.

*contributed on 18/04/18*

**TT No.119: Steve Hardy - Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> April 2018; Life Central v Chawn Hill Church; West Midlands Christian League Division One; Kick-Off: 10.30am; Result: 8-0; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 3 (h/c)**

It was a definite case of 'after the Lord Mayors show' for Life Central today. They are currently league leaders in the top division of the West Midlands Christian League, but their chances of actually winning the league disappeared last Saturday when they lost at home to their nearest rivals Clarendon. With games in hand, the title is now there for the taking for Clarendon.

I did wonder if Life Central would actually be up for this game, after last week's disappointment. I needn't have worried though as visitors Chawn Hill Church offered very little throughout the game and will probably be pleased that this was their last game of the season.

The action took place in the beautiful Springfield Park in Kidderminster. Even at 10.30am the park was packed with locals taking their dogs for a walk, joining in outdoor yoga classes, feeding the ducks or just generally relaxing in the wonderful spring sunshine. There are two adult football pitches laid out on a plateau at the front of the park, with changing rooms close by. There is also a wonderful café which opened at 10am and was doing a roaring trade throughout my time there. Sadly, I had to spurn the offer of a veggie breakfast and settle for a latte instead, as there was a football match to watch!

As for the game itself, Life Central were 5-0 up at the break and I was greedily anticipating a big improvement in my goals-per-game total in the second half. It didn't happen though, as Life Central took their foot off the pedal somewhat and settled for just 3 more late goals and an 8-0 final score.

This completes the WMCL, once again, for me. I can only hope a few new clubs join for next season, as I thoroughly enjoy my visits to these matches, with today being no exception.

*contributed on 18/04/18*

**TT No.118: Keith Aslan - Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> April 2018; HORBURY TOWN v Pool; West Yorkshire League Premier Division; Kick-Off: 14.34; Result: 3-0; Admission: Free; Programme: £1; Attendance: 22 (19 home, 2 away & 1 neutral)**

The sun is shining, it's the first day of the year that the epithet 'warm' would not be an exaggeration, and I'm off to make my 6th (sixth) attempt to visit Hilton Harriers. I get to London before receiving a text from their chairman, who has been a star, to inform me that the match is off yet again so time to put plan B into operation. My plan B's involve blind panic and frantic mobile phone action. Luckily, I came up trumps with my first call and so it was off to Yorkshire for me today.

Horbury Town have been prolific programme producers for many a year and continue to be the only issuers in the West Yorkshire League. A ten-minute bus service from Wakefield station will get you to this one, can't tell you anything about the town as I didn't have time to visit it with the consistently appalling Virgin trains rolling into the station at 13.09 rather than the 12.34 shown in the timetable. Congestion in the Doncaster area just one of the myriad excuses for this one. Horbury play at the Slazenger Centre, three pitches with a glorious backdrop of the Yorkshire Moors and the famous Emley Radio Mast visible in the distance. The main pitch is fully railed with Perspex dugouts, and like many of the teams I visit these days plans are afoot to build a small stand that they don't need with money they haven't got. Ground grading, don't you just love it? There is a tea bar which if you get there early enough also serve bacon rolls (really crispy just like they should be). The secretary immediately sussed me out as the person who had

phoned him up that morning, although arriving 50 minutes before kick-off and clutching the programme in a Perspex folder was probably a bit of a give-away.

The visitors are bottom of the table and I was expecting a very one-sided match given the original fixture was abandoned due to injury after 12 minutes, enough time for Horbury to score three goals. Pool were a revelation and gave as good as they got throughout the first half. Five minutes before half time it all went wrong when their goalkeeper got himself sent off for calling the linesman a retard. Can't understand it, I thought this type of abuse had been eradicated by the pre-match 'Respect' handshakes. Surely if they aren't working the FA would stop them. ha! ha! A man down and a rookie keeper meant Pool succumbed to three second half goals, but if their potty mouthed idiot of a goalkeeper had kept quiet it would have been a different story.

A different slant to today's late start. Ref. and linesmen at the ground when I arrived, but it was only 8 minutes before kick-off they decided to go out on the pitch for their pre-match workout. Both teams out of the changing rooms and lined up and ready to go 3 minutes to kick off. Officials still pottering around doing their pre. match exercises. Seeing the players out they sauntered back to their changing rooms before eventually emerging to lead both teams onto the pitch for their pre. match 'respect' routine. And why when they were trotting past the goals didn't the linesman check the nets rather than delay the game even further. I'm sorry but this attitude to punctuality really winds me up. Notwithstanding, the officials tardiness this was a wonderful, and unexpected, day out in the Yorkshire sunshine and long may the programme editor continue to shine a beacon for the league.

*contributed on 18/04/18*

**TT No.117: Brian Buck - Saturday 7th April 2018; Pen Mill Athletic v Charlton United; Yeovil & District League Division 1; Venue: played at Yeovil Sports & Social Club, Coronation Avenue; Result: 11-1; Attendance: 10.**

You may wonder why I picked out this game today, bearing in mind that this wasn't even a match in the Premier Division in this league. Well it was because I was given a lift by my passionate Luton Town friend and they were playing at Yeovil Town FC. We got there in good time even though we had the customary 20-minute delay going past Stonehenge where the goal posts seem to get smaller each time I see them. Then after stopping off for a quick slurp we made it to my game, where my driver parked up and walked the 20 minutes it took to get him to his match.

Soon after my arrival the players appeared for this 2pm kick-off. The first thing some of the hosts players did was to inspect the hedge on the far side of the pitch! Most of the spectators were present at kick off and the women outnumbered the men by six to four and one of them was the ref's partner and/or friend. The match, played out on a very bumpy pitch was quite enjoyable and was even until the hosts took the lead on 14 minutes. Thereafter the game slowly slipped away from the visitors and it was 4-0 by the break. At half time I went into the clubhouse where the bar lady told me that nearly all the rolls (which would be on

sale after the match), had gone. Did I want the last one reserved for me? “Yes please, but what about the players?” “Oh, they can go without!”.

On my return to the playing area, I could see the floodlights from the Yeovil Town FC ground, which were switched on and on occasions I could hear bits of noise coming from that game. Meanwhile back at my game and at about the same time as Charlton switched their keeper over, allowing their rather rotund original to become as an outfield player, two blokes walked round the pitch, one of them pushing a pram. Where did they stop? Yes, you’ve guessed it. Right in front of me! It wasn’t worth telling them to piss off, so I just moved away. But a few minutes later they moved on anyway. After Pen Hill took the score up to 6-0 by the 59th minute the ref gave them a spot kick, but quickly realising that he got the teams mixed up he booked a Pen Mill player instead. Then Pen Mill changed their keeper as well. Then on 76 minutes he gave Charlton a penalty, which was scored by their subbed keeper! After this, Pen Mill rattled in another five goals before the end, thus taking them to the top of the table.

The game had been played in a great spirit by both sides throughout, but just after the final whistle some home players spotted a lady with a dog, which belonged to the partner/friend of one of the Charlton players. They were reminded that they had already been told at half time that dogs were not allowed in the grounds and to remove it immediately. The response from the Charlton player is not printable! Thereafter I spent the next hour or so in the bar with a nice bloke, a Westland Sports fan, who would have been watching his team play in the Somerset Senior Cup Semi Final today (lost 2-0), had the local paper put the fixture in the paper! Then my friend returned (won 3-0) and we went home. A nice day out, bearing in mind that I had no great expectations in advance of this match!

*contributed on 11/04/18*

**TT No.116: Brian Buck - Thursday 5th April 2018; Guilden Morden v Melbourn; Bambridge Invitation Cup 1st Round; Result: 5-1; Attendance: 20 approx.**

Tonight, with tiredness still a problem for me, I picked the closest game to home. I don’t come here much, but it’s one of the more scenic grounds in the Cambs League, especially if you stand on the far side of the pitch and look towards the church. These days they play on the back pitch as there are too many undulations on the one nearest the pub. One of these I was told relates to a sinking tunnel which is supposed to run under this pitch from the church to nearby manor that is Morden Hall. But after ploughing through everything you need to know about Guilden Morden via *British History Online* when I got home, I suspect that this is not true, especially as it has to pass by the Edward 7th pub on its way!

Anyway, the same bloke who told me about this also thought that I was with the Cambs FA. He must have thought that they’ll believe anything! After the game started one of the lino’s thought that I was scouting. I kept my reply to that as respectful as possible! As for the match, it was disappointingly one sided, especially as Melbourn play in a division higher than Guilden Morden. The first Morden goal came after just 8 minutes and was really an own goal after a visiting player diverted a shot into the goal off his bonce. Then further goals on 11, 20 and

25 minutes, not only put the game out of Melbourn's reach, but left them with an uphill task, even though they were playing downhill at that stage. However, Melbourn did improve for a while after the break and on 51 minutes they pulled a goal back from the spot after an alleged handball. I think that really the ref felt sorry for them after the ball was blasted "110mph" at the offender. Overall a decent evening. We got the full 90 minutes in as well, as this was quite a light evening weatherwise.

*contributed on 11/04/18*

**TT No.115:** *Steve Hardy* - Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> April 2018; **Chesterfield U18** v Hartlepool United U18; Football League Youth Alliance North West Division; Result: 2-1; Kick-Off: Noon start; Admission: Free; Programme/Team sheet: None; Attendance: 37.

Another season, another new venue for Chesterfield's Youth team. This year they have moved to St George's Park Graves, in south Sheffield. This is an excellent set up where the football facility is set to the rear of a large leisure centre on Bochum Parkway. There are three pitches at St Georges Park. Two are caged 3G and the third is grass, with today's match taking place on 3G pitch 2. Spectators are allowed in both cages and have a designated viewing area along one side of each pitch, although for some reason today, most of the crowd of 36 decided to watch from outside the cage whilst squinting through the mesh.

In continuous rain, the two teams put on a very entertaining game. Chesterfield are a tad low on confidence following two recent defeats but seemed up for it today. Hartlepool looked the better team for most of the first half, but a terrible mistake by their keeper gifted Chesterfield a tap in opener on 38 minutes. The second half was, once again, nearly all Hartlepool, and they got a deserved equaliser on 74 minutes. The game then looked to be drifting towards a 1-1 finish, but in the 92<sup>nd</sup> minute, a goalmouth scramble was turned in to give Chesterfield a somewhat fortuitous 2-1 victory.

This was the middle match of three for me today. All on 3G pitches. Oh, how I long for a match on grass.....

*contributed on 08/04/18*

**TT No.114:** *Keith Aslan* - Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> April 2018; Old Carthusians v Old Hamptonians; London Old Boys Senior Cup Final; Venue: **OLD PAULINE F.C.**; Kick-Off: 15.05; Result: 1-0 to O.C.; Admission & Programme: Free; Attendance: 46 (9 O.C.; 20 O.H.& 17 neutral).

Old Boys football has always fascinated me. Played out in an almost total publicity vacuum it is autonomous from the F.A. pyramid, it's teams only ever play each other, it has its own officials and while grassroots clubs and leagues are folding by the day, this football continues to thrive with no shortage of players or teams. Clubs have magnificent facilities with today's venue at Old Pauline being typical of the ones I have visited. A gym, a snack bar where you can watch women in leotards getting sweaty (not that I was interested in that sort of thing), a bar showing *Sky Sports*, plus three Rugby, and three Football pitches all with immaculate playing surfaces. The place was buzzing this afternoon with a couple

of Rugby games and another football match taking place around my chosen game. Where do all the players come from?

Old Carthusians originate from Charterhouse public school and can boast of an illustrious history. They are one of only three clubs to have won the Amateur and F.A. Cups. The other two are Royal Engineers and Wimbledon. They play in the Arthurian League while their opponents strut their stuff in the Amateur Football Combination. This Cup Final was played at Old Pauline a name that would have meant nothing to me a week ago. It is handy to get to by public transport being a 5-minute walk from Thames Ditton station. Being in a perpetual state of hunger I was gutted to find the kitchen was closed before the match due to catering for a bunch of rugby bods annual jolly. They then proceeded to taunt me by carrying a relay of roast dinners to the function so close I could smell them. At half time they were only producing meals for players and officials. I wasn't going to miss out again and I had a delicious chilli con carne by pretending to be an official. There are two types of hopper, the devious and the hungry. If the girl who served me wondered why an official looked like he'd been sleeping rough she didn't say anything.

Probably best to gloss over the football match, it wasn't very good, but at least Old Carthusians second half goal meant we were spared extra time. The pitch was roped off and what a waste of time that was with half the crowd ignoring it and blocking the view of the other half who dutifully watched the game from where they were supposed to. I wonder if the miscreants thought they were getting a better view by moving six feet closer to the pitch. Presumably it never occurred to them why there was a rope round the pitch in the first place. You'd have thought the 4th official might have done something. This waste of space didn't even have a matrix board to grapple with and he must be feeling very pleased with himself that he's connected to a sport that pays him to do nothing all afternoon. And while on the subject of officials, the referee today merely confirmed what I've thought for ages, telling the time isn't a prerequisite for the man in black. A fashionably late kick off of course, not even worth the effort of starting on time for a cup final. He then spun the first half out for 50 minutes. A change of ball which took up to all of half a minute was the only stoppage. No injuries, no time wasting, and even if you subscribe to the myth of adding 30 seconds on for goals and substitutions there weren't any of them either. He atoned in the second half by only playing 44 minutes. Strange man.

Met up with a fellow hopper I hadn't seen for ages and we spent the afternoon putting football in particular, and the world in general, to rights. This added to a smashing day out that even a rubbishy football match couldn't detract from.

*contributed on 08/04/18*

**TT No.113: Brian Buck - Saturday 31st March 2018; AFC Christchurch The Magpies v Somersham Town 'A'; Cambs County League Mead Plant & Grab Division 5B; Result: 3-0; Attendance: 25 approx.**

Yet more heavy overnight rain meant yet another nightmare in trying to find somewhere to go where I hadn't been before and somewhere which was actually on! Furthermore, this was the fourth day in a row where more games were off than



on and as this was now starting to tire me out, ideally, I wanted to go somewhere about an hour from home. Well, I may have got home in just over an hour, but it took me twice as long to get there. But before anything could happen I had to confirm that the match was on. I had no contacts for the hosts, so I had to check things out through the helpful Somersham Town secretary. Eventually a message came through, that as of 11am the match was on, but to ring this number.

However, en-route I discovered that my phone battery was flat. Further problems arose when I discovered that the road through St Ives was closed. A long detour followed, during which time the sun actually came out for a while and despite the cold weather I saw steam coming off the ploughed fields in The Fens. I had nearly arrived at the ground when I encountered another road closure. Cue another diversion. I finally arrived at the ground some 40 minutes before kick-off, to see players (the away team) milling around in the car park. I walked round to the changing rooms, which were in a newish building. Here I found the ref and I asked him if the match was on. He told me that he hadn't inspected the pitch yet! Then he walked up and down the centre of it and came back confirming that it was OK. This left me minimal time for a pre-match slurp, but I managed it despite it being a rather rushed experience.

Once back at the ground the game soon started on a very bumpy pitch, but on the sort that apparently doesn't waterlog. Any port in a storm and that arrived almost as soon as the game started and continued until just before it finished. Luckily, I had a broly which the brave home secretary declined to share with me! The hosts unusual name comes from the fact that they wanted their nickname included in the title. It's possible that they might get promoted at the end of the season and today's win against the spirited bottom of the table was effectively a formality and the visitors didn't have a shot all match. The goals were scored between the 18th and 26th minutes and really the hosts should have scored more. Just one unusual situation in that on 43 minutes the ref in effect told one of the home players or coach, on the sidelines to stop getting on his nerves or he would be banished, to where, I don't know! But later it transpired that he was in fact the ref's uncle and this was all a bit of a wind up! I really enjoyed this day out in the company of the soaked home secretary. There is something peaceful and relaxing about watching football in the beautiful flat fens.

*contributed on 03/04/18*

**TT No.112: Brian Buck - Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> March 2018; Imperial v Mendip Broadwalk; Somerset County League Division 1 East; Result: 1-4; Attendance: 30 approx.**

Today I was offered a lift, which as always, these days was gratefully accepted. I was dropped off at my game with what I thought was about 90 minutes before kick-off. This was at the impressive looking South Bristol Sports Centre. But after enquiring within, I discovered that this is not where Imperial play and I was redirected to a not quite so impressive venue, a couple of hundred yards away, or metres, according to the barman! As soon as I saw it I remembered it. This was the place where I had come to watch Imperial play on the last day of the last century. But the game got called off because one of the teams didn't turn up. However, we still got in two other games that day.

Anyway, I returned to the bar for lunch and had the biggest pastie I've ever seen. However, under the pastry there seemed to be a lot of bread. Obviously, they are struggling to make ends *meat* here! Anyway, after washing this down with a few pints, while I watched Tranmere Rovers 3 Eastleigh 1 on the TV, I headed off to the ground, which won't win many awards for spectator viewing from the changing rooms even though there is plenty of it. You can't watch a game from here as the pitch is on a plateau. In fact, while I was waiting for my game to start, which I had now worked out was a 3pm kick off, rather than the expected 2.30pm, I could hear another game going on. So, I climbed the bank and headed towards it. Up here conditions were very wet, following the more than expected overnight rain. There were puddles everywhere. Then as I moved along to try and find a dry bit to stand on, I could hear another game going on. This one was down in a dip.

Eventually my game got going and I watched it in the company of a local Groundhopper whom I'd never met before. This pitch was railed off on two sides and the rest was roped off and although very wet and cutting up a lot, it was quite playable. Imperial are named after tobacco makers of the same name and in 2017 the Imperial Tobacco Group had 33,800 employees. However today after 16 minutes had passed by the home team had run out of puff! They had just conceded three goals in four minutes and a cricket score looked on the cards. But somehow, they didn't concede anymore before the break despite the half of the pitch they were defending looking like a mud bath and the other half almost completely green. The second half was slightly more even and on 54 minutes Imperial pulled a goal back, mainly because I suspect that the last thing on the visitor's keepers mind was a forty-yarder coming his way. Then right at the end Mendip got their fourth goal. Perhaps the Imperial number 4, a defender, might like to ask himself why he came off the pitch almost spotlessly clean, whilst all his team mates were covered in mud though!

*contributed on 03/04/18*

**TT No.111: Steve Hardy - Saturday 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018; Lichfield City v Brocton**  
Midland League - Division One; Result: 2-4; Admission: £3 (OAP); Programme: £1;  
Attendance: 36 (h/c)

As every match on my list slowly disappeared under 2ft of water, I gave up trying to find a new ground and settled for my nearest 3G pitch, and a revisit to Lichfield City. The attraction here today was visitors Brocton, a club I have a soft spot for, and who are engulfed in the relegation battle at the foot of the Midland league first division.

There have been quite a few changes at Lichfield since my last visit. The 3G pitch for one, plus a small area of covered terracing at the far end of the ground, to go with the main stand. The entire area around the pitch has now got a tarmac path too, so well done to Lichfield for updating their ground like this.

Brocton are really struggling on the pitch at the moment, and I fully expected a comfortable home win today. Once again, I was totally wrong! Brocton were much the better side in the first half and cruised to a 2-0 lead at the break over their strangely lethargic hosts. After the break, Brocton took their foot off the peddle

and began wasting time wherever possible. Given their superiority in the first half, this seemed a rather short-sighted thing to do in my opinion, and sure enough by the hour mark it was 2-2 after a penalty and a scramble in the box. It looked like Lichfield had the momentum to go on and win it, but Brocton then abandoned their time-wasting tactics, put three players up front, and duly scored 2 more goals in the last 10 minutes to wrap up a 4-2 win. As the Brocton keeper was heard to say, this was the first time they had scored 4 goals in a game for ages.

The attendance today was just 36. Most of them were from Brocton, and it does seem a tad disappointing for the homesters that there seems to be little interest in step 6 football in a city the size of Lichfield.

*contributed on 01/04/18*

**TT No.110: Steve Hardy - Saturday 24th March 2018; AFC Stockport v Whalley Range Reserves; Lancashire & Cheshire Amateur League Division D; Kick-Off; 2.00pm; Result: 5-2; Admission charge/Programme: None; Attendance: 6 h/c**

After the excitement of the morning's match in Rusholme, it was back on the 192-bus towards Stockport again, and a ten-minute ride to South Reddish. My chosen match was in the Lancashire & Cheshire Amateur League and once again featured a team at the bottom of the Division with no points at all.

The action took place at the Frederick Whittaker Scott playing fields, which is a huge area with numerous pitches laid out for both adult and youth team matches, set in what looks like an industrial estate, and located next door to the Reddish Working Men's club. When I got there, there was a crooner in the building next door, belting out standard classics. He had a really good voice, actually, and it was nice to sit and listen to him whilst I ate my sandwiches and waited for the footie to start.

Sadly, the nice fuzzy glow of his voice faded once the football started. I really couldn't get in to this one with the main problem being Whalley Range Reserves. They obviously are having a terrible season, and they spent most of the game in a state of civil war with each other. Arguing, swearing and throwing hissy fits for the entire 90 minutes, it was not nice to watch at all. AFC Stockport only started their Saturday team in 2015, having been mainly a Sunday side until then. Today was really about how many they would score, but frustration grew as they missed chance after chance in the first half with the score stubbornly remaining at 0-0! Then a home penalty following a blatant dive. A chance to opening the scoring...but no, a brilliant save from the keeper and it remained 0-0.

I was just beginning to wonder if the Ressies would hold out until the break when the floodgates opened. 2 quick goals, one of which was embarrassingly offside, gave us a 2-0 half time score, and the prospect of many more after the break, I thought. It wasn't to be though, with the Ressies actually managing a couple of goals themselves which they hadn't looked remotely like scoring in the first half.

The result was never in doubt though and finished in a deserved 5-2 win for AFC Stockport. This was only my second game in this league, which offers a large

number of new grounds to be visited in the south Manchester and north Cheshire area. I will definitely be back for more.

*contributed on 25/03/18*

**TT No.109:** *Steve Hardy* - Saturday 24th March 2018; **Manchester North End** v North Manchester Athletic; Manchester Saturday Morning League Division Two; Kick-Off: 10.15am; Result: 8-0; Admission charge/Programme: None; Attendance: 1 h/c

Another very early start from Hardy Towers on the milk train to Stockport, followed by a number 192 bus to Rusholme, got me to Rushford Park just in time for this morning's entertainment. Top of the table Manchester North End v bottom of the table North Manchester Athletic.

I had envisaged Rushford Park, as being just that. A public park, with a football pitch in one corner. I was totally wrong though, as it is in fact the name of Manchester North End's base and is purely a football ground with an adult grass pitch, a 3G pitch in a cage, plus some grass six a side pitches as well.

The football was never going to be anything else but a huge home win. Goals came at regular intervals, and I began to get so bored with it all that I started looking to take photos of the football with as many different trains in the background as possible. This venue really is a trainspotters' paradise, with tracks on two sides of the ground, and trains roughly every minute or two. At one point the home manager came and asked me if I was a trainspotter, or watching the football, as the bench had been intrigued by me wandering round taking photos of trains all the time!

Just one ground left to complete the Manchester Saturday Morning League for me now. I think I will save that until next season, though, as I really don't want the fun to end!

*contributed on 25/03/18*

**TT No.108:** *Keith Aslan* - Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> March 2018; **TEAM DUDLEY** v Gornal Athletic; West Midlands Regional League Division 1; Result: 2-3; Kick-Off: 15.01; Admission: including a very good programme just £1 for old folk; Attendance: 44 (32 home, 10 away & 2 neutral)

As everybody knows, or at least everybody whose looked up its *Wikipedia* page, Dudley is the largest town in England never to have had a football league club. In spite of the awfulness of the area it's a tourist hot spot boasting a castle, a zoo, a brand new Greggs and the Black Country Living Museum, a visit to the latter making me glad, not for the first time, that I was born when and where I was. Life for the working classes used to be very short and very brutal. Running under the ground is the longest canal tunnel in the world, an engineering marvel when it was built. Dudley is the birthplace of both Duncan Edwards and Sam Allardyce. There is a statue in the Market Square of Duncan Edwards but I never found the one for Big Sam! Backing up my theory that the worse an area is the more comedians it produces Billy Dainty, Lenny Henry and Norman Pace (of Hale and...) are among

the mirth makers to come from here and for the final bit of Dudley trivia, it's twinned with Fort William of all places.

The bearded anti-Christ treated me to the full Virgin experience with my outward train being cancelled, stock shortage wouldn't you know. Once in the midlands the ground is very easy to get to being an 8-minute walk from Dudley bus station with frequent buses flying around to every train station between Birmingham and Wolverhampton. I opted to go via Dudley Port but you can take your pick. The ground is brand new, opened in 2016 by M.P. Ian Austin. Makes a change for a politician to be opening a sports facility rather than building houses on one. As plastic pitches go I quite liked this, surrounded by, hold your breath, a green fence it does have a barrier and tarmacked spectator facilities. I was already feeling good as someone in the High Street had come up to me and said 'Jesus loves you' so at least I've got one friend. My mood was enhanced on arriving at the ground when I was actually asked if I was a concession, normally the gateman just takes one look at me and automatically peels off an old man's ticket. This club is very spectator orientated, the programmes are always advertised in advance on social media and when I arrived one and a quarter-hours before kick-off, they were already available, with the kitchen serving hot drinks and snacks also in operation. And £1 for the programme and admittance, what can you say.

To top things off this was one of the best games I've seen in a long while. Goalmouth action a plenty, three direct hits on the metalwork and some cracking saves from both keepers with the Gornal stopper proving that morbid obesity is no barrier to quality goalkeeping. At 2-2 the game looked like finishing all square until a deflection gave Gornal the points in the 89th minute. A draw would have been a much fairer result but then again life isn't fair. My trip to Team Dudley will go down as one of my more memorable days out and they receive my best wishes for the future with their attitude to customer care. Talking of which my train back to London actually ran. Thanks Richard.

*contributed on 25/03/18*

**TT No.107:** *Brian Buck* - Saturday 17th March 2018; **Ottershaw** v South Wimbledon Dazzlers; Surrey Junior Cup Semi Final; Kick-Off: 1.30pm; Result: 2-1; Attendance 25 approx.

When I woke up next morning I was greeted by a light layer of snow on my lawn. The first thing I then did was to try and find out what parts of the country had been affected. I soon found out that no one seemed to be particularly immune from the weather and games were getting called off all over the place. However, I had been in contact with the Ottershaw secretary via *twitter* on the previous night and soon I had received two messages from him telling me that the match was on. I was very grateful for his help in what otherwise could have been a very tricky day for me. I had left it too late to go to the game by public transport, so it was a car job and it took me about 90 minutes or so to get there.

On my arrival the nets were being put up, players were arriving and there was no snow around, so it was game on. This is probably a very pleasant place to watch football on a nice day and the recreation ground seems to be cut out of a wooded

area. This was also seemingly a good dog walking area. But before I could appreciate all this it was time to head into the bar, which belongs to the cricket club. Today they did a good trade and there was some hot food available as well. But you could tell that it was very cold outside because the windows soon got steamed up.

Then it was time for the match which was played out in occasional snow flurries. There was a certain beauty about this place as the pitch is slightly raised and the dullness of the surrounds gave a slightly Christmassy feel to the afternoon. But it was extremely cold and I really don't know how one lady survived. The top half of her body was well wrapped up, but I wouldn't personally recommend thin tights (I assume!) for the lower part! As for the match, it was a keenly contested game which I thoroughly enjoyed, not least because for the most part the players of both sides behaved themselves and played the match in the right spirit. The ref though was well in control and at one point I thought that he was going to actually book the lump of dog shit someone spotted on the pitch before it was removed. Ottershaw, from the Guildford & Woking Alliance and playing uphill, took the lead on 17 minutes with a close-range effort and slightly against the run of play. The goal gave them confidence and they then became the better side for the rest of the half. But I still felt that there was something more to come from the South Wimbledon Dazzlers, who play in the Wimbledon & District League and after the break they deservedly equalised by way of a 30-yard direct free kick on 70 minutes. Soon I recall saying to a watching lady, "It's got a bit more exciting now," and she agreed, "A proper game!" The match looked like going into extra time (I assume) but on 90(+1) minutes a rogue tackle just inside the area, saw Ottershaw win the game from the spot. A tad harsh on the visitors who did enough not to lose at this point. But I think that the collective team effort from the hosts helped them to keep their composure and I wish them well in the final.

Afterwards I nipped off to watch the end of the first half and all of the second half at nearby Chertsey Town, who were playing AFC Hayes in a Combined Counties Division 1 match, which finished 1-1 (attendance 52). Not great and I think that the fans of both sides thought that their respective sides could do better. The ground, a decent one, was much as I remember it from my last visit here, on Easter Monday 4 April 1994: I saw them beat Leatherhead 6-2 in a Diadora League Division 1 match (attendance 400 approx). Earlier in the day I had watched De Havilland lose 4-0 at home to Walden Rangers in a South Midland League Division 1 match (attendance 25 approx) before going on to Spurs to see them lose 4-1 to West Ham United (attendance 31,502). Don't remember too much about that one though!

*contributed on 20/03/18*

**TT No.106: Brian Buck - Friday 16th March 2018; Glington & Northborough Veterans Reserves v Oundle Town Veterans; ChromaSport & Trophies Peterborough & District League Veterans Plate Quarter Final; Venue: played at Tresham College, Corby; Result: 6-5; Attendance: 4.**

Even though I was to get a 'new' ground out of tonight's game, I wasn't particularly enthusiastic about visiting yet another uninspiring 3G pitch in a cage.

Yes, you get a 'new' ground, but to me they are all rather bland, especially this sort, which had no designated spectator viewing facilities and therefore no stand either. This one is right next to Corby railway station, but had I come by train then because this was an 8pm kick off I would have missed the 21.43pm train back, although there was another one an hour later. I arrived at Tresham College with about seven minutes to spare and apart from the people here for the game the place was deserted. The attendance of four was made up by one bloke with a dog, one without one, a lady, two young children who weren't watching the match and me. The lady was a very interesting person to talk to and not just because she was a lady. She was the partner of one of the players and has been a season ticket holder and staunch supporter of Nottingham Forest since she met Brian Clough when she was six years old. In her pre-partner days she often went out to watch football by herself, but now she goes with her 80- year old father and her two sons. She was at the Hillsborough 'Disaster' match and told me what really went on, most of which is what I suspected anyway.

As for match it was rather strange that it was played here at all. Oundle is a few miles south west of Peterborough and Glington just outside the northern outskirts of Peterborough. But they wanted the game played and coming here was the best option. Glington, always the better side going forward, seemed to try hard to throw this game away. They were a goal down on 3 minutes but were leading 3-1 by the 34th minute. However, by half time it was 3-3. By the 75th minute they were leading 5-3, but it was 5-5 five minutes later. However, three minutes after that they finally scored what would be the winning goal. Had their number 6 not scored their last four goals then I really don't know what would have happened!

*contributed on 20/03/18*

**TT No.105:** *Steve Hardy* - Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> March 2018; **Red Rum** v Quarry Bank Old Boys; Liverpool Premier League Division 2; Kick-Off: 1.00pm; Result: 0-4; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 2 (h/c)

Match two today, was in the Liverpool Premier League Division 2, and featured John Lennon's former school I was told. Yet another 3G pitch in a cage, this time at the excellent Sir John Bosco Art College in the Croxteth area of the City.

The 1.00pm kick-off suited me perfectly but it didn't really enthuse the local Croxtethians to turn up in their droves, as the 'crowd' consisted of a hopper from Sheffield and myself. Access to the cage is restricted to half of one side, although nobody batted an eyelid when I came on to the pitch and wandered round all four sides taking photographs.

On the pitch, QBOB have a 100% win record this season, and this was their 10<sup>th</sup> straight victory. Red Rum tried hard initially, but QBOB virtually controlled the game from start to finish. They missed umpteen chances in the first half and only led 1-0 at the break. It was much the same in the second half, although this time they did manage to put away a further three of their many chances for a comfortable 4-0 victory.

QBOB have a further 14 league games to fit in the next 6 weeks before the end of the season. There are already a couple of double header games scheduled in the Liverpool Premier league, and I would imagine the QBOB players will be exhausted by the season's end.

*contributed on 18/03/18*

**TT No.104:** *Steve Hardy* - Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> March 2018; **The Academy** v RYM; Merseyside Christian League Division 2; Kick-Off: 10.30am; Result: 1-1; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 5 (h/c)

With the rest of the country gripped by *snowmageddon*, a trip to snow-free Liverpool turned out to be a very sensible decision.

Match one, was in the Merseyside Christian League, and was a revisit to the Anfield Sports & Social Club. The ASSC is the home to Lower Breck FC, who play on a 3G pitch in a cage right in front of the dressing room complex. LB have applied to join the expanding North West Counties league for next season, and, plans for a small stand within the cage to comply with NWCL rules are already in train.

Beyond the 3G pitch, are four grass pitches, and my match today took place on pitch 2, which is to the right of the 3G cage looking from the dressing rooms. The featured game was 2<sup>nd</sup> bottom of the bottom division, The Academy, playing bottom club RYM FC. On a very boggy pitch, both teams played some excellent football and the rest of the division must be of a pretty high standard if these are the bottom two clubs.

In a biting wind which produced a chill factor of -6, I kept walking around the pitch in a vain attempt to keep warm. 0-0 at half time, and it began to look as if my long run without a goalless draw was coming to an end. Luckily the elements intervened and an over-hit cross from the right by an Academy player, changed direction several times in the swirling wind, before sailing over the keeper's head and into the far corner, on the hour mark. RYM, who haven't won a single game yet this season, kept going though, and were rewarded with a deserved equaliser near the end. By this time, I was frozen solid and it was a struggle to hurry up Lower Breck Road after the game for bus 14 to my second game.

*contributed on 18/03/18*

**TT No.103:** *Keith Aslan* - Tuesday March 13<sup>th</sup> 2018; **EDINBURGH CITY** v Cowdenbeath; Scottish League Division 2; Kick-Off: 19.46; Result 1-1; Admission: £12 (half price for old people); Programme: £2.50p (excellent value); Attendance: 246 (198 home, 38 away & 10 neutral).

I didn't have to get very far into the superb 40-page programme to realise I'd picked a hum dinger to refinish the Scottish League. Page 3 Managers message - a huge game for both sides - page 4, Chairman's notes - a massive fixture for both teams - page 5 Captains corner - this match has special implications - page 7 - a crucial match for both sides. 'Huge', 'massive', 'crucial' so all a bit of a downer to read the league table tucked away on page 37 to see these are the bottom two



teams in the Scottish league with Cowdenbeath so far off the pace with a solitary victory all season that their chances of overhauling the home team were zero.

Edinburgh play in the northern suburb of Pilton and currently ground share with Spartans. They have been turfed out of the Meadowbank Stadium while 'work' is being done on it (going past on the train it looks like it needs it) Ostensibly for three years even the club themselves admit it's unlikely they will ever return to their former home. In truth, Ainslie Park is far better suited to their needs. A tidy ground with a plastic pitch, and, 500-seat stand along one touchline, spectators are only allowed down two sides, just not worth opening it all up for a couple of hundred people. From the City centre it's the 27 bus you want (get off at Morrisons), and if you are the other person in the universe that pays on buses they are all a flat fare of £1.70p, right money only. The pies are superb, why can you only get grub like this in Scotland? It rather spoilt the evening when I discovered too late that they hand out the leftovers for free if you smile at the girl serving them. That will teach me not to concentrate on the food and not the football. The match was spent in the excellent company of an Edinburgh based ground hopper who is also a doctor, always reassuring when you get to my age to sit next to someone who knows what to do if I keel over!

The match was typical of Scottish football at this level, lots of endeavour and enthusiasm but not a much skill. Cowdenbeath missed a penalty early in the second half, and Edinburgh took the lead soon after. The 'beath equalizer was a cracker so all square in this 'crucial' battle. Cowdenbeath can still lift themselves off the foot of the table if they win most of their remaining ten games. If you are a gambling man you will get some pretty good odds on that happening.

Much of my youth was misspent here in Edinburgh. When I was doing the Scottish League I always used to finish up with a pub crawl round the seamier side of the capital. The pubs were open all night, a novelty for me as England still had draconian licensing laws back then, a truly exciting city for a young and outrageously handsome boy like myself to roam around. I visited some of my old haunts after tonight's game but everywhere has changed. Or maybe I have?

*contributed on 17/03/18*

**TT No.102: Brian Buck - Saturday 10th March 2018; Costessey Sports v Hempnall; Hadley & Ottaway Anglian Combination Division 3; Kick-Off: 2.30pm; Result: 2-5; Attendance: 10 approx.**

After the previous match had finished we made our way unhurriedly to our other game today and drove past the pitch where we could see both teams warming up some 15 minutes before kick-off. The reason for this was that there was a pub just up the road to tick off! This came in handy as on our return we found that there were no spectator refreshments of any sort available! This was slightly surprising in some respects as the changing rooms formed part of a newish looking village hall which had meeting rooms upstairs and I think also houses the Parish Council meetings. Downstairs there were some people doing some form of exercise. I didn't pursue this much as it brings me out in a sweat! But no food or drink though!

Bearing in mind all the overnight rain we'd had, which caused some local postponements, the pitch here was in good condition, something which couldn't be said for quite a few of the participants today. The football pitch was in a large recreational public park and along one boundary there was a goodly number of flowering daffodils, which gave my watching friend an idea for Mother's Day, next day. That was until my other watching friend gave her husband a gentle slap! As the game progressed we learned that Costessey are bottom of this division, but this fact didn't register immediately as the visitors weren't that hot either. However, they did take the lead on 8 minutes, with a goal scored by the most unfit looking player on the pitch. The match moved on and after Hempnall created a few more chances the hosts came into it and equalised on 37 minutes. However, five minutes later Hempnall regained the lead via a header from a deep cross. Around about this time we had the 'idiot with a dog' scenario! The ball went out of play towards this bloke and his dog, the latter not being on a lead, or the former come to that! The dog got to the ball first and started to play with it. The bloke then got it and kicked it slowly back to the pitch. The dog chased the ball on the pitch, before someone sensible removed it from him. During the break and at the start of the second half we had some rain, but it didn't last long. In this period the hosts folded quickly after conceding goals on 47 and 54 minutes. Then on 78 minutes the ref gave the visitors a penalty for a push, but neither side knew anything about this and until he made himself clear they assumed that he had given a goal kick. That was converted and then right at the end the hosts managed to score again. Not a great game but it brought to a close a decent day out if you take both games into account.

*contributed on 15/03/18*

**TT No.101: Brian Buck - Saturday 10th March 2018; Norfolk FA U18 v Gloucestershire FA U18; FA County Youth Cup Semi Final; Venue: played at Norfolk FDC, Bowthorpe Park, Norwich; Kick-Off: 11.30am; Result: 3-1 (AET); Attendance: 134.**

The lure of this early kick off was that it allowed me and other Groundhoppers the chance to get in two matches today. However, bearing in mind that with extra time being needed, this match didn't finish until around 2pm, I wonder just how many of them got to their next game on time, or if they did at all! I saw a match here about five years ago and it hasn't changed at all as far as I can tell. It's a busy venue, with lots of the small 3G pitches in use. Also, Norwich CBS (ex-Spixworth) play their home Thurlow Nunn matches here.

This was a keenly contested game and the visitors, fresh from their overnight stay in the area were just slightly the better side during a tense normal time. However, what the game really needed was a goal and this finally arrived on 58 minutes from the spot after the visiting keeper had a 'lightbulb moment' and brought down an attacker as he moved away from goal. Given that he was unlikely to score anyway, this wasn't the brightest thing to do. However, 3 minutes later Gloucestershire were level by way of a tap in through Bennington - Mannings. I bet that with a name like that he doesn't get booked too often! As the game moved into added on time Norfolk scored what looked like the winner, but it was offside. So, onto extra

time and finally we had the defining moment. On 110 minutes the ref and or lino spotted a visiting player lash out at a home player off the ball and he was sent off. With both sides now tiring the extra man helped the hosts a lot and on 111 minutes the ball was hooked home after the keeper parried a cross to the scorer. Then right at the end with Gloucestershire pushing up for the equaliser, Ryan Miles completed his hat-trick by running on to score after he was played in. Overall a fascinating match and one which held one's attention throughout.

*contributed on 15/03/18*

**TT No.100: Brian Buck** - Friday 9th March 2018; Fitzwilliam College v Girton College; **Cambridge University League Cup Final**; Venue: played at Cambridge University Rugby Club, Grange Road; Result: 6-1; Attendance: 175 approx.

This particular cup final is always worth watching mainly because they are always passionately supported by the attendees of the respective colleges taking part. But tonight, was a very wet one and on our way to the match I had serious doubts as to if the game would be on. But as we made our way along Grange Road we could see the floodlights gleaming in the distance and we knew that we would be OK. Parking was quite easy here as most students don't have cars! There were also a number of Groundhoppers present and they will have been impressed not only by the glossy programme, but also by the fact that it was free!

Despite the rain, which persisted all night, the pitch stood up to it well, even though it became very sticky the longer the game went on and by the end one small part of it was slightly waterlogged. Tonight, most of the fans decamped to the large wooden stand on the far side of the pitch, meaning that there was plenty of seating on the clubhouse side and we chose to sit here, well out of the way of the occasional sophisticated chanting you get from the supposedly intelligent fans at this level. When you look at some of the famous names on the honours boards inside the clubhouse then it is rather frightening to think that we could be rubbing shoulders with someone who might become famous in the years to come!

However, it is doubtful if any of the Girton side will become famous footballers as they were soundly beaten here tonight. In the first half the goals against them slowly mounted up and by the break they were losing 5-0. It could have been 6-0 when on 20 minutes Fitzwilliam claimed that the ball had crossed the line, but the local VAR expert lino wasn't up with play! In the second period things were much more even, probably due to the usual reasons, but on 66 minutes Fitzwilliam did score again. Then right at the end Girton finally scored, if only from the spot. I was pleased that they did as although they got a tonking on a very wet night they never gave up.

*contributed on 15/03/18*

**TT No.99: Keith Aslan** - Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> March 2018; **RAMSGATE** v Chipstead Isthmian League Division 1 South; Kick-Off: (believe it or not!) 15.00; Result 3-0; Admission: £5 for old people; Programme: £2; Attendance: 134 (122 home, 12 away & neutral).

Ramsgate FC is a 20-minute bus ride from my country dacha, but it takes a bit longer when I go via London. It was in the capital I discovered plans A and B were both postponed and with plan C's only for the professional I had dined at my favourite Camden trattoria before returning eastward where I knew Ramsgate wouldn't let me down. The pitch was probably in no better shape than a lot of games that were called off, but the Rams wanted to play which makes all the difference. I find it a quaint notion so many clubs and players have these days that you can't play football in mud. As rain isn't exactly unknown in the winter it's no wonder so many clubs now have fixture backlogs.

Ramsgate is a proper club with a proper ground, covered terracing behind both goals. Good grub, good programme, what's not to like. And I won first prize in the raffle, £30. We'll be eating every day this week. I always buy raffle tickets here. The winning numbers are put up outside the club shop at half-time and the prizes are decent, none of this cheap bottle of wine nonsense, here there is £60 up for grabs. I can never work out where the prize money comes from, I don't know what the take up is, but you would need 50% of the crowd to shell out just to break even! Is it being used as a money laundering exercise?

Lee Dyson, the referee, was clearly disorientated and totally failed to grasp the concept of Isthmian Mean Time. Maybe, like me, he wanted to get home to watch the Welsh football on S4C, but whatever the reason he kicked off the match dead on time. Since I moved down here I must have seen over a hundred Isthmian games and this was the first one to start when it should have done. The crowd were completely thrown by this and one wag near me shouted out to the ref. 'You won't last very long at this level if you can't even kick the game off late' I assume he was being ironic but he could just as likely have been the assessor.

All to play for this afternoon with both sides locked in a titanic battle for the coveted 16th spot. While the score-line looks fairly comfortable it wasn't, and only a tremendous save by the home keeper prevented Chipstead from taking the lead. I wish them well, any team that has a player called Ollie Twum deserves success.

A day that could have been a downer turned out very well and arriving home with more money than I left with was a bit of a bonus.

*contributed on 11/03/18*

**TT No.98:** *Steve Hardy* - Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> March 2018; **Crewe Alexandra U19** v AFC Fylde U19; National League U19 Alliance Division K; Kick-Off: 1.30pm; Result: 5-6; Admission: Fee; Programme: No: Attendance: 5 (h/c)

The name 'National' U19 league is perhaps a bit of a misnomer. The overwhelming majority of the teams in membership are in the south of England, but there are a few northern clubs too, and these are tucked away in the enclave known as Division K.

A 20-minute train ride, followed by a 2 mile walk out of town, took me to the euphemistically named Crewe Soccer Centre, which is on the Crewe Road heading towards Nantwich. This is a really impressive set up, with the main pitch being 3G, with floodlights and with a small stand along one side too. In arctic conditions in

Crewe today it would have been wonderful to snuggle down in this stand out of the biting wind. Unfortunately, that would have made watching the game a tad difficult as a 6-a-side goal was strategically placed directly in front of the stand blocking the view completely.

So, braving the rain and wind it was for your intrepid reporter, and what a game we had to keep us entertained. I thought Fylde were technically the better team, and they played some lovely football. They just couldn't finish Crewe off though, despite taking the lead four times. Both defences were, shall we say, indifferent, and this made for a high scoring attack minded game, which Fylde eventually won with an 88<sup>th</sup> minute strike direct from a corner.

Overall an excellent afternoon out at a venue where the smell from club sponsors, Mornflake's nearby factory, made this reporter very hungry indeed.

*contributed on 07/03/18*

**TT No.97: Brian Buck - Saturday 24th February 2018; York Railway Institute v Huntington Rovers; Minster Engineering York League Premier Division; Result: 0-4; Attendance: 25 approx.**

This was a ground I had been meaning to visit for some time, in fact ever since the club were in the Northern Counties East League and it was thirty years ago this year when they actually won Division 1. We got lucky with the trains at Peterborough, where we caught a train to York which was so late that it came in roughly the same time as the next one was due to arrive. I'm still going to claim on the Delay Repay scheme though! As the train pulled in to York on this sunny but very chilly day, I spotted the marked-out pitch of Dringhouses on the east side of us and afterwards I saw the floodlights of York RI, where I would be appearing a few hours later. But before then it was time to have a look around, which was surprisingly a first for me, except for passing through on foot or bus to go elsewhere. I was really impressed by the place and I could have spent much longer here. But we had a mixture of churches and pubs to visit, the former being made easier by one of my very knowledgeable friends and the latter being made easier by my other very knowledgeable friend. Eventually it was time to go our separate ways and so I walked to the ground, which takes roughly 15 minutes from the railway station.

I was a bit worried when on my arrival not only I could I not see many people, but a few cars were coming away. Then I saw some players warming up in the distance and I breathed a sigh of relief. I was a bit surprised that the match was not played on the pitch I perceived to be the best one, which had metal barriers all around it, proper dugouts and floodlights. Not sure if they still work though. The tall floodlights I saw from the train illuminate the rugby pitch, but 'my' match was the only thing going on today here. This pitch had metal barriers round three sides with the fourth being roped off and I was later told that this was the pitch they used in their NCEL days, although probably true, it was still hard to believe. York RI are bottom of this division, justifiably so from what I saw today and the visitors (not to be confused with Huntingdon Town) didn't really have to work too hard for their win. They scored all their goals by the 35th minute. York RI did improve after

that, marginally initially and more so after the break when the visitors had probably declared. I spent this period, talking to the League Secretary, who was also assessing the ref, who came from Bradford, although he didn't hold that against him! Afterwards I was going to spend some time in the club bar, but they had no TV in it. So, I went back into town and in trying to find a pub which had football on in it, on this rugby day and I ticked off two more pubs while I waited for my friends to return from their York City match. But it was only when I was in the middle of doing something in the gents that I got a phone call saying that they'd caught an earlier train home!

*contributed on 27/02/18*

**TT No.96: Brian Buck - Saturday 17th February 2018. Brockworth Albion v Taverners; Gloucestershire Northern Senior League Division 1; Result: 0-1; Attendance 35 approx.**

Today I once again had the advantage of getting a lift to this game and we even found a pub close to ground so we could both have a quick slurp before we went off to our respective games. Me more so and a couple of pints of some 7.3% strength cider went down a treat. But I didn't have enough of it to make my game more enjoyable though! I'd been to a Brockworth Albion home match before, on 22 April 1995 when I watched them beat Dowty Dynamoes 8-0 in a match in the same league and division as today's game, (att 25 approx). That match was played at Brockworth Rugby Club, a 200-yard uphill walk away and I don't remember much about that match and I am not inclined to dig out my article about that game from a programme in my loft to find out more!

Since then the club have been in and out of the Gloucester County League and apparently they only moved to the rugby club to satisfy GCL requirements. The Mill Lane Playing Fields, where they played today, is their spiritual home and as I sourced a cup of coffee at half time I noticed that the current pavilion was opened as recently as 8 November 2014 by Sir Geoff Hurst, who apparently lives near Cheltenham these days. The visitors today were also a GCL side for many years and their ground backs onto Forest Green Rovers. As for the match, it was played out on a very bumpy pitch which wasn't roped or railed off and quite frankly the first half was one of the worst 45 minutes I've seen for many a year. Nothing really happened, although I did log three goal scoring attempts by the hosts. They also had the first of their two bookings today, given by a decent ref, despite the fact that he seemed to have a spare match ball stuffed up his jumper! In the second half things carried on in much the same way. But after both sides had a shot and Brockworth got their second booking, Taverners finally broke the deadlock on 72 minutes. With most of the Brockworth players stranded upfield, Taverners broke away and a square pass to the scorer just inside the area, I think, saw something noteworthy happen at last! Thereafter the game sprang into life, or as close as it was ever going to get and as the sun set the warmth of this sunny afternoon disappeared, so both sides finally gave it a bit of a go. By the end it was another tick in the book at least!

*contributed on 27/02/18*

**TT No.95: Keith Aslan - Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> February 2018; PONTARDAWE v AFC Porth;** Welsh League Division 2; Kick-Off: 14.03; Result: 4-0. Admission & Programme: £4; Attendance: 34 (32 home, 1 away & 1 neutral)

With the glorious sunshine casting a refulgent glow over the valleys this was a good place to spend a winter Saturday afternoon. Neath is the 'gorsaf' for this one with a half hourly service leaving from the bus station where a big computer screen told me my bus was leaving from Bay 8. Bay 8 has a leaflet stuck to the window dated 17th April 2017 saying all Pontardawe buses now leave from Bay 4. Clearly 10 months is too shorter timescale to change the computer. I never cease to wonder that I live on a planet so advanced it can send a rocket 100-million-miles to Mars and we know exactly where it is, but mankind hasn't devised an accurate computer programme to give correct information on where buses are going to stop!

On arrival in town the hungry hopper should visit the Pontardawe Diner for a top-notch meal run by a delightful mother/daughter combo. Directly opposite is Greggs so it's lucky I'm a very greedy person and I finished off with a cream slice from the world-famous bakery chain, and of course that all important tick. If time is pressing hot drinks and burgers are available at the ground. The Welsh league will cease to exist in a couple of years with a wholesale reorganization about to take place that is, put simply, ludicrous. The clubs weren't consulted about the changes, they don't appear to be a very important part of this brave new world. The Welsh f.a. recently inspected Pontardawe's ground and told them what they need to be part of this exciting future. A good football team you may be thinking. Nope, it's a 250 seat stand which they haven't got the money to build and which the impartial observer might find to be a little over the top for today's crowd of 34. Oh yes and because, through no fault of their own there isn't any water in the on-site dressing rooms at the moment they will be thrown out of the league anyway at the end of the season if they don't get it sorted. Plenty of water in the nearby leisure centre but apparently the changing rooms there are too far away. Rules are rules you know. And common sense is common sense boys. It seems to me the Welsh f.a. are making decisions that aren't in the best interests of their member clubs.

The ground is typical of the Welsh league, fully enclosed, railed with a small Atcost structure on the half way line. On arrival I was greeted by the secretary who presented me with an envelope with my name on it and a cracking 32-page programme inside. Although he has spent his whole life in the town he supports Queens Park Rangers. Long story. A.F.C. Porth aren't having a particularly good season and it wouldn't be unfair to suggest there is room for improvement on the current record of played 17, lost 17. And while this result is no surprise, they weren't outclassed and this team could certainly hold its own in the division below which is where they will be next season (unless of course they build a 250-seat stand). Also mention must be made of lineswoman Rebecca Thomas. One to look out for next time you're watching football in this part of the world.

The sun shone, the buses, tubes and trains all behaved themselves, and the locals were friendly. All rather nice.

*contributed on 25/02/18*

**TT No.94: Brian Buck - Saturday 10th February 2018; Cricklewood Wanderers v Brentham; Cherry Red Books Middlesex County League Premier Division; Venue: played at Wembley; Kick-Off: 3pm; Result: 3-2; Attendance: 15 approx.**

As I quickly made my way out of Wembley Stadium after watching Spurs beat Arsenal I found myself in some rain. It must have absolutely tipped it down while I was watching the previous game, as there were large puddles everywhere. I tried to ring up the ground at Wembley to see if the match was still on, but either it was the wrong number or it's not in use at present, but with time at a premium I continue on my way. Once I got past Wembley Central station the crowds thinned. Soon I spotted a bus going my way and I jumped on it and this took me most of the way to the ground. I walked the rest and got there about ten minutes before kick-off. I did still wonder if the game was on as although the corner flags were out, I couldn't see any players. But then I saw some Brentham players appear through a gate in the corner of the ground and they had been warming up on an outside pitch.

So, I went into the bar for a quick pint, picking up a free programme at the same time. The barman said that this pitch is one of the best in the SSML and their groundsman, also the Wembley manager, has won Groundsman of the Year award for the past two seasons. When I looked closer I could see why. Both goalmouths were in excellent condition and one of them was still fully grassed. The game kicked off on time, despite my tongue in cheek request for it to start a few minutes late. I sat in the main stand, but still the wind and now light rain blew in from time to time. I was slightly protected by one of the see-through perspex dugouts and initially I couldn't work out the lettering on it. This ground is in a multicultural area so I thought that the word YAWA might be a local name for 'home' or 'away'. Then I realised that being see-through it actually read AWAY. I'd be dangerous if I had a brain!

The game was an excellent one with some good quality football played, despite the deteriorating conditions, which saw the central part of the pitch cut up in places. It was also a mainly non-friction game, apart from both teams trying to squeeze favourable decisions out of the ref, who was an old school guy and was having none of it. Brentham took the lead on 4 minutes, but Wanderers hit back, equalising on 12 minutes and taking the lead 8 minutes later, but Brentham scored on 42 minutes to make it level at the break. On 53 minutes the lights came on and ten minutes later the hosts got the winner they probably deserved, despite late pressure from the visitors.

Afterwards I headed back to the bar to have another pint and watch the scores come through. I would have stayed longer and spent more time with the lovely ladies who help run the club, but I would have drunk more and I had to drive home eventually. So I couldn't help them eat the food no one seemed to want. Overall this was a good afternoon's football, despite the weather and it was good to be back at a ground where I haven't seen a game since 30 July 1986 when I watched Wembley draw 0-0 against Wealdstone in a pre-season friendly match (att 170 approx), although on 31 March 2012 I did pop in for a few moments to see the end



of a Wembley game, the one which saw Terry Venables first game as Director of Football here, which was quite close to his last one!

*contributed on 20/02/18*

**TT No.93:** *Keith Aslan* - Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> February 2018; **ASHFORD** v Gillingham Town; Kent FA Reliance Junior Cup Group A Quarter-Final; Kick-Off: 14.17; Result: 1-1 after 94 minutes (2-2 after extra time and 3-1 penalties); Admission: Free; Programme: £1; Attendance: 43 (33 home, 0 away & 10 neutral)

There's been no rain for three days which down here in Thanet is the prelude to a hosepipe ban but on the plus side the unseasonably arid weather means Ashford finally get to play a game at Ham Street. This must come as a huge relief to their secretary who can now get her Friday evenings back without them being punctuated with a barrage of phone calls from groundhoppers. It was still very boggy underfoot, but this is to be expected when you have a ground on Romney Marsh. While only one stop nearer to Ashford than their previous abode, it is far more convenient for the carless hopper with Ham Street station actually in Ham Street as oppose to Appledore station which is two miles away from civilization. Ham Street also has an hourly bus service from Ashford, useful when Southern trains are on strike. A team called Ham Street used to play here during a short spell in the Kent County League about five years ago, but other than that Ashford are the only senior team to operate out of the village.

As with their time at Appledore, spectator comforts are a cut above what you would expect at this level. A marquee contains seats and a secretary selling hot drinks, pies and programmes with today's full-colour edition numbered issue 12 volume 2. Good to see something resembling a crowd here, it was in single figures when I visited Appledore. Couldn't quite get to the bottom of the move with the official explanation being the ultimate aim is to play back in Ashford and this ground is closer. Indeed, it is, but not by very much, and given they were only paying £30 a game to hire their previous ground I think there might be more to it than that. Ham Street is not so much a sleepy village as a comatose one and I would thoroughly recommend giving the local pub, the Duke of York, a very wide berth with sky high prices and the rather elderly barmaid having to have three attempts at getting the right price for a pint of Fosters and a packet of Quavers (at one attempt she was charging £11.20p for the Quavers!) Also present in the hostelry was a well-known hopper who was taking photographs of the beer pumps to put on his social media site. And to think some people call me sad!

Gillingham Town is a new one on me, they play in the Rochester and district league with their ground only about 400 yards from the more well-known club from the town. Ashford dominated most of the match and when they finally broke through mid-way through the second half it looked to be all over. But Gillingham raised their game and equalised to take the match into extra time. Having had much the better of the extra time the home side retook the lead in the first period only for Gillingham to raise their game again and get another equalizer. If only they could play with the same enthusiasm when they weren't actually losing they might well have won this game. After their second comeback, Gillingham retreated

back into their shell and were content to play for penalties, not a particularly wise tactic as they weren't very good at taking them.

An early return to my Broadstairs dacha meant I was able to spend my Saturday evening watching T.N.S. v Dumbarton on S4C. Watch the two Scottish goals on you tube, they were a bit special. But why do they continually tantalize people by saying you can get the English commentary by pressing the red button. You can't. And I, along with most Welsh people, don't understand Welsh.

*contributed on 19/02/18*

**TT No.92: Steve Hardy** - Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> February 2017; **Goldenhill Wanderers v Keele University Reserves**; Staffordshire County Senior League Division Two; Result: 3-3; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 10 (hc)

Not the match I intended to watch when I set off, but arriving at Waterhouses to watch Staffordshire Moorlands v Cannock United, and finding the place deserted, meant an extremely quick dash across the county to Burslem, and the new home of Goldenhill Wanderers.

The last time I visited Goldenhill Wanderers, in 2008, they were playing at Sandyford Cricket Club. This season has seen a move to Westport Road, in Burslem, and the Trubshaw Cross Lads & Dads club. Quite an impressive facility this is too, with three full sized pitches at different levels of this notoriously hilly part of Stoke. The barbed wire laden dressing room block apparently houses a tea bar, as I saw several people with steaming cups of coffee pitch-side, but I just couldn't find out where the entrance was!

On the pitch, mid table Wanderers were entertaining the third from bottom stiffs of Keele University. My initial thoughts were that GW looked to have more about them than the students, who seemed very tentative to start with. Even having a player sent off after just 8 minutes didn't change my opinion and sure enough the ten men of GW took the lead after 25 minutes. Strangely, they seemed to go back in to their shells at this point. The students started to get more confident, and played some super football too on a very heavy pitch, and were rewarded with an equaliser on 31 minutes.

1-1 at half time, and with an ear-bashing for the Wanderers players, from their Manager, still ringing in their ears, GW started the second half with a bang with 2 goals in 2 minutes. At 3-1 down, it all could have imploded for Keele, but it didn't. All credit to them for pulling one back on 54 minutes, but they seemed to have blown their chance when one of their players was shown a straight red for an off the ball incident on the hour. The last thirty minutes was all Keele though, and they finally got their deserved reward with the equaliser on 86 minutes.

So, another top afternoon out in the Potteries. Shame it wasn't at the ground I had set off to visit, but that will be for another day.

*contributed on 18/02/18*

**TT No.91:** *Brian Buck* - Saturday 3rd February 2018; **Cookham Dean** v Taplow United; Thames Valley Premier League Premier Division; Result: 2-0; Attendance: 15 approx.

Despite my meticulous planning, some days out don't go quite according to plan. I travelled to this game by public transport and I was due to arrive at Cookham station at 12.45pm, some 75 minutes before kick-off. But my train got delayed en route, because they couldn't close the sliding doors, which meant that I missed the hourly connecting service from Maidenhead. Eventually we managed to limp into Maidenhead and my train to Cookham arrived on time. However, because it was obliged to wait for passengers from other delayed trains, it finally left at the time it was due to arrive at Cookham. So, I finally arrived at my destination some eight minutes before kick-off and I arrived at the ground two minutes before kick.

But I'd missed nothing more than a pre-match pint or two because the game kicked off about three minutes late. The secretary had earlier in the morning told me that this pitch rarely waterlogs and today he was just about right. It rained throughout this match, albeit only lightly and if your idea of fun is standing in a large open recreation ground with water starting to seep up around your shoes, then this was the game for you. In fact, one of the official lino's didn't turn up because someone had told him that the game was off. Or did they? Anyway, the players and officials all entered into the spirit of things and the players got truly muddy as the centre of the pitch gradually became a gluepot.

In the first half Taplow, despite being bottom of this division, looked to be marginally the better side, but no one could score. It appears that the hosts had a rollocking at half time (they don't use the term 'bollocking' in these parts, as this is a posh area!). Anyway, it worked and Cookham took the lead from a 'powerdriver', which I missed because I was talking to a dog! But I saw the other goal, on 90(+1) minutes, scored by a player who had just joined Cookham Dean from Taplow! Then it was into the club bar, to make up for lost time, before catching a train back to London and onwards and having the good fortune to find the rear coach unoccupied, thus allowing me to sleep off some of the excesses of the day!

*contributed on 15/02/18*

**TT No.90:** *Brian Buck* - Friday 2nd February 2018; **Burton Park Wanderers** v Thrapston Town; ChromaSport & Trophies United Counties League Division 1; Result: 1-2; Attendance: 73.

I was quite keen to go to this game tonight, especially as my only other visit here was on 14 May 1986, when I watched the hosts lose 4-0 to the then named Mirrlees Blackstone (Blackstones these days) in a Nene Group United Counties League Division 1 match (att. 15 approx. I was a bit late in picking up my friend at Huntingdon station, who was looking resplendent in his 'pork pie' hat, bought during a trip to Thailand, as I had fallen asleep at home and was thus very grateful to my wife for waking me up and asking me if I was still going out! Actually, I was dreaming about being late for a football match!

We made the half hour trip to the ground, but not without a few problems. The sat nav didn't recognise the new roads they've built round here recently and so we had to look out for some floodlights. That wasn't easy either as the brightest ones were lighting a nearby car park, rather than the ground! But we finally found it. The car parking wasn't particularly well lit and I nearly tripped over a step. I've had some bad luck in that department recently as I tripped over a terrace step at Redbridge and walked into a bollard on the way back to my car after a game at Stevenage earlier in the week. Luckily it missed both of my legs. Unluckily it nearly caught something else!

Anyway, after we found somewhere to sit we surveyed our surroundings and were surprised that the lights were so poor, although eventually our eyes got used to them. Although the infrastructure of the ground was a vast improvement, it was hard to believe, that Kettering Town, currently at the top end of the Southern League, might be playing National League football here next season. They have in effect taken over this ground, leaving Burton Park Wanderers with a portakabin style clubhouse in one corner of the ground, which was well used tonight. The match itself took a bit of time to get going. Thrapston started well, but gradually BPW got into the game and eventually dominated much of this half. They were rewarded when they got the opening goal on 35 minutes, which came from a 20-yard direct free kick, after the keeper fouled an attacker, earning him the only yellow card of the game. Straightaway you see that losing here was not part of their pre-match plan and on 44 minutes a 30 yarder saw them equalise at the Tin Hat End! Their winning goal came on 54 minutes after the scorer was put in and rounded the keeper. Thereafter the game was keenly contested but with the visitors always having the upper hand.

*contributed on 15/02/18*

**TT No.89:** *Brian Buck* - Wednesday 14th February 2018; **Cambridge University Falcons** v Bishop Grosseteste University; BUCS League Midland Division 3B; Venue: played at Queens & Robinson Sports Ground (aka King's & Selwyn College Sports Ground); Kick-Off: 2pm; Result:1-1; Attendance: 2.

With the remnants of the previous days bad weather still lingering around, it was good that this game got fitted in before the next band of bad weather arrived. So, after having confirmed late morning that the match was still on, I dropped Mrs Buck off in Cambridge and then returned to ascertain which pitch this game was being played on. Then after donning my wellies I set off and found that it was the furthest one away from where I parked my car. In fact, it was in the King's & Selwyn part of the complex. Had I known this in advance I could have parked my car here. The confusion as to which part of the complex belongs to which college is made all the more confusing by the fact that it is all maintained by Queens & Robinson College, which was irrelevant to today's participants, but important for statistic 'nutters' like me.

Anyway, the bonus was that the match was played right next to the Kings & Selwyn dressing rooms, which were close to one corner of the pitch. Furthermore, I was able to watch the game from the balcony, thus out of the wind and potential rain, which fortunately never arrived during play, apart from a few spits. This was a

match between the third-place hosts, still with a chance of winning this division, against their bottom of the table visitors who are based in Lincoln. It was they who had the wind advantage in the first half, but when they took the lead on 11 minutes it came from a wrongly given corner, right in front of me. The resultant kick was partially cleared, but straight to the scorer who lobbed the ball back into the box. But either he miskicked it or the wind carried the ball, but it went over the keeper and into the net. Up until this point the Falcons had been doing OK, but for the rest of the half their confidence was dented a bit. However, after the break and with the wind now behind them, they gradually got on top. As they piled on the pressure an unusual occurrence happened. The visitor's keeper complained to the ref that the Falcons subs were pushing spare balls onto the pitch as soon as one went out of play, especially after they noticed that he was time wasting. So he in effect he was actually telling the ref that he should be allowed to time waste! Soon after this, on 77 minutes a 20 yarder from the Falcons deservedly brought the equaliser, but try as they did they couldn't conjure up the winner.

*contributed on 15/02/18*

**TT No.88:** *Keith Aslan* - Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> February 2018; **SAINT HELENS TOWN AFC** v Whitchurch Alport; North West Counties League Div. 1; Kick-Off: 15.03; Result: 1-5; Admission: £5, Programme: (brilliant) £2; Attendance: 178 (133 home, 42 away & 3 neutral).

St. Helens is famous for two things, glass and darts. In some freak of genetics, 3 of the top 20 darts players in the WORLD come from this non-descript northern outpost with the towns darts shop being prominent sponsors of the football team. After spending the past seven years homeless, this season the team are back where they belong with a new ground and plastic pitch meaning in spite of the rain this was a stress-free day out for yours truly with a football match guaranteed. Given their seven-year exile it was fitting they entered the field to the sounds of the Thin Lizzy standard 'The boys are back in town' blaring out over the tannoy. My own personal choice would be 'Hello, hello I'm back again' by Gary Glitter who we don't hear nearly enough of these days. Whatever you think about his extra-curricular activities he did make some mighty fine records.

Ruskin Drive is a 25-minute walk across town from the railway station. It is a brand-new complex with Pilkington Recs. having a rugby league fixture next door to the football. Confusingly it's the same entrance to both, the pay hut is divided into two with both sports having equal billing. For the paper fetishist the Recs. also produce a programme and their attendance was not dissimilar to the football crowd. While many hoppers have slagged off the ground they are missing the point. St. Helens are back playing in St. Helens and that is all that matters. Beggars can't be choosers and the opinions of a groundhopper who is only ever going to make a single visit is of no consequence. For the record it is a three-sided ground with a bit of atcost architecture around the half way mark. Of course, fans of green fences won't be disappointed. The clubhouse was showing the lunchtime footie but the bar staff were overwhelmed until the rugby crowd emptied out for their earlier kick off. I seized my opportunity and ordered a scrumptious sirloin

steak and chips from the many wonderful meal options available. Not cheap, but well worth the money.

All around the ground, and in the programme, there are homages to their most famous old boy, Bert Trautman, who played 51 games for the Saints before moving on to Manchester City. A thoroughly nice chap by all accounts who achieved immortality by playing on in one match with a broken neck. Brave or stupid, you decide. His presence in the St. Helens team led directly to the town being twinned with Stuttgart, the first such twinning with the enemy after the war. Today the home side were no match for Whitchurch who chalked up their 10th consecutive win, with a brief St. Helens comeback early in the second half not proving sustainable. Alport were well supported by a large number (everything is relative) of enthusiastic fans. As with all new grounds the stewarding was a nonsense, I counted nine, four didn't seem to do very much while the other five did nothing at all and just stood and watched the football. Nice work if you can get it. The 56-page glossy programme was a work of art, about the best I've seen all season with everything you could possibly want from it. Possibly they could send a copy to the Margate programme editor, 50p more expensive and quite frankly, rubbish. Another excellent day out dodging the raindrops.

*contributed on 11/02/18*

**TT No.87: Steve Hardy** - Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> February 2018; **FC Cavaliers** v Awsworth Villa; Nottinghamshire Senior League Premier Division; Result: 0-3; Admission: £2 including programme; Attendance: 13 h/c

3G to the rescue again. My fifth game on the plastic in a row, although it has to be said that knowing your game will definitely go ahead takes away all the stress of Saturday mornings scouring through your list of preferred games as each one falls to the weather!

So, an easy drive to Nottingham and the Forest Sports Zone on Gregory Boulevard. There are two 3G pitches here with one being used for a ladies' hockey match when I arrived, and the other behind the changing room block, being used for football. My game was a 2pm scheduled start, but when I arrived at 1.30pm there was a youth team game just starting on the pitch. Turned out that KO had been put back to 3.00pm to accommodate this youth team game, but nobody had bothered to update the Fulltime website!

On the pitch it was 3<sup>rd</sup> v 2<sup>nd</sup> in what was effectively the 2<sup>nd</sup> place decider. In the end it was a bit of a damp squib, with Awsworth much the better side and controlling the game from start to finish. They were helped by the Cavs keeper, who palmed a cross in to his own net for the opener on 14 minutes. To his credit though, he made several excellent saves after that, before being beaten again just before the break for a 2-0 halftime lead for the Villa.

More of the same in the second half, with every Cavs threat being handled easily by the Villa defence. Playing mostly on the counter attack, Villa had several other chances to increase their lead but in the end, just added a 3<sup>rd</sup> for a well-deserved victory.

Spectators are not allowed inside the cage, but are restricted to one designated viewing area along one side of the pitch. Admission was £2 and the club printed just 5 copies of their programme which were very quickly snapped up by the other groundhoppers present.

*contributed on 11/02/18*

**TT No.86:** *Steve Hardy* - Saturday 3rd February 2018; **Old Hill Vets** v Shirley Athletic Vets; Birmingham & District League Vets Cup; Result: 2-6; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 4 h/c

Once again, a 3G pitch comes to the rescue. This week though, I actually wanted to visit it, as opposed to the 'everything on grass is rained off, so a plastic pitch it is then' attitude I have adopted in recent weeks.

The match was originally on the fixture bulletin as a Shirley Athletic home match. I thought at the time that Shirley were the only ground left for me to visit in the BADL, so as the game was postponed week after week through the bad weather, I got more and more frustrated. This week's bulletin said 'game switched to Old Hill' though, so a quick text to the very helpful Shirley Secretary gave me the address of Old Hill's ground, and I hadn't been there - woo-hoo!

The ground in question is actually a school, Leasowes High School in Halesowen, to be exact. At the back of the school is a brand new floodlit 3G pitch in a cage, where spectators are allowed in, and can wander around all four sides too, which was a bonus.

I had seen a couple of games previously in the BADL vets cup competition, so I knew that any thoughts that this match would see 22 elderly men tottering around the pitch for 90 minutes was entirely spurious. These games are taken VERY seriously, the players are fit and the play is often aggressive. A tad too aggressive in today's match though, and we had 2 'sendings off', a ten-minute sin binning, umpteen bookings, several full on punch-ups involving all 22 players and, oh yes, some decent football played as well!

It was 1-1 at half time, with Shirley's early lead being cancelled out by a wickedly deflected own goal on 38 minutes.

After the break, Shirley were much the better side, and moved to a 3-1 lead after 55 minutes. Then one of their players was sin binned for handling the ball after he had been hacked to the ground. The extra man told briefly, and Old Hill made it 2-3 on the hour mark. Were we in for a grand finale? Not a chance, as after the 2 dismissals for fighting, Shirley quickly regained control to score three more times including a penalty in the 88<sup>th</sup> minute to round things off.

I thoroughly enjoyed my afternoon's entertainment today, and am looking forward to recompleting the league when Shirley Athletic finally play a home game!

*contributed on 04/02/18*

**TT No.85: Brian Buck - Saturday 27th January 2018; Scarborough Athletic v Prescott Cables; Evo-Stick Northern Premier League North; Result: 3-0; Attendance: 1,342.**

With my intended chauffeur for today wisely deciding against driving me to a game to Gloucester, because of the bad weather there, I was able to 'switch providers' at short notice and without any penalty fees either! So, it was that I found myself being picked up relatively close to home and just over three and a half hours later we had arrived at the ground.

Soon we were in the club bar, the entrance to which was at ground floor level. From here we could see the pitch, which was down below us, entrance to which was at the back of the main stand. These days I really need to sit down if it is all possible, so I explained my position to the helpful club officials and enquired if they had any seats available. I was expecting a negative response as I had understood that they are all taken by season ticket holders, but I was surprised when I was told that they had one seat left, which I bought. It offered me a good view of the game as well. This was an hour and three quarters before kick-off though.

In truth we couldn't be bothered to do the tourist business round Scarborough. Done it all before though. So, we stayed in the clubhouse where they had food and drink available. It is a big clubhouse, but they have very few chairs and tables in it, but once again we were lucky today as we did find somewhere to sit. That would have been my only gripe today. I was in my seat just before kick-off and what a wonderful atmosphere there was. It's a long while since I've been to a non-league game played in a ground which was basically full and it was hard to believe that they got another 400 people in here for their opening game, a friendly match against Sheffield United. This ground also has a very scenic view of the hill and a road rising steeply from the far side of the pitch. Scarborough Athletic were formed in 2007, just after the demise of Scarborough FC, who used to play about 200 yards away, as the crow flies. Until this season they played most of their games in Bridlington, hence the excitement of returning to their home town this season. At the same time Scarborough Town were formed and they played more locally and I saw them play home games on two different grounds. But once Athletic got the go ahead to get this ground built, their dreams quickly died.

So, it was that in front of an enthusiastic expectant crowd, Athletic took the lead on 26 minutes, from just inside the penalty area with scorer unmarked. This goal was also kind to one of our passengers who won £40 by having the right Golden Goal ticket! The second goal came on 37 minutes after the scorer was played in and ran on. This was slightly harsh on the visitors as they had been having plenty of possession without looking like scoring. At half time I discovered that the chap sitting next to me knew me, which surprised me because I was over 200 miles from home! The second half in this no friction game saw Athletic look comfortable with their lead as Prescott seemed unable to do much about it and a third Athletic goal right at the end was well justified. Afterwards we got away quite quickly and savoured this memorable day as we made our way home.

*contributed on 04/02/18*



**TT No.84: Steve Hardy** - Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> January 2018; **Alumni** v East Villa; Liverpool Premier League Premier Division; Kick-Off: 1pm; Result: 1-3; Admission: Free; Programme: Free; Attendance: 11 (h/c)

Alumni play at the very impressive Wavertree Sports Park in Wellington Road, Wavertree. The Park is home to Liverpool Aquatics centre; Liverpool Tennis centre; a huge, floodlit-athletics track and the 4G pitch where this afternoon's fix took place. The players change at the athletics stadium, and then have a lengthy yomp over hill and dale to get to the football pitch, which is next to the enormous car park.

It hasn't been a very good season for Alumni on the pitch. Last week's win over MSB Woolton was their first win of the season which at least gave them some optimism for today's encounter with high flying East Villa. Sadly, they were never really in this game and even when they equalised after half an hour it was only to last 6 minutes as the Villa scored a really well worked goal to take a lead after which they never looked like losing.

Attendance at the game was just eleven. All of these were groundhoppers, from all over the UK, who had somehow spotted that Alumni had tweeted about their first ever programme being produced today. For a step 7 league, I find it strange that not a single club produces a regular programme. It is compulsory in other step 7 leagues like the CML or Middlesex League, but there appears to be no interest in Liverpool.

There is no designated spectator standing area in the 4G cage. No problem though as the referee said he was quite happy for us all to pile in, and in my case, wander round the pitch taking photos at my leisure.

Another top, if extremely soggy, day out.

*contributed on 28/01/18*

**TT No.83: Brian Buck** - Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> January 2018; **Freiston** v Woodhall Spa United; Boston Workforce Unlimited League Division 1; Result: 5-1; Attendance: 25 approx.

As is seemingly a regular occurrence at this time of the year heavy overnight rain, which was still falling as I got up, meant that I had to put on my weather forecaster's hat on to help me to decide where to go to today. I soon noted that the rain was expected to move no further north than roughly Spalding. So, after consulting the fixture secretary of the Boston & District League, I picked out this game, based partly on him telling me that this pitch drains well. Mind you, he was going to the other one I had on my list, namely East Leake, but that one, being a cup match, kicked off half an hour earlier and such was my tardiness in leaving home, getting there would have been a bit tight. So, I settled on this game at Freiston.

If coming from the south then get yourself to Boston. Turn right just past Boston United's ground and keep going! I arrived here with about 45 minutes to spare and immediately noted that the car park was rather full, but after driving through

some mud I found a place to park, on some grass. Then I discovered the reason for there being so many cars - they were holding an auction in the clubhouse, known locally as the Danny Flear Community Centre, which also houses the dressing rooms. After ascertaining that the match was on I asked a local where the nearest pub was as she pointed out the back of one in the distance, about a two-minute walk away. So, I nipped in there for a quick pint. No time for more today. But at the same time, I saw this magnificent looking church which I only had time to observe from a distance.

I was back in time for the match. The home manager was almost alone on the far side of this big pitch and when I went around there I soon discovered why. He had verbal diarrhea! Freiston started the day bottom of the league and you could soon see why. The players complained to him that they wanted him to change things. He told them that in effect that it was their problem and to get on with it. But then he did make a couple of positional changes and on 27 minutes Freiston took the lead and it was almost deserved. A second goal then followed from the spot on 33 minutes with the third going in three minutes before the break. After all his high octane verbals during play, I didn't hear a word from the manager at half time and I spent much of this period avoiding the smoke generated by at least four of his players puffing fags! After showing no enthusiasm in the first half the visitors perked up a bit after the break and after Freiston scored their fourth goal on 51 minutes they pulled one back a minute later. A fifth goal on 63 minutes not only gave the scorer his hat-trick, but wrapped up a well-deserved win for the hosts. It was a win which lifted them one place off the bottom of the league and you ended up wondering just why they were there in the first place!

*contributed on 30/01/18*

**TT No.82:** *Brian Buck* - Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> January 2018; **RAF** v Tamworth X1; Friendly Match; Venue: played at RAF Cosford; Result: 3-0; Attendance: 80 approx.

These days I don't normally venture out this far for a midweek game, but when a friend rings you up and asks if you want a lift and you are available then you go! Thanks Craig (Dabbs). RAF Cosford is roughly half way between Telford and Wolverhampton, just off Junction 3 of the M54. So, having left Bedford at about 4pm we were on site just over two and a half hours later, noticing immediately that it was much colder up here.

First task was to pick up a copy of the free 12-page programme. This was achieved quite easily. Then it was food time. Nothing on site though. They don't have a license to sell food and drink and we were told that it would cost about £1,000 to get one! So, it was off to the Spa shop across the road for some goodies. Next it was back into the relative warmth of the clubhouse and out of the biting wind, to eat it. Then just before the start it was back outside and time for coffee, free with a recommended 50p donation! I wouldn't say it was hot, but my plastic spoon melted as I stirred my coffee with it!

Then it was into the stand from where a good view of proceedings could be had, even allowing that the pitch was in the middle of a running track. The stand seemed to hold roughly 200 people, perhaps a bit less. By now the running track

was starting to ice up, but the stand did seem to protect us from most of the wind. Despite all this the RAF keeper had a short-sleeved shirt on! The match was quite physical at times, but without friction. The RAF took a 34th minute lead when the scorer won a 50/50 tackle and ran on to score. Soon after this it started to sleet and after the break this turned into snow for about ten minutes, settling at times, causing us to start worrying if we going to be able to get home. But once it stopped things were OK. The RAF then went on to score further goals, on 68 minutes with a rising shot with the keeper unsighted and right on time with a well-placed cross shot. Then after clearing the frozen ice off the windscreen it was back home, where conditions were less threatening. It's grim up north!

*contributed on 23/01/18*

**TT No.81:** *Brian Buck* - Saturday 13th January 2018; LNER v London Titans; Cherry Red Books Middlesex County League Combination; Kick-Off: 2pm; Result: 6-3; Attendance: 1.

After my previous match had finished I caught the next train from Carpenders Park, alighting at Wembley Central 16 minutes later. From here it was about a 40-minute walk to the ground, although I could have caught a bus most of the way. I'd been 'umming and ahing' where to go for my middle match of the day all week and eventually settled on this one, as I noted from the league website that the hosts have their own social club on site, meaning I could have a few pints before kick-off while watching some TV football at the same time.

While I was in here a woman suddenly appeared and told us that she couldn't find her way out of the bar! In some respects, I was lucky that this match was on as I when I looked out of the window while I was supping my pint, that water was being brushed out of one goalmouth. But even though it was rather squelchy underfoot, most of the pitch was playable if rather undulating. LNER Sports & Social club was established in 1923 by the London North Eastern Railway Company and since then has been a place for friends and family alike to enjoy! Although it says this on their website, I couldn't really understand the connection at the time, as I thought LNER trains ran on the eastern side of the country. But it seems that the LNER inherited four of London's termini and Marylebone (ex-Great Central Railway) was one of them. In addition, it ran suburban services to Broad Street (London, Midland and Scottish Railway) and Moorgate (Metropolitan Railway, later London Transport). Today the Piccadilly Line passes on one side of the ground and a Chiltern Railways line on the other side. Also, if you stand in the right place you can see Wembley Stadium in the distance.

The game was 'reffed' very well considering that the holder of the whistle could barely walk, yet alone run. At one point when a player deliberately kicked the ball out of play he told him, "Either go and get the ball or give me your name!". The score was 1-1 at the break, with LNER taking the lead on 13 minutes. I asked their clubs lino for the scorer's name and was told it was John Smith. Well, you may know a lot of John Smith's but how many do you know that play football and score goals? Not many Gary, as they kept calling him! I made sure that he was in earshot when I called him a prat when the manager gave me his real name at the end, by which time he'd scored four goals! The second half was full of goals and in a

seven-minute period starting on 54 minutes, the score went, 2-1, 2-2, 3-2 and then 3-3, but starting in the 79th minute LNER won the match with three goals in five minutes to bring to a close a game where for the first time, I think, I was the only spectator for a Saturday afternoon match! Then it was onto Wembley Stadium to watch Spurs play.

*contributed on 17/01/18*

**TT No.80:** *Brian Buck* - Tuesday 9th January 2018. Altis v United London; London Junior Cup 4th Round; Venue: played at London Marathon Community Track, Stratford; Result: 1-1 (United London won 4-2 on penalties); Attendance: 90 approx.

This game was played on what is in effect the 'warm up' track to the literally adjacent London Stadium, where West Ham United play (sometimes!). I think that it's locally called the 'warm up' track because tonight it was nowhere near as cold as it was for my game at Huntingdon Town on the previous night. It seemed rather strange not leaving home until shortly after 6pm to get to a floodlit game in London, but this was an 8.15pm (8.18pm actually) kick off.

So, I caught the 7.14pm train from Cheshunt to Stratford. Then, once I found where the right platform was, it was a two-minute journey to Pudding Mill Lane on the Docklands Light Railway and about a five-minute walk to the ground from there. I was in the ground by about 7.50pm, a £1.80 Oyster Card journey. Next it was time to track down a programme, £3 tonight! Then it was time to join the who's who of Groundhoppers who formed most of the crowd, with the majority sitting in the 300-seater stand. This was placed slightly off centre so it could cater for people watching the closing stage of the athletics meetings they hold here. But despite this the view of proceedings wasn't bad. Add to that all the lights of the towers of flats or offices in the distance and this place had a bit of character to it.

Soon as the match started we noticed that there were no lino's. Initially I thought that this might place a lot of pressure on the ref, but despite his tender years he officiated very well and both sides seemed to respect him. The opening goal was scored by United London on 9 minutes. They are a fans-based side. Each one of their games are filmed and then by way of an on-line vote, they select the team for the next game. They do have a coach though! The game then moved on and without being brilliant it was entertaining, but with lots of misplaced passes. Then on 61 minutes Altis surprisingly equalised, by way of a header from a free kick. This brought life into the match, but also concerns for the watching multitude, as some had specific trains to catch to get home and we were hoping that the game might be resolved in normal time. On 90(+3) minutes the Altis keeper brought down a United London player just as he was about to score and he was sent off. Then after the same United London player missed an open goal two minutes later it was on to the dreaded penalties. Here after Altis missed their first two spots kicks, it was fairly easy for United London to win through.

Then it was a quick dash back to Pudding Mill Lane and I just managed to catch the 10.30pm train back to Cheshunt from Stratford. Overall an enjoyable evening out

at a venue which is unlikely to stage too many floodlit games, unless an Essex Senior League side wants to try and do a deal to play here!

*contributed on 15/01/18*

**TT No.79: Keith Aslan** - Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> January 2018; **RETFORD** v Brodsworth Welfare; Central Midlands League North Division; Kick-Off: 14.03; Result: 2-0; Admission: £3, and a bargain quid for old people; Programme: £1.50p; Attendance: 60 (53 home, 3 away & 4 neutral).

I must have been past this ground literally hundreds of times on the train. I normally go through Retford at 140 miles an hour, which in truth is probably the best way to see the town. Retford FC (not to be confused with Retford United) have only been going since 2015 and having previously ground shared, this is their first season at the former Rail headquarters. It's a move along the right LINES and they are definitely on TRACK. Three side railed, concrete walkway, turnstiles and a tannoy comprise part 1 of the upgrade. Next season a stand and floodlights are TIMETABLED. Hot drinks and snacks are available from a portacabin and the burger van next door is expected to be online soon for more-meaty fayre. They also have a selection of this season's home and away programmes laid out on a table to which spectators are invited to help themselves. All the SIGNALS are good for the future with the team in the top half of the table having amassed plenty of POINTS with the on-field activities matching the off-field progress. Serious groundhoppers will find the teams written on a whiteboard next to the dugouts. For the driver the way in could be a bit difficult to find. The ground is one side of the main road, the entrance is through a tunnel on the other. For the carless it's a simple 20-minute walk from the station. They do have a clubhouse 50 yards from the ground which I missed out on.

Brodsworth Miners Welfare (they dropped the 'Miners' appellation in 2006 for obvious reasons) have had a rollercoaster ride for the past few seasons. 2011 - North East Counties; 2012 - Doncaster Senior; 2013 - Central Midlands; 2016 - Doncaster Senior and 2017 back to the Central Mids. They were no match for the home side today who dominated proceedings and only rubbishy finishing meant the second goal that made things safe only came 5 minutes from time. Somewhat surprisingly no balls went over onto the adjacent main line which if they had done would unlikely to be ever seen again. The match was accompanied by a glossy, colour, 16-page programme. The quiz had 12 questions, any sports fan could have a punt at 11 of them but I guarantee nobody will get the answer to 'what sport did Scotland become world champions in 2005?' Answer at the end of the report but to give you a clue it's not a sport you associate Scotland as being particularly good at like Hammer Throwing, Tossing the Caber or Football (ok forget the last one).

Retford have just 4 home match's left this season due to only playing 3 away games up to the new year including a period from 23<sup>rd</sup> September to 6<sup>th</sup> January when they weren't given a single away match! I wonder who the Central Midlands League fixture secretary could possibly be? I spent the game in the excellent company of Harlow Dave (Betcha can't guess where he lives). He didn't want to go very far today because he'd been working Friday night. Only a groundhopper would regard a 2-hour 20-minute drive each way as "not very far".

And so, to the answer to the days big question: what sport did Scotland become world champions in 2005? It was of course Elephant Polo. The things you learn from football programmes!

*contributed on 14/01/18*

**TT No.78:** *Steve Hardy* - Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> January 2018; Northern Premier League Division One South; **Stamford** v Frickley Athletic; Result: 2-4; Admission: £7 for an OAP; Programme: £2; Attendance: 334

A wonderful day out in freezing Lincolnshire, in the beautiful town of Stamford. The only downer on what turned out to be a very long day were the numerous rail replacement buses between my home station and Birmingham New Street.

Stamford FC are in their 4<sup>th</sup> season on their new ground at the Borderville sports centre. Unlike the old ground, which was directly behind Stamford Railway Station, the new one is a 2 mile yomp through town and out on the Ryhall Road so I was exhausted by the time I reached it. Luckily there is a Sainsbury superstore nearby, so a quick toasted teacake with my coffee, and I was revived.

The new ground has received mixed reviews amongst groundhoppers. My view was that it was excellent for step 4, with friendly staff letting me wander round to take photos before the game. In summary, there is a large seated stand along the turnstile entrance side, a large standing stand behind one goal, a super club shop, a huge car park, a very busy tea bar serving hot food, and an upstairs bar area, which became more and more busy as temperatures plummeted.

On the pitch, visitors Frickley Athletic, who are a southern club apparently, continued their very impressive run of recent victories, but left it late to do so. The Daniels took the lead on 22 minutes, before Frickley were gifted a deserved equaliser on the stroke of half time. After the break it was all fairly even until Frickley scored their second on 73 minutes. Back came Stamford though, with a deserved equaliser on 80 mins. Frankly I thought a draw would have been a fair result by this point, but Frickley pulled out all the stops to score twice more in the last 5 minutes. Their 4<sup>th</sup> goal was timed at 90 +7!

The official attendance was 334, with a fair few coming with the visitors. My rough headcount was 124, although it was impossible to see how many people spent the whole game very sensibly watching from the warmth of the first-floor bar.

*contributed on 14/01/18*

**TT No.77:** *Brian Buck* - Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> January 2018; **Hunstanton** v Marshland Saints; UK Van Solutions North West Norfolk League Division 2 Cup 1st Round; Result: 0-1; Attendance: 20 approx.

Today I ended up roughly where I had set my mind on a day or so earlier. But a combination of overnight frost on some already wet pitches meant that no grass pitch was completely immune from the weather conditions today. But as I sat in my car just outside Cambridge railway station, I got the nod from the Hunstanton secretary that the match would be on and so off I went.

A 45-minute train journey later and I was in King's Lynn. From here it was a short walk to the bus station where buses run at least every 15 minutes to Hunstanton and 50 minutes later I had arrived. The bus passed the ground of Ingoldisthorpe, another club on my hit list up here and I could see that their game was also on as their pitch was being marked out as my bus passed by it. Once in Hunstanton I walked up to the ground, which took less than ten minutes, to make sure that the game was on. Then I retreated to the pub for liquid refreshments and something to eat. Railway enthusiasts will be pleased to note that a remnant of the old King's Lynn to Hunstanton railway line still exists. Although the station and surrounding land is now a large car park, a railway signal is still in place!

I arrived back at the ground in good time for the start of the match. This is not a spectacular venue by any means, although the cedar trees, mainly behind one goal, does give it some character. Otherwise the club seem to be the poorer of the relationship between them and the cricket club, where they now change, having once had their own clubhouse. Today Hunstanton, top of Division 2 of this league, were wearing their new yellow shirts, as a result of having a new sponsors deal, thankfully replacing their navy-blue kit, which can clash with the black kit refs wear. Bet you knew the last bit already!

Hunstanton were expected to soundly beat their second from bottom opponents, but things didn't pan out quite as they expected. The first half was tense and both sides looked a bit rusty after the Christmas break. Hunstanton looked the better side, but couldn't translate this into goals. At half time the Hunstanton number 15 suddenly subbed himself, ran to the changing rooms and shouting, "See you later," got changed and drove off. The game restarted and on 49 minutes the visitors surprisingly scored the only goal of the game when what was really just a cross, ended up as a shot. It wasn't that difficult to save, but somehow it slipped through the keeper's hands! It was scored by Nathan Jones, who immediately flew back to Newcastle afterwards to supervise Luton Town's FA Cup defeat there! This goal was a big setback for Hunstanton. On 63 minutes their manager decided to switch to 3-5-2, from what, I wasn't sure! But almost immediately the ball went out of the ground and landed on the roof of a passing car on the adjacent coast road, causing the driver to stop momentarily! On 67 minutes there were cries of "Do we want this or not?" from the hosts. Answers on a postcard please! Then on 67 minutes the manager switched to 4-4-2, but I think that he could have pulled balls out of a hat. They weren't going to win! Credit to the opposition for doing what they needed to though. Afterwards, rather than go home straight away, I went back to the pub, to watch the football scores come in, before making my way home, thereby not annoying Mrs Buck by getting home too early! Overall an enjoyable day out in the quite seaside town of Hunstanton.

*contributed on 09/01/18*

**TT No.76: Keith Aslan - Saturday January 6<sup>th</sup> 2018; BRAMFORD ROAD OLD BOYS v Bramford United; Bob Coleman Cup; Kick-Off: 13.36; Result: 0-6; Admission & Programme: Free; Attendance: 22 (12 home, 5 away & 5 neutral).**

Cup weekend again and it's the Bob Coleman variety cutting the mustard (Coleman-mustard, get it) with the Bramford derby just too good to miss, although

the attendance would suggest it passed many of the locals by. The home side strut their stuff in Division 2 of the Suffolk and Ipswich League while their opponents play in the rarefied atmosphere of the Premier Division. Could there be a giant killing? No. Old Boys play adjacent to the Whitton fitness centre, about 4 miles to the north of Ipswich with a 15-minute bus service connecting the City centre to the ground. It has all the spectator facilities you would expect at this level, nothing. But a raised concrete 'terrace' along the half way line with a fence to lean on provided an excellent view of proceedings. The Sports Centre next door is a warm place to thaw out and three vending machines supplying everything you could wish for in the drink and snack department with my 'smooth café latte' going down a treat at half time. Also, the Ipswich Eagles Cycle Speedway track backs on to the ground. A new sport to me but apparently quite big round these parts. The track had terracing, seats and floodlights, all in all very impressive.

To mark the occasion Old Boys produced a one off programme, nothing fancy but it hit the spot for me. As the score would suggest the home side never managed to close the gap in class with United's victory never in doubt. Hats off to the under employed away keeper, a chubby chap who carried off his vomit inducing violet kit surprisingly well. To him the question 'Who ate all the pies?' would be a rhetorical one. The game was enlivened during the first half when a spectator crept up behind the linesman and pulled his shorts down, a first for me. Who says the fun's gone out of football? How we all laughed, the shorts shifter turned out to be his brother (well that was his story). If that's what siblings do to each other I'm glad I'm an only child.

All records must come to an end and after three Saturdays on the spin of punctual kick offs we reverted back to late starts today. Can't really blame the ref. He was on the pitch with his two linesmen ready to go at 1.25 but neither side felt able to leave the warmth of the changing rooms without his exhortations. Old Boys eventually wandered on to the pitch but United remained firmly in situ, loud music blaring from within, presumably they were waiting for the heavy metal track to finish before venturing out into the cold. It was left to a fellow hopper, who presumably aspired to get home the same day, to go around to the changing rooms and motivate them to come out and play a game of football. Don't forget to put it in your report ref.

*contributed on 31/12/17*

**TT No.75: Brian Buck - Saturday 30th December 2017; Team Dudley v Newport Town; West Midlands (Regional) League Division 1; Venue: played at Dudley College, Priory Road Football Complex; Result: 1-3; Attendance: 40 approx.**

I was due to appear here two weeks earlier, but snow on this 3G pitch put a stop to that. But today I was offered a lift, with my kind chauffeur dropping me off on the way before going elsewhere. This meant that I could get a few pints down me before kick-off. Although the first pub I went in had football on TV, where I saw the dregs of a rather ordinary Celtic - Rangers derby, it didn't have any food whatsoever, including crisps. So, it was off to the next pub which satisfied my basic requirements. Here I met an interesting bunch of people, including Mr Dudley. I was told that he had been around since time began, but when I found out



his age I was surprised that he was only ten years older than me! Actually, I was a bit worried as he looked well into his eighties! Then a couple appeared who knew him and I got chatting to them, especially the lady, who it transpired can't read or write. It was brave of her to tell me this, but I did fear for her when she went off to the toilets! Meanwhile, back at the ground it was all systems go. No programme today and as 3G grounds go at this level it was very basic. You could get inside the cage, but spectator viewing was limited to about a third of one side only. Nonetheless the surrounds were quite pleasing on the eye. This match was between fourth and first in the league. Without being especially convincing early on, you could see why Newport Town are top of this division. However, it was Team Dudley, seemingly a University side connected with Dudley College, who took a first half lead on 34 minutes, just as they were starting to get into the match. Time for some refreshments at the break. No bar here, but you can get tea and coffee here from a table just outside the dressing rooms. This comes with a free biscuit! In the second half and on 53 minutes, one of the lino's flags broke. So, he went to the changing rooms to borrow one of the refs and when he returned he was asked by a spectator, "Does it work?" On 60 minutes Newport, playing slightly better now, equalised. However, in my humble opinion they were still there for the taking. But on 85 minutes a momentum tackle saw them awarded a spot kick. But rather than send off the player who made the tackle, he gave a second yellow card, followed by a red, to the recipient of the tackle. The spot kick was converted and then four minutes later and with Team Dudley pushing up, a third Newport goal sealed for them a decent quality game.

*contributed on 31/12/17*

**TT No.74:** *Keith Aslan* - Saturday December 30<sup>th</sup> 2017; **SCARBOROUGH ATHLETIC** v Clitheroe. Northern Premier North Division; Kick-Off: 15.00; Result: 4-1; Admission: £10, a fiver for old people; Programme: £3(!); Official Attendance: 1001

Ex. Football league towns whose clubs have been exiled from their homes all have the same problems on their return, the grounds they come back to are woefully inadequate for their attendances. Maidstone and Darlington spring to mind and to that list should be added Scarborough. Although today's gate just about reached four figures the only decent vantage-point to be had was in the main elevated stand, and like Darlington these are local seats for local people, if you aren't a season ticket holder you can forget it and it's downstairs to be hemmed-in at pitch level. Only 1 point off an automatic promotion place, improvements are projected to comply with a higher status, but since when has ground grading got anything to do with spectators? Truth of the matter is they need a bigger ground and while it would be easy to extend it along the far touchline I would imagine the money isn't there. The clubhouse at the top of the stand is a bit too antiseptic for my taste but is somewhere to watch the football results after the game. You would have to be very thirsty to join the long queue at the bar.

It's a twenty-minute walk from the station, if travelling by train you can see the ground on the right-hand side as you enter the town. I went for a bracing walk along the sea front before the game, I've always liked the fading grandeur of

Scarborough and while it wasn't looking at its best today, going this time of year, you avoid the crowds. As for the match, the Clitheroe Kids were no match for the home side who took another step to what their supporters regard as an inevitable promotion. The recent rainfall was irrelevant to the pristine plastic, a perfect surface which produced an entertaining game of football. The double issue programme was a bit pricey at £3 and I didn't see anyone else that had one. O.K. I suppose most people would have bought it for the Boxing Day fixture but I would still have expected to see one or two dotted about in such a large crowd. They went around the ground selling team sheets which also had forthcoming fixtures and away travel arrangements. £3 for a programme, 20p for a team sheet? I wonder how many fans went for the cheaper option.

A few random jottings. For the third week in succession my game kicked off exactly when it was supposed to, this must be some kind of record (don't forget records only began with the advent of the premier league, the other 100 plus years of football didn't exist.) I'm going to an Isthmian League game on New Year's Day and if that game starts on time then I must have travelled into a parallel universe. The Dickens pub. in Scarborough town centre does a superb steak and chips served by a very obliging waitress. The trains behaved themselves although I noted if I had turned up at Broadstairs station and asked for a single to Scarborough I would have been charged £208. I obviously misheard the politicians when they said fares would be cheaper with privatization. The community police officers in Scarborough were all wearing beanie hats with police written on them. Seriously this is part of their uniform. Nothing says 'authority' quite like a beanie hat! And York station has a group of people who have 'Security Ambassador' emblazoned on their high visibility jackets. What is the world coming to?

*contributed on 31/12/17*

**TT No.73: Brian Buck - Saturday 23rd December 2017; Heyford Athletic v Launton Sports; Oxfordshire Senior League Premier Division; Result: 1-0; Attendance: 25 approx.**

Sometimes people ask me how I can watch games like these when in the next breath I'm at a nearly full Wembley Stadium watching Spurs play. Given that Spurs are blowing hot and cold this season, there is otherwise no comparison and today's trip out was one of the best I've had all season, if not the best. First thing to do was to confirm that the match was on, as I'd struggled to do this on the previous night. But just as I was texting the home secretary, after I failed to speak to her direct, she phoned me back to tell me that it was all systems go. So off we went, leaving ourselves sufficient time to spend a lovely hour in historic Buckingham on the way. I didn't even have to pay to park as a lady gave me her partly used car park tick, thus saving me 50p!

Then it was off to the ground and as we entered the village of Lower Heyford I think that it is fair to say that we were both gob-smacked. Suddenly and although we were just about only 60 miles from home, we were transported into another world. As we descended down the narrow main street into the village centre there were next to no pavements, each house was individually crafted and there was hardly anyone around. It was a bit misty though and I wouldn't mind betting that

this is the kind of place where they would once film TV programmes like The Avengers. We then passed the ground on our right and seeing that they were getting everything ready, we drove on, initially to look at the church (closed), but just as importantly, to get something to eat and drink in the pub. In between the two we noticed a lady, who must have been in her seventies, high up on a step ladder, pruning her roses.

Anyway, we arrived back at the ground and they kicked off while we were still finding somewhere to park. There are two Heyford Athletic's, the other one playing in the Northants Combination at Nether Heyford, near Bugbrooke St Michaels. Bearing in mind just how cramped the housing is in this village and how hilly it is, it was rather surprising that they could fit in a football pitch here at all. But they manage it and it slopes up and down and side to side. Overall you are given the impression that you are much further from home than you actually are. The match itself was keenly and for the most part evenly contested even though Launton Sports are bottom of this league. So it was a bit unfortunate for them that they conceded the only goal of the game on 90(+4) minutes, from the spot after a player was bundled over, or sandwiched, in the area just as he was about to shoot. Overall a great day out and one which has a Christmassy feel to it, with mulled wine and homemade mince pies being on offer from the clubhouse at half time and probably after the match as well.

*contributed on 28/12/17*

**TT No.72:** *Steve Hardy* - Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> December 2017; **Heath Hayes** v Leicester Road; Midland Football League Division One; Result: 2-4; Admission: £3; Programme £1; Attendance: 52 h/c

A Boxing Day visit to one of my favourite local clubs was just the ticket today, and a chance to banish the Xmas excess. The Coppice ground is excellent for a step 6 club, with all the facilities along one side of the pitch. A brand new clubhouse, one standing and two seated stands, as well as a top notch tea bar with a seated area which would have been lovely if the temperatures had not been sub-zero!

Hardly a local derby for the two clubs, of course, but a decent crowd of 52 turned up to see if Hayes could turn over league leaders Leicester Road, from Hinckley.

In truth they never looked like doing it, despite taking the lead, completely against the run of play, after 20 minutes. Up until then Leicester Road had had all the possession and chances, but going behind didn't upset them at all, and they duly equalised on 40 minutes, before taking the lead on the stroke of half-time through an audacious chip from miles out.

After the break LR looked to have sewn the game up with a third on 68 minutes, but credit to Hayes who scored straight from the kick off to reduce the arrears again to 2-3.

It looked like curtains for Hayes with the dismissal of their keeper on 75 minutes, but the resultant penalty was missed, so hope remained...for all of five minutes. Then LR scored their fourth and that was that.

LR have two very annoying supporters who stand behind the goal their team is attacking chanting 'Lesser Row, Lesser Row, Lesser Row' for what seemed like hours on end. Everyone gives them a wide berth, but with so few supporters in the ground today, there was no escape from their endless droning. Bah Humbug, I say.

*contributed on 27/12/17*

**TT No.71: Keith Aslan - Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2017; RUARDEAN HILL RANGERS v Gala Wilton; Gloucester County League; Kick-Off: 14.00; Result: 0-0; Admission & Programme: £2; Attendance: 44 (33 home, 2 away & 9 neutral)**

Another excuse to visit one of my favourite parts of the country, today looking resplendent in the winter sunshine making it hard to believe that the last two Saturdays had seen games here postponed due to snow. Ruardean's ground is situated on the highest point of the Forest of Dean, 920 feet above sea level, with magnificent views wherever you look. From the adjacent flagpole you can allegedly see seven counties but I fancy that is a bit of an exaggeration. However, reaching such a high altitude is somewhat stressful without a car and if mountaineering is your bag, the ascent of K2 would be a doddle after you'd done the climb to the ground from the bus stop. The one-mile walk looks easy on the map. It isn't. The aforementioned bus stop has an hourly service from Gloucester, double-deckers, and if you are the other person who pays bus fares, relatively cheap at £5.10p return for what is quite a major journey.

I wouldn't imagine Gloucester County newbies Ruardean had any problems with the ground grading committee. Fully railed with an old stand on the half way line an attractive ground in a glorious setting. It has a very welcoming clubhouse with hot drinks available served in Ruardean Hill Rangers FC mugs. They missed a trick here as at least three people wanted to buy one but were told they didn't have enough to sell as people keep nicking them. Not any of the hoppers today though, we are much too nice. Two large platefuls of rolls appeared at half time and while I got in early for my four, when I went back for seconds just before the match resumed, they'd all gone. They're a greedy lot round here. The food prepared for the players post-match banquet looked scrumptious, a club well up in the hospitality league table methinks. One of their officials even gave three of us a lift back into Cinderford after the match where we caught an earlier bus. The kindness of strangers. The club was formed in 1919 with men coming back from the war, but given the carnage and the size of the hamlet, I'm surprised they found enough players to form a team.

Don't be put off by the score, goalless games can be very entertaining and this one was. The Gala goalkeeper was on top form which he needed to be to keep out a barrage of Ruardean attacks, particularly in the second half. Undeterred that he was wearing exactly the same colours as the home side he got around this by donning a high visibility vest which made him stand out even more. For the second Saturday in succession my game kicked off dead on time, I hope these referees never try to get a job in the Isthmian League, they won't last very long with that sort of time keeping.

*contributed on 24/12/17*

**TT No.70:** *Steve Hardy* - Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2017; **GNP Sports** v AFC Solihull; Midlands League Division Three; Result: 1-1; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 18 h/c

Guru Nanak Prakash Sports have returned to the Midland league this season after a brief three-year spell between 1997-2000. Back then, they were based in Solihull, but now they have decamped to Coventry and moved into the Coventry Athletics track, which is part of the University of Warwick, Westwood Campus site.

This is just what it sounds like. A grass pitch in the middle of an athletics track where the track itself is painted a rather lurid blue colour. The famous Coventry Godiva Harriers athletics club are also based here, and they have a separate club house behind one corner of the track.

GNP have taken the league by storm so far, this season. They had won all their opening ten games to lead the table, and today were facing the surprise package of this season, AFC Solihull. Regular watchers of Midland league football will be amazed to find AFC Solihull in third place in the table. Normally they are rock bottom, and suffering thrashing after thrashing, but not this year.

The match itself was really good, and gripping from start to finish. GNP had most of the possession in the first half, but I thought Solihull were excellent in defence and reduced the GNP boys to shots from further and further out which usually sailed way over the bar. They were nippy on the counter attack too, and to everyone's amazement they took the lead through a breakaway goal exactly on half time.

After the break it was more of the same, with GNP getting more and more frustrated as they just couldn't find a way through the well organised Solihull defence. Time wore on, until with virtually the last shot of the game, GNP finally managed to get into the Solihull box and sneak in a deserved equaliser.

GNP were very disparaging of Solihull on their *twitter* account afterwards, with pictures of parked buses to show what they thought of the AFC Solihull tactics. Personally, I thought Solihull came with a plan, stuck to it well, and thoroughly deserved their point.

The athletics track is a soulless place to watch football. On a bitterly cold afternoon, there were no spectator facilities at all for the 18 spectators, although there is a hot drinks machine in the dressing room block if you are desperate!

*contributed on 24/12/17*

**TT No.69:** *Brian Buck* - Saturday 16th December 2017; **Royal Holloway Old Boys** v AFC Spelthorne Sports; Surrey Elite Intermediate League Intermediate Division Challenge Cup 1st Round; Result: 5-4aet; Attendance: 8.

When I left home shortly before 9.30am the masterplan was to drive to Biggleswade, to pick up a passenger and then head off to Hatfield where both us were due to be picked up, with a view to ending up at Team Dudley in the West Midlands. But on arrival at Biggleswade my friend was already on the blower and it transpired that overnight snow had caused that game to be called off. I then rang

up a ground I needed in Norfolk, but that was about to be called off due to a frozen pitch. So, we hit on the idea of visiting the Excel Centre, a new ground shared by Walton & Hersham and Walton Casuals and that's where we went.

We arrived here some two and a half hours before kick-off and ascertained that the game was on. But we had also noticed that the weather was quite warmish and so rather than waste a Saturday doing a 3G pitch we or I decided that we should look for a grass pitch game. I had visiting Royal Holloway Old Boys in my mind for some time and today they had a 1.30pm kick off. This was ideal for us and we arrived here just about 15 minutes before kick-off. As we entered the grounds of the College we were immediately greeted by sight of this wonderful college, first opened for women in 1886 by Queen Victoria. But it wasn't until 1965 that they finally let men in. Bet they got frozen waiting outside! So, although we made no attempt to look at it more closely (no time) pictures of it, both inside and outside make it look like a palace and it's truly stunning. Meanwhile there was a game about to happen and I was able to watch it from a balcony on the halfway line, which I shared with a video camera, put there by the Spelthorne goalkeeper, to focus on his performance.

This was a very competitive game, between first and third in the league and the hosts took the lead on 2 minutes. Then the first of many bookings followed three minutes later, for a dive. Later on, Spelthorne complained when play was stopped when a home player was poleaxed when the ball hit him in the face. "It's not a head injury ref!" one of them said! On 39 minutes when in my opinion the aforementioned Spelthorne keeper was lucky not to be sent off when he appeared to take out an onrushing Holloway player. But the ref only booked the home player. However, the ball did end up in the net for 2-0! At half time the keeper asked me my opinion, telling me that he didn't touch him! On the stroke of half time Spelthorne pulled a goal back and on 53 minutes they equalised. Five minutes later Holloway regained the lead and this goal was scored by the son of the watching Gordon Bartlett, the former long serving manager of Wealdstone. However, goals on 60 and 62 minutes saw Spelthorne now go into a 4-3 lead. But three minutes later Holloway scored again to make it 4-4. With no more goals coming in normal time, the match went into extra time and in the by now seriously fading light it seemed that the game would go to spot kicks. But on 120(+1) minutes Holloway suddenly scored the winner with a 20-yard direct free kick to end this thoroughly entertaining match. Afterwards we headed off to nearby Egham Town to watch the closing stages of their game against Hanwell Town. Having not been here since 3 November 1981 when I saw them lose 2-0 to Eastbourne United in a Berger Isthmian League Division 2 match, I could barely remember anything as to how the ground was then. But today I found it to be a decent set up, although I doubt very much if the occupants of the newly built houses just before you enter the ground would agree!

*contributed on 20/12/17*

**TT No.68:** *Brian Buck* - Saturday 2nd December 2017; **AFC Hoxne** v Ransome Sports; Touchline Suffolk & Ipswich League Senior Division; Kick-Off; 2pm; Result: 2-0; Attendance: 20 approx.

Hoxne, pronounced either 'Hoxney' or 'Hoxon' depending on who you listen to, is roughly six miles east of Diss. With Diss Town being at home we decided to visit AFC Hoxne so we could take in the second half at Diss once that had finished. We arrived at the ground in good time to allow us to visit a couple of pubs before kick-off. Both of them were full of country folk, but I reckon that they were all in fancy dress! I can't believe that away from the pub they would want to dress like this, in their checked shirts, waist coats and whatever. Seems to me that they put this clobber on just to try and prove that they are real country people. I bet that during the week they all work in the City!

Anyway, back at the ground it was all systems go and I managed to down a couple of hot beef slices before the start, feeling a bit guilty in doing so because when my friend asked for one at half time they were all sold out! Anyway at least we both got a programme which was by donation, otherwise free. Newly promoted Hoxne had started the season well, but had slipped down the table in recent weeks. Meanwhile Ransomes have taken a lot of big tonkings this season, to the point where they are not only bottom of the league but recently they nearly folded. They have kept going and although they lost again today the margin of defeat will have given them confidence. This was something the enthusiastic president of Hoxne was not short of as he regaled us with stories of his life experiences throughout the afternoon! Hoxne took the lead on 31 minutes, doubling it on 67 minutes, shortly after the visiting manager nearly got sent off for overly voicing his opinions after a mini handbags incident. Earlier his keeper had nearly knocked himself out when he managed to punch a long shot into his own face. After this game we went off to Diss Town, where we saw most of the second half, which included all of the goals scored in their 2-1 win against King's Lynn Reserves.

*contributed on 20/12/17*

**TT No.67: Brian Buck - Tuesday 28th November 2017. Leicester Nirvana v Blackstones; ChromaSport & Trophies United Counties League Knock Out Cup Quarter Final; Result: 5-2; Attendance: 14.**

This was a cold night to recomplete the UCL by paying my first visit to Hamilton Park. Travel wise the evening went quite well, and once I got onto the A47, off the A1 we were at the ground, which is on the north east side of Leicester, less than an hour later. It was too cold to hang around, so it was straight into the bar. In fact, you could have watched the whole match from here. We were quite early and as we waited for the game to start a few more people turned up, but none of them hung around outside either. Then with about three minutes to go before kick-off, everyone moved out of the bar ready for the kick off. It was at this point that we realised that us meagre few in the bar constituted the crowd! But although the official crowd was given as 14, I did count about 32 people watching. Unfortunately, though they had picked the same night to play as Leicester City were playing Spurs about four miles away. So, with a decent team in town tonight for a change (even though Spurs lost 2-1) it was no real surprise that the attendance was so low. However, for a side that could potentially win the UCL Premier Division, attendances haven't been correspondingly high even for league matches. One way in which they could make some money is by serving mole-

burgers, as we noticed plenty of molehills as we walked from the clubhouse to the pitch. The pitch wasn't that great on the side we were sitting. We were told that the water drains down the hill onto this part of the pitch. So, it was a bit disappointing to note that one of the teams had done their warm up exercises on this boggy part! The touch line was so wet that the lino on this side started the game six-foot tall and finished it measuring somewhere around five feet six inches! He was actually thinking of lining it from the concrete walkway where no one was standing! As for the match it was ultimately as one sided as the score-line suggests. But Blackstones didn't disgrace themselves and they worked hard to only concede four goals in the first half and then scoring themselves just before the break. They also scored the last and best goal of the evening on 64 minutes when the scorer ran on and blasted the ball home from about 25 yards out. Apart from the cold this was a decent evening out.

*contributed on 20/12/17*

**TT No.66:** *Brian Buck* - Saturday 25th November 2017; **Holy Rood** v St Albans Romans Reserves; Hertfordshire & Borders Churches League Division 2; Venue: played at Harefield Academy, Northwood Road; Kick-Off: 10.30; Result: 2-2; Attendance: 2.

Looking for a game prior to going on to watch Spurs play at Wembley, I picked out this match, which also gave me a new ground. When I left home, there was still a layer of frost on the ground, but on my arrival here, it had all gone. It was still very cold though and so before the game started and after having a chat to the ref, who I knew, I circled the pitch, looking for the best place to stand, out of the icy wind and away from the benches. On my walk I encountered one player who told me that he hadn't played football for over two years, before adding that he was an ex-semi-professional player. Then just as thought that I was going to have the 'honour' of being the only spectator, a friend turned up to ruin things! Actually, there were four spectators in the first half, but two of them were killing time before a girl's match started on an adjacent pitch. Looked like Watford v Barnet to me. Anyway, my eyes were fully focused on 'my' game which was played out on a flat, well maintained pitch. The hosts, who are associated with Holy Rood church in Watford, took the lead with just 11 seconds played. But St Albans Romans, named after some Romans who used to live in St Albans, before the neighbours got annoyed, equalised on 28 minutes with a long range daisy cutter of a shot which went in just inside the post. But the hosts regained the lead on 36 minutes when the keeper pushed a hard hit shot up in the air and it was nodded home before he could have another go at stopping it. Then in the 50th minute of this decent game the equaliser came from a corner, when the scorer headed home from a back header.

*contributed on 20/12/17*

**TT No.65:** *Brian Buck* - Saturday 18th November 2017; **Attenborough** v Newark Flowserve; Precision Notts Senior League Premier Division; Result: 1-3; Attendance: 25 approx.



Today there were engineering works, so no trains ran via Grantham. This had various advantages, not in the least was that my trains weren't overloaded with distant relatives of Mrs. Thatcher. Also as the train from Peterborough to Nottingham was non-stop I was able to get a decent sleep both ways. At Nottingham I caught a train to Attenborough an hour earlier than I needed to. So, I got off at Beeston and walked along to the end of the platform, through a gate and into one of the best real ale pubs you'll find in this area. After having a couple of pints and something to eat I caught the next train to Attenborough an hour later. Then after a less than ten-minute walk I was at the ground. There were programmes here, but they were dated a month in advance by mistake. But it did come with a free cup of coffee. Did they want me to dip the programme in it?

The people here were very nice and, later on, I had a good chat to their secretary. I also knew the lovely Zoe, the secretary of Newark Flowserve. I'd met her on my visit to their ground a couple of seasons ago. They started this match top of the league, having won all their previous 11 games. So, an away win was expected as Attenborough were bottom of this division. The first half was tense. Flowserve were all over the hosts, but couldn't score. Attenborough were feeling the pressure but failed to take confidence from the fact they had actually stopped the visitors from scoring in this period. Unsurprisingly the bespectacled ref bore some of the blame for Flowserve's failure to score and on 38 minutes he stopped the game to speak to their bench. The home number 6 standing near me tried to encourage him to get on with it. I pointed out to him that the ref was probably one of the best refs in the league and this is what happens if you misbehave. He grunted, ran off and shouted "Pervert!" I think that this was directed at me rather than this ref. If so then I would just like to point out that I'm not fully qualified yet! Anyway, in the second half it took Flowserve just 29 seconds to take the lead, increasing it on 65 and 81 minutes. But although Attenborough had lost confidence by now, they did get the last goal with the last kick of the game. They also had one booking in this period. Guess who the recipient was?

*contributed on 20/12/17*

**TT No.64:** *Brian Buck* - Friday 17th November 2017; **West Ham United U23** v Derby County U23; Premier League 2 Division 1; Venue: played at London Stadium, Stratford; Result: 1-5; Attendance 1,208.

I don't often tick off new Football League grounds these days, mainly because I've been to most of them, but tonight was an opportunity to watch a match here for free. My good friend of the Beds County League, Peter Francis, knows a West Ham United season ticket holder and if you are one then these games here are free, even though they rarely play at The London Stadium. So; we went to the game by train. We had left earlier than we needed to. But it took us longer to get to Stratford than we expected. On arrival we set off for the ground. But soon it became obvious we were going the wrong way, especially as I espied Canary Wharf in the distance! We asked a couple of locals where the ground was, but they were foreign and hadn't got a clue. Then we found a couple of taxi drivers who put us straight. It seemed to take about twenty minutes to get there, but we finally spotted the stadium in front of us with a gigantic helter-skelter, lit up in gory red.

£20 to have a go on it apparently! Anyway, after a quick body search we were still one of the first inside the ground. I have to say that despite all the negative comments I've heard about it, I was actually quite impressed. Tonight, everyone was sat in a block of seats which gets shunted out of the way for athletics in the summer. As for the match, it was played on Children in Need night. Watching West Ham play was more like watching Adults in Need! They went a goal down after just 28 seconds and further goals on 21 and 37 minutes saw it game over by the break. Despite fielding a strong team and having the same, or perhaps more possession than Derby, they couldn't defend and seemed shot shy. Further Derby goals on 48 and 51 minutes didn't help, but what did was the fact that after this Derby declared and West Ham then dominated, getting a goal back on 69 minutes and having a few other attempts as well.

*contributed on 20/12/17*

**TT No.63: Brian Buck - Monday 13th November 2017. Aveley v Barking; Bostick League North; Result: 0-1; Attendance: 241.**

This season Aveley have moved from their historic ground at Millfield to their new premises at Parkside. Which is about a ten-minute walk away, as people who came by public transport found out tonight. The bus stop is very close to the old ground and therefore catching the 9.55pm bus back to Rainham station is no longer easy, especially like this match the game finishes after 9.45pm! We arrived at the ground overly early because there weren't any real problems on the nearby M25. In fact, we were so early that our admission money was collected from the bar without the need for us to pass through the turnstiles. As for the ground the clubhouse side was very similar to that of Barnet's new ground at The Hive. Most of the money seems to have been spent on this part, which looks exceptionally impressive. However, it has only 268 seats in it and for a main stand you would expect it to have more if they eventually reach the Football League. Otherwise it's very clean and tidy, as you would expect and there is further seating on the far side, giving them 424 seats overall. Something else which was impressive was the LED floodlights. We saw them switched on and they came on instantly, without the need for them to warm up and in this respect, it was like switching on the lights at home.

The game itself wasn't great. If Aveley don't watch out, then they could get relegated. The first half was roughly even, although Aveley did create more chances than Barking, although the latter did have a shot which crashed down off the crossbar, with some thinking that it had crossed the line. In the second half Barking were soon in the ascendancy and on 54 minutes they scored the only goal of the game with a narrow-angled shot into an empty net with the keeper AWOL. Thereafter Aveley struggled with their creativity and passing while Barking looked composed. By now the ref was showing lots of cards and the Aveley captain was lucky to only get one. The ref kept control though, apart from when the ball hit and he failed to trap it! Overall a clean and tidy new ground, but viewing facilities will need to be improved if they start to get big crowds.

*contributed on 20/12/17*

**TT No.62:** *Keith Aslan* - Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> December 2017; **SPORTING 87** v Ipswich Athletic; Suffolk & Ipswich League Division 1; Result: 5-2; Kick-Off: 14.00 (to the second, well done ref); Admission/Programme: Free; Attendance: 19 (18 home, 0 away & 1 neutral)

Dodgy weather meant we were down to about plan F today before I plumped for another Anglian adventure with Sporting 87 (I betcha can't guess what year they were formed?). If this had kicked off a few hours earlier it wouldn't have kicked off but a Saturday morning battle between Mr. Sunshine and Mr. Frost resulted in a win for the great ball of fire, and the fact both teams wanted to play helped, not always the case around this time of year.

Sporting 87 play in Bury St. Edmunds a town I last visited many moons ago when I was young and beautiful as oppose to being old and beautiful now! Of course, I can't remember a thing about it so it was just like visiting a town for the first time, a precursor for when the Alzihimers kicks in. It joins a long list of places that are great to visit but I wouldn't want to live there, but it does have two Greggs which is two more than Broadstairs has got. Home of 'Green King', I could have gone for a tour of the brewery (if I'd wanted to make myself sick) and I was very surprised to see they had a marquee in the town centre displaying the banner "Green King IPA official beer of England cricket" In view of recent events I would have thought they would have wanted to keep quiet about that one. The ground is a gruelling 50-minute walk from the station in the southernmost extremities of the town, and although there are buses, a change is required, and it takes even longer than walking.

Pre-match you can warm up in the clubhouse although it doesn't officially open until after the game, but hot drinks are served at half time. The first-floor covered veranda would offer respite from any rain, and while a perfectly acceptable vantage point, it is just a tad far away from the pitch for the optimum viewing experience. Plenty of action today with the home side only needing 70 seconds to take the lead, Ipswich then went 2-1 up before Sporting hit the break 3-2 ahead and followed it up with a dominant second half. The Ipswich number 3 made a hideous tackle that Hannibal Lecter would have been proud of and the fact that the recipient carried on playing after lengthy treatment was down purely to luck. The referee only booked the miscreant, if I'd been in charge he'd have been off, no messing. When the injured party was finally able to continue the ref. made him leave the pitch. Presumably he didn't get the email from the FA about the change of rules that if you receive treatment from a tackle that results in a booking you don't have to leave the field afterwards. Justice was done when Sporting scored from the resulting free kick, which would have been no consolation whatsoever if the player had broken his leg.

Sporting 87 are a Christian team which was reflected in the superb programme. The club chaplain had his own page in which he admitted his favourite Christmas song was 'Stop the Cavalry' by Jona Lewie which is a bit sad. Keeping on the religious theme was an article culled from the Times on former professional footballer Phillip Mulryne who has become a Catholic Priest. He found his life was empty away from football, although given he spent most of his career at

Norwich City I would have thought the same could be said about when he was playing. With money, nightclubs, flash cars and flashier women he thought there must be more to life. Haven't we all been there? Just one brilliant read of many in a 12-page glossy gem of a programme that the club steadfastly refused to take any money for. With some Southern League clubs no longer issuing, shame on them and a bigger shame on the league, it's good to come to smaller teams like Sporting 87 where paper production is still a matter of pride.

*contributed on 17/12/17*

**TT No.61: Steve Hardy** - Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> December 2017; **Stapleford Town** v Selston Reserves; Notts Senior League Division One; Result: 4-1; Admission: Free; Programme; No; Attendance: 21 h/c

With a definite 'game on' text from Stapleford Town, I was off to Nottingham in a flash, to see my first game in the Senior league this season. I always enjoy NSL games where the football is usually, shall we say, robust, and today turned out to be another splendid example.

Stapleford Town play, not surprisingly, in the suburb of Stapleford, at the Hickings Lane Recreation ground. This is a fairly large public park which houses football, cricket, tennis and bowls clubs. I would guess it is council owned, although the changing rooms/tea room building does have several 'welcome to Stapleford Town' signs up, so perhaps the Stapleford adults team, and their 20 or so junior teams, have exclusive use of the park.

The visitors today were the stiff of Selston FC, who actually brought one or two supporters along to the game. My headcount peaked at 21, although dog walkers who stopped to watch 10 minutes of footie whilst Rover did his business, might have distorted the actual attendance. Stapleford were in control for most of the game really, and led 2-0 at the break thanks to goals on 25 and 42 minutes. When their skipper was sent off just after half time, it looked like game over for Selston, but, amazingly, they pulled one back on 55 minutes. Game on? No, not a bit of it, as Stapleford scored straight from the kick off to restore their two-goal lead and found the net again near the end to round off a 4-1 win.

This win keeps Stapleford 3<sup>rd</sup> in the division one table, with games in hand on the two clubs above them. Promotion is definitely their main aim, they told me, and I hope they achieve it. The fact that they very generously gave me one of their very warm bobble hats when I arrived too, just summed up what a really friendly and go-ahead club they are.

*contributed on 17/12/17*

**TT No.60: Keith Aslan** - Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> December 2017; **BENHALL ST. MARY** v Bramford United; Suffolk & Ipswich Premier Division; Result: 3-1; Kick-Off: 14.00; Admission and Programme: Free; Attendance: 22 (20 home, 0 away & 2 neutral)

With parts of the country closer to the Arctic Circle being beset by snow, the sun was shining in East Anglia, although admittedly it was a tad on the nippy side. The

newly promoted home team had put on their social media site that they are surprised at certain club's lack of facilities and after match hospitality in the higher division, adding that 'some clubs don't even do a programme' (so they'll be in for a shock if they ever make it to the Southern League!). Previous non-issuers Benhall have been printing the paper all season, a decision they think compliments their higher league status. If only there were more clubs like this around.

Relatively easy to get to, the ground is a 25-minute walk from Saxmundham Station, with the meagre bus service not fitting in with the match. Benhall is a hamlet of which the football club is the focus of the local social scene, with the clubhouse being a very welcome respite from the biting cold. No food here but hot drinks at half time. Pre. match was spent supping the amber nectar and watching Chelsea lose to West Ham on the big screen, my disappointment at the result was tempered with the fact that in a way I should be pleased the Hammers won as it's my taxes that subsidise our friends from East London. Never mind the National Health System, far better to put money into a football club that rakes in hundreds of millions every season and can afford to pay its employees a hundred grand a week, slightly more than nurses get I fancy.

Having been promoted last season Benhall have lost a few players but clearly replacements of the requisite standard have been sourced if today's game was anything to go by. Two departed to Henley of the same division because they are paying their players, which seems quite bizarre at this level. The game kicked off with a crowd of 7 but by half time had risen to 22 all of whom hung around for the second half. I'm not of course including the cowards who watched the match from the warmth of the bar. They must know they can't count it, real men stand on the touchline, we take hypothermia in our stride.

Nice part of the world, nice club with top of the range facilities make this an enjoyable outing but it won't be for the football that today will stick in the memory. Imagine my excitement when changing trains at Ipswich I found a brand-new 'Greggs' opened up on the station. Two new ticks in one day, that's what I call a result.

*contributed on 12/12/17*

**TT No.59:** *Steve Hardy* - Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2017; **Bellevue** v Halkyn United; North East Wales League; Result: 1-22; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 7 h/c

OK, it's a fair cop. I did target this game as I thought there would be plenty of goals. I didn't think there would be this many though!

The North-East Wales League is comparatively new, having only been born in 2011 as the Clwyd league East. It consists of just 16 clubs of varying standards, with the winners being entitled to be promoted to the Wrexham Area League.

My match today saw a visit to Wrexham, and particularly to Bellevue Park. This is a fairly extensive public park, which has a dressing room complex and one full sized pitch on it's right hand edge. My match today saw newly formed Bellevue

entertaining former Welsh Alliance side Halkyn United who are trying to climb the Welsh pyramid again after folding their first team in 2016.

Bellevue are a very interesting club. Formed specifically to help refugees, immigrants and minority players get to play football, make friends and generally integrate in to Wrexham life, this first season has been a bit of a struggle. Before today's match they sat rock bottom of the league with 15 straight defeats, most of them being by double figures too.

To be fair though, they turned up with a full team plus subs, and played this match with a smile on their faces, despite the terrible thrashing they suffered. In brief, Halkyn scored at will really. Leading 10-1 at half time they got a bit confused near the end and were urging their players to 'make it 20' when, by my reckoning, they were already winning 21-1. There was no rubbing the Bellevue players faces in it though, or showboating either, which was good to see too.

Halkyn are now up to second in the league, and looked a good team to me. They will face more difficult opponents than Bellevue this season, for sure, but I do hope Bellevue keep going as their ethos is to be applauded.

*contributed on 03/12/17*

**TT No.58:** *Steve Hardy* - Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> November 2017; **Ashville** v Stockport Georgians; Cheshire Amateur Cup 3<sup>rd</sup> Round; Result: 1-3; Admission: £1 for an OAP; Programme: No; Attendance: 46 h/c

After my morning match at the new Tranmere Rovers training ground, it was under a mile to Ashville's Villa Park ground in Cross Lane, Wallasey Village on the Wirral. Just as well the two grounds are so close as the 1.30pm ko here gave me just 12 minutes to eat my lunch!

West Cheshire league Ashville are the current holders of the Cheshire Amateur cup, having won it for the past two seasons. In the 2016 final they beat today's visitors, Manchester league Stockport Georgians, so this was always going to be a keenly contested match.

I really liked Ashville's ground. Fully railed off floodlit pitch with a concrete walkway around three sides, they have a fairly large stand down one side of the ground which has the home dugout embedded squarely in the middle. The Social club is vast and had a great many old team photos on the wall, as well as a trophy cabinet which had the huge Cheshire Amateur cup (or perhaps a replica for security reasons) in pride of place.

On the pitch, Ashville started really confidently and took the lead on 12 minutes. They failed to push home their advantage though and it remained 1-0 at the break. After half time Georgians started to get more in to the game and they scored a deserved equaliser on the hour mark. By this time the temperature had started to plummet and the assembled throng were really hoping someone would score again to avoid the dreaded prospect of extra time. To the chagrin of the home faithful though, it was Georgians who did just that on 77 minutes. They scored a 3<sup>rd</sup> on 84

and that was it for the holders who left the competition with a whimper rather than a bang.

No programme at Ashville these days, although they have issued in the past. Instead we were all given a copy of the West Cheshire league bi-monthly newsletter, which was an interesting read, but not as good as the real thing!

*contributed on 19/11/17*

**TT No.57:** *Steve Hardy* - Saturday November 11th 2017; 2.30pm start; **Manchester Gregorians** v Hindsford; Manchester League Premier Division; Result: 3-5; Admission: Free; Programme; Crowd of 16.

I must confess at the start of this article, that I really didn't enjoy my trip to Belle Vue last Saturday. It wasn't because the game was played on yet another soulless 3G pitch. It wasn't because the football was poor. There was no lack of goals either. So, what was the problem?

A bit of background first. The local council has teamed up with various sporting governing bodies and between them they have built the Belle Vue Sports Centre on Kirkmanhulme Lane in Belle Vue, Manchester. As you walk down Kirkmanhulme Lane from the Hyde Road, you now pass a massive greyhound stadium, an equally large speedway stadium which is the new home of the Belle Vue Aces, and a brand new and very big Basketball centre, which is home to all the various England basketball teams. Tucked in between the speedway and greyhound tracks is the caged 3G pitch where I watched the Gregorians get taken apart by a very clever Hindsford team.

Nothing wrong with all that I hear you say, so what was the reason I disliked it so much?

Well, putting it simply, it was the dreadful attitude of both teams and their management. Both of them moaned about every decision made against them, shouted and swore at the officials throughout and surrounded the referee brandishing an imaginary red card every time one of their players was fouled. We had two very young lady linespersons today and with the score at 1-1 one of the girls flagged for an obvious offside as a Gregs player 'scored'. To everyone's amazement the referee overruled her and awarded a goal. Uproar ensued with the poor linesperson the subject of terrible abuse and swearing from both players and managements alike, and you could see she was really upset by this, as well as having no protection from the referee who just ignored her.

The half time team talk from the Greg's Manager consisted of a string of invective. He was incapable of saying a five-word sentence without using the 'F' word three times, and I really can't see how he thought he could rally his flagging team by swearing at them continuously.

Spectators are allowed inside the cage, and have a railed off standing area along one side of the pitch. I doubt very much whether many of the freezing cold crowd of 16 will bother to come back if it is like this every week.

*contributed on 14/11/17*

**TT No.56:** *Brian Buck* - Saturday 11th November 2017; **London APSA** v Old Esthameians; Essex Alliance Premier Division; Venue: played at Flanders Field and Bobby Moore Pavilion, Napier Road, East Ham; 2pm kick off; Result: 7-6; Attendance: 7.

For the second weekend in a row we had overnight rain prior to this match. Fortunately following my Friday night phone call the genial home secretary told me that he would ring back if the game was called off. But his phone never rang, so off we went. On paper this seemed to be an easy place to get to, but once we came off the M11 we were joined by lots of other cars and we got stuck in long traffic jams. So, we abandoned our original plan to go to the ground and check out the game first in favour of heading off to West Ham Cemetery, to look for one of my friends' relatives. In doing so we got stuck in a further traffic jam and so had limited time to spend in the Cemetery and so we didn't find my friends relative.

Then it was off to the ground, where through slightly less traffic jams, we arrived five minutes before kick-off and they kicked off at least five minutes late. We needn't have worried about the pitch as it was in excellent condition and it was better than many Step 7 and above grounds. It was ironic that we should be watching football at Flanders Field today, Remembrance Day, as this ground has connections with Flanders in Belgium and the First World War. It is also where former England football captain Bobby Moore played as a child during the late 1940s and early 1950s and where he was first talent scouted. So, after a quick cup of coffee, we were ready for the action.

This was a match between the bottom of the table hosts and their mid table visitors. Unsurprisingly the visitors were expected to win. We exchanged greetings with the APSA secretary, who also turned out to be their goalie. The game was played out in a good spirit and both sides had chances in the first 15 minutes. Then on 26 minutes APSA took the lead from the spot following a foul. And then rather surprisingly, given their league position, APSA doubled their lead with a curling shot over the keeper who was a bit off his line. More coffee at half time. We could have had food here as well, but we declined it because we erroneously believed that there would be food available when we arrived at our second game at Clapton. Meanwhile while we were still drinking our coffee APSA scored a 3rd goal. Could we be witnessing their first win of the season? It seemed like it when they scored a fourth one on 54- minutes. On 56 minutes the visitors pulled a goal back, but on 65 minutes APSA got their 5th goal and a 6th followed on 68 minutes. However, the visitors scored their 2nd goal directly from the restart, which upset the home keeper as he claimed that he wasn't ready! No real problem as the score became 7-2 on 74 minutes. What could go wrong now? Well lots as Easthameians slowly clawed their way back into the match with goals on 78, 79 84 and 90(+1) minutes. They were gradually getting excited now and believed they could win. Unfortunately for them time ran out and the hosts saw out this wonderful match. Both sides put in so much effort in trying to score, it was a joy to watch and one of the best, if not the best, games we've seen this season. Part of the reason for the hosts conceding six goals though came when I bumped into the home secretary at Aveley on the following Monday night, he told me that he was not a proper goalie.



*contributed on 15/11/17*

**TT No.55:** *Steve Hardy* - Saturday November 11th 2017; 10.15am KO; **Old Stretfordians** v Medlock Rangers; Manchester Saturday Morning League Division One; Result: 1-4; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 1 (hc)

The Manchester Saturday morning league is perfect for those of us who like to do a double when visiting the city by train. My plan had been to watch Rochdale U18s play Blackpool U 18s at Stalybridge, but when that game was called off during the week, and with train tickets already bought, I turned to the MSML for a replacement morning fixture.

Old Stretfordians are a very long-established club, who have played in the Lancashire & Cheshire Amateur league for years now. Their team in the MSML is a more recent addition though, so it was the number 255-bus from Piccadilly Gardens for me as I made my way to Urmston for their match with Medlock Rangers.

They play on playing fields on the Flixton Road in Urmston. The ground address is the Old Coach House ground, and I was surprised to find this building is in fact their headquarters, where changing rooms and a club house are housed. There are at least 4 football pitches laid out on the site, with a small sized pitch being used for kiddies training today.

On the pitch, things are not going so well for the club. They started the game rock bottom of the table, and despite a spirited performance today, they were no match for visitors Medlock, who won fairly easily. 0-2 at the break, with the first being a shot from miles out which sailed over the keeper's head after 35 minutes. Medlock scored twice more in the second half, with the homester's 90<sup>th</sup> minute goal came from a penalty which the referee awarded more out of sympathy than merit, I felt.

I thoroughly enjoyed this game, as I have most of the others I have seen in this wonderful league, and will be back for more.

*contributed on 12/11/17*

**TT No.54:** *Keith Aslan* -Saturday November 11<sup>th</sup> 2017; **CHURCH STRETTON** v F.C. Darlaston; West Midlands League Division 2; Kick-Off: 14.01; Result: 3-0; Admission: Free; Programme: 50p; Attendance: 46 (20 home, 9 away & 17 neutral)

The great, the good and the gormless of groundhopping glitterati were attracted to this one, something to do with a first ever bit of paper I believe coupled with the fact that Church Stretton is a pleasant venue for a day out and the station is a five-minute walk from the ground making it very popular with the carless contingent. The ground is pretty basic, two sides railed sums it up although the smart changing room block and tea room are new builds this year. Although not much to look at where it scores with the aesthete is the setting, a glorious backdrop of the 'Long Myndd' and Shropshire Hills. The surroundings are designated 'an area of outstanding beauty'. If you like walking, get here early, if you like drinking get here early as well, with the neutrals today making a sizeable

contribution to the local pub. trade. It's a very wealthy town making the Big Issue seller in the High Street look somewhat incongruous. With beverages available at the ground, for food go to the café just a one-minute walk away. I had a major steak diner, excellent.

There are some strange happenings in the black country on the non-league football front. I saw West Bromwich United's final game last season. They'd just got promotion and were talking optimistically about the future. 3 weeks later the manager did a runner to Darlaston 1884, took all the players with him and West Brom. folded. Darlaston FC was then formed (a breakaway club from a breakaway club!) by the chairman, programme editor and a couple of supporters. They had a ready-made team with the personnel that became surplus to requirements at 1884. The official reason for the formation of the new club was they wanted to play nearer to their old home in the centre of Darlaston. Yes, it is nearer than 1884's ground, by my reckoning about 300 yards closer! I think there's a bit more to the breakaway than that

Neither side have started particularly well with two wins a piece is all they had to show for their efforts prior to kick off. It turned out to be a very comfortable win for the home side. Disappointingly there were a few goals with virtually every hopper hoping for a 0-0 as one of our number has to return if he doesn't get a goal and becomes somewhat agitated the longer a match progresses without one. Watching him jump up and down is usually more entertaining than the match itself but alas it was not to be this afternoon.

My day started with two bus rides as the line was shut due to 'emergency engineering works'. No, it wasn't, they must think I was born yesterday. Network Rail took the track up overnight as they often do for no reason, and didn't leave themselves enough time to put it back. No emergency, the correct word is 'overrunning'. Fair play they got the transport sorted out quickly, rail replacement bus to Ramsgate, all change onto another bus to Minster and the train was ready and waiting to go, only arriving 6 minutes late into London. But here's the problem, the bus left Margate and Broadstairs 15 minutes before the train. I was very lucky that I got to the station early but most people missed it and almost everyone else on the bus had been hanging around for an hour after making for the previous train. This really isn't very good, why can't they just leave the track alone. The 'emergency' engineering works were all cleared up on my return for an uneventful journey back to my country dacha.

*contributed on 12/11/17*

**TT No.53:** *Brian Buck* - Saturday 4th November 2017; **FC GNG** v Saffron Dynamo; Everards Brewery Leicestershire Senior League Premier Division; Result: 2-3; Attendance: 45 approx.

Initially today appeared to be one of those wet Saturdays, with there being the likelihood of loads of games getting called off for waterlogged pitches. So, I left deciding where to go until the morning. So, it was no real surprise to find that

when I got up, it was tipping it down. But nonetheless I rang up the secretary of my chosen game for the day. He was already at the ground and seemed rather bemused when I asked him if the game was one. There was no doubt in his mind, possibly because the rain had long since passed the ground by as it moved from west to east. Furthermore, as it hadn't rained for ages the pitch probably needed the rain. Although I had seen this ground from the outside before, I'd never really had a good look at it and I was pleasantly surprised. I reckon that it wouldn't take too much effort to get it acceptable for UCL football. Also at one end you can see the floodlights of Leicestershire CC's Grace Road ground in the distance. Anyway, after a pre-match slurp and some food in the club bar while we watched Stoke City and Leicester City trying to entertain us, we headed out into the cold for our footy fix. I wondered why my sat-nav had brought us via Leicester Tigers ground to get here. Perhaps she thought that it might be more exciting than what we were about to witness! But she was wrong! The GNG part of The FC GNG name stands for Guru Nanak Gurudwara. The club started up with after a group of young Asians aged between 16 and 18 got together 3 to 4 times a week to play football, and before long, dreamt to participate in Leicester City's football league. In 1969 with the support from the Guru Nanak Gurudwara Sikh temple they did just that. Today, in a match which got more-spicy as it went along, they took the lead on 28 minutes, after the ball was stabbed from close range. On 30 minutes Dynamo were level from a parried clearance after the keeper failed to get to the ball. He was beaten again 8 minutes later he was elsewhere when the ball was headed back to him by a defender, leaving the scorer with an easy shot. This goal generated two home bookings! On 68 minutes a header saw GNG equalise, but 10 minutes later Dynamo got the winner when the ball was also scrambled in from close range. An excellent day out both on and off the pitch.

*contributed on 10/11/17*

**TT No.52:** *Steve Hardy* - Saturday November 4th 2017; **Cromford** v Wirksworth Town; Central Midlands League Division Two; Result: 0-14; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 13 h/c

The Central Midlands league has introduced a division two this season. This is predominantly for reserve teams, but there are two first teams included as well, and today they met in the beautiful Derbyshire Dales village of Cromford.

The ground is located at Cromford Meadows where the football club share with the local cricket and rugby clubs. The rugby club has its own clubhouse and dressing rooms at the far end of the complex, with the football and cricket clubs sharing a separate and smaller dressing room and garden shed sized clubhouse near the entrance.

On the field, things are a bit of a struggle for Cromford. They went in to this game rock bottom of the table with no points at all from their opening eleven matches. Things got off to a bad start today when they kicked off with just ten players, and they got much worse when their goalie appeared to break his leg after just five minutes. The poor chap was lifted from the pitch and spent the rest of the game waiting for an ambulance to turn up and take him to hospital. By the end of the game, with no ambulance having arrived, his worried parents eventually decided

to drive him to the hospital themselves as he was in terrible pain. Hope the poor chap is OK.

A clearly upset Cromford team then spent the rest of the game with just 9 men, trying to stem a tide of attacks from visitors Wirksworth. That they only conceded 14 is a testament to their sticking to it (as well as some profligate finishing from Wirksworth!).

After a very rainy Friday night, the Cromford Secretary took the trouble to ring one of our number back to confirm the game was still on, for which we were all very grateful. I do hope things improve for them as they were a most welcoming club, who actually thanked us all for coming at the end of the game.

*contributed on 05/11/17*

**TT No.51:** *Steve Hardy* - Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> November 2017; **Sutton Coldfield Town Youth** v Matlock Town; Northern Premier League Youth Division; Kick-Off: 1pm; Result: 0-6; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 13 h/c

Aah, the joys of being retired! A Wednesday afternoon match in Sutton Coldfield was just the ticket today, as Sutton entertained Matlock Town in the Evo-Stik league youth division. Not sure of the ages of these lads, but I would guess either U19 or U18. Two completely contrasting displays from the two teams however. Matlock were sharp, confident and attack minded, whereas Sutton were none of those things.

The Central Ground is tucked away in the middle of a residential street called Coles Lane. A well-hidden entrance leads down a narrow lane to the ground where for low key matches like this you can actually park your car behind one of the goals. It's a 3G pitch, of course, and it is very well used, with both SCT and Romulus playing there as well as a plethora of youth teams every evening. The main stand is a treasure in my opinion. Bought from Manchester City in 1956 it was finally erected in 1959 as a replacement for the old stand that had burned down in 1955 following a firework accident.

On the pitch, the lads from Matlock controlled the game from start to finish. 3 goals in each half was the least they deserved, and they remain top of the table with a 100% record.

Another top afternoon out, and much better than sitting behind a desk in an office, in my opinion.

*contributed on 02/11/17*

**TT No.50:** *Brian Buck* - Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> October 2017; **Fry Club** v Odd Down Reserves; Somerset County League Premier Division; Result: 1-0; Attendance: 40 approx.

The lure of today's game was that this is a club on the up. Fry Club is located about a five-minute walk from Keynsham railway station and they issue programmes. I travelled to the game by train changing at Bath, which seemed to be overrun by tourists. There could have been a rugby match going on there as well, as I heard a modicum of chanting going on outside the station as I briefly waited for my connection back to London after the game. Meanwhile back at my game and I arrived here about an hour and a quarter before kickoff. The club have moved grounds recently and as Fry's have sold off a lot of their chocolate making complex for housing and there was a lot of building work going on here. I eventually found the ground, with the floodlight pylons being of assistance. Here I soon bumped into the club's chairman and their secretary, the latter relieving me of £2 for the programme. Nice four-pager, but there was no value in it except that you were paying for your admission at the same time. Next it was time for food and drink and the plush looking The Pavilion satisfied my needs. I had fish & chips, washed down with a couple of pints. This part of the complex also incorporates a fitness centre, or something to do with exercise. In these places the only part of my body which gets exercised is my drinking arm! So onto the match. In addition to floodlights the club also have a railed off pitch and their long-term ambition is to play in the Western League. Today it was very windy again and after Fry scored the only goal of the game on 19 minutes I decamped to behind the top goal which backed on to the aforementioned Pavilion, where it wasn't quite so windy. In fact, try as they might neither side could really deal with it. Odd Down were probably the more comfortable side when Fry scored, but as the match wore on so Fry were in the ascendancy by the end, playing with the wind at their backs and downhill. Afterwards a brisk walk saw me catch the 16.56pm train back to Bath.

*contributed on 02/11/17*

**TT No.49:** *Steve Hardy* - Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> October 2017; **FC Creswell** v Balfour Old Boys; Stafford & District Sunday League Division Two; Result: 0-22; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 2 h/c

The Stafford Sunday League has three divisions, with Division Two being the bottom one. My match this morning saw the bottom club FC Creswell entertain the top side Balfour Old Boys, and I have to confess my choice of this match was based entirely on the number of goals I thought I would see.

Creswell is a small village to the west of Stafford, and the park the game was played in, is just off junction 14 of the M6 motorway. To the background roar of continuous M6 traffic, the home team, with their assortment of different coloured socks and shorts, must have been fearing the worst as 4 goals in the first 15 minutes (including two own goals) gave the Old Boys the perfect start. It was 7-0 at the break, and the goals just kept on coming in the second half with the 22<sup>nd</sup> and final one coming in the 89<sup>th</sup>.

Two things could have happened in the second half, but neither did. The first would have been a complete capitulation by the homester's and the second the Old Boys showboating and rubbing the host's noses in it. That neither happened

was a credit to both teams, particularly the home team who never gave up and almost scored themselves with the score at 20-0. Just think what the final score might have been if that one had gone in?

No tantrums/swearing or fouls of any nastiness throughout either, which gave the young lady Referee probably her easiest game of the season so far.

*contributed on 29/10/17*

**TT No.48:** *Keith Aslan* - Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> October 2017; **AFC KILBURN** v Swanwick Pentrich Road; Central Midlands League South; Kick-Off: 14.04; Result: 0-3; Admission: £3; Programme: £1; Attendance: 32 (19 home, 11 away & 2 neutral)

With storm 'Brian' putting paid to my previous week's visit to Milborne Port my intentions to visit them today were stymied when they disappeared during the week, and judging by the conversations I'd had with their friendly secretary their demise would have come as much of a shock to him as everybody else. So, with that ground gone forever, I immediately set my sights on AFC Kilburn, another ground that I missed out on in their Central Midlands League days due to their predecessors suddenly folding, and with current results not dissimilar to Milborne Ports, I wasn't going to hang about for my second chance at this one.

Previously name Ambergate after the village they played in a couple of miles up the road they moved into Kilburn in 2015, with the facilities enabling them to attain a higher standard of football. I assume part of the deal was that they changed their name to Kilburn, but the AFC prefix? A bit naff. If it was up to me I'd have gone for Kilburn Ambers. It's a proper old ground, an 'Atcost' free zone but with plenty of cover and a small refreshment room serving hot drinks with northern delicacy, the chip butty, appearing at half time. There is the working man's welfare just outside the ground, cheap beer but not the sort of place you'd go for a night out. The village itself, like the ground, looks much as it would have done a century ago. Not so much 'sleepy' as 'comatose' The place was pretty much deserted and I only found a Chinese Restaurant and a hairdresser's in the place, one was closed and I had no use for the other. There are oodles of buses from Derby that stop either in the village itself, a 5-minute walk from the ground, or Kilburn Turn, which is 12 minutes. They have strange numbers such as 9.1, 9.3, Amberline and Comet. The Comet has state of the art buses and runs non-stop back to the bus station. Highly recommended. 'Trent Barton' supply the services and I wish they ran buses round my way. The last bus back from Derby to Kilburn is 02.45am! If you are the other person in the universe apart from me who pays bus fares, a £6-day rover ticket will see you well. Incidentally I can recommend the food at Derby bus station. While you know you will always be conned at railway stations, there are sometimes good cheap cuisine on offer where buses congregate, and they don't come much gooder or cheaper than at Derby.

There is an acute referee shortage round these parts and lack of an official put paid to Kilburn's reserve match this afternoon. And when the ref. dropped out of the first team game the chairman of the Central Midlands League stepped in to officiate to ensure the game went ahead. While the FA is quite clearly run by

idiots, we should remember it also has good people like this league chairman who work tirelessly in the interests of grassroots football. He went out of his way to explain all his decisions to the players and spectators apart from the only ones I wanted to know. Why did he start the game four minutes late? Why did he add 3 minutes injury time onto the first half when there weren't any injuries? and why did we have to suffer an extra 6 minutes at the end when the game was clearly over as a contest? Timekeeping is obviously an alien concept in this league (as with many others). It's easy to see why Kilburn are struggling, they dominated the first half hour without coming close to scoring and once Swanwick went ahead, that was that. I am indebted to a fellow hopper giving me a lift back to the bus stop. Silly of me really to expect to catch a bus that would require the referee to condense one and a half hours of football into two hours!

Finally, I'm sure a lot of my fans will have had sleepless nights wondering if my Immingham programme ever turned up. After two months and numerous phone calls the promised paper came through my letterbox, so they've been crossed out of my little black book. Many thanks to the Immingham official who did so much to get the programme delivered, and all I can say is if you are planning a visit there don't take any notice of what goes upon their social media sites as the person who writes them appears to make a lot of it up.

*contributed on 29/10/17*

**TT No.47:** *Brian Buck* - Saturday 21st October 2017. **Tollesbury** v Dedham Old Boys Reserves; Essex & Suffolk Border League Division 3; Result: 6-1; Attendance: 20 approx.

Today was forecast to be a very windy as Storm Brian passed over the UK and it was. But rather like with me, things turned out to be not quite as bad as I was led to believe. So because of this I held back on deciding where I should go until the morning of the game and picked somewhere more easterly where the wind would be at its lightest. I checked out the game with the clubs fixture secretary, who admitted that it was a bit blowy where she was and added that she had just taken her dog for a walk. On the basis that she came back with it she assumed that the match would be on! So off I went, arriving at the ground at about 90 minutes before kick off. There was one car in the car park and that belonged to the ref. I knew that he was the ref because he looked smart and had a shirt and tie on. No one apart from match officials 'dresses' up for matches like these! Anyway, as he was adamant the game would be played, unless one or both of the teams refused, I headed off to the pub, where I had a very nice pre-match meal and had a good chat to the locals while I was eating it. The highlight of this encounter was a discussion on how to serve leeks! Apparently the problem doesn't arise here as a leek has never walked into this pub! Back at the ground it remained very windy, but the sun was out. So most people stood on the far side of the pitch, where the sun wasn't in one's eyes and the cross wind was near enough behind our backs. Tollesbury are top of this league whilst Dedham are mid table. The hosts played into the wind in the first half and found the going tough in what became something of an endurance test. On 23 minutes Dedham took the lead, but on 39 minutes

Tollesbury equalised from the spot. The general consensus of opinion was that it should not have been given as it was a fair tackle. Afterwards even the ref was uncertain, even though he had a clear view of the incident from about five yards away. After the break Tollesbury made full use of the wind and once they got to grips with the wind and Dedham tired facing it, they rattled home five goals in the last twenty minutes, some of them good ones. Overall a decent day out despite the blustery conditions.

*contributed on 24/10/17*

**TT No.46: Brian Buck** - Wednesday 18th October 2017. **Coventry United** v Highgate United; Birmingham Senior Cup 1st Round; Venue: played at Butts Park Arena, Coventry; Kick-Off: 7.45pm; Result: 3-5; Attendance: 65.

More like 125! We arrived here with just under an hour before kick off after surviving the Coventry inner ring road, which makes the Monaco Grand Prix circuit look like a doddle in comparison. Anyway, we purposely avoided having to pay to park in the spacious car park behind the goal by parking outside a real ale pub in a road next to the ground and said car park instead. Unsurprisingly we felt obliged to go in the pub while we were there! We returned in good time for the match. I'd already purchased the glossy programme, 50p tonight, soon after we parked up. Then came the shock. It was £7 (Adults) and £6 (Concessions) to get in and this was for a Step 5 level game! This was my only gripe of the night though. We then made our way to the seats and we sat high up in the 3,000 seater stand. If relations continue to deteriorate at the Ricoh then Coventry City are thinking of moving here. If so then there is plenty of space to develop the ground, although rugby is also played here at present and is used by Coventry RFC and Coventry Bears I believe. Also, a railway line passes behind one goal and it was good to see a few trains pass by as the game progressed. Initially the floodlights looked a bit dingy. But just as the match started so more came on and suddenly the lux value doubled and the brightness of them was excellent. As for the game I got the impression that this was a cup competition which neither side was too fussed about winning. So both sides went for it, without worrying too much about defending, just like football used to be! In the first half the lead changed hands three times. Highgate opened the scoring, before Coventry scored twice. But it was 3-2 to Highgate by half time. After the break Highgate soon extended their lead and then both sides scored again with roughly 15 minutes left. Overall a decent night out in a part of Coventry where the lights of the tall surrounding flats overlook the ground, bringing a slight feel of Canary Wharf to the place.

*contributed on 24/10/17*

**TT No.45: Steve Hardy** - Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> October 2017; **Redditch Borough** v Wake Green Amateurs; Birmingham FA Saturday Vase First Round; Result: 0-2; Admission: Free, Programme: No; Attendance: 51



Another week and another County cup competition for me. This time it was the middle ranking of the 3 Saturday cups run by the Birmingham FA, the Saturday Vase, and my destination was Redditch.

Redditch Borough started life as Redditch United Reserves and set off on their own in 2014, joining the then Midland Combination. Now absorbed in to the Midland league, they are currently playing in Division Two which is at step 7 of the non-league pyramid. In contrast, their visitors today, Wake Green Amateurs, are a very old club having started in 1925. They play in the Premier Division of the Birmingham & District League which isn't in the national pyramid system, but recent clubs to leave the BDL have gone straight in to Division 3 of the Midland league. Given the two-division gulf between the teams, most people seemed to think the Borough were a home banker. Not me however, as I have seen a great many matches in the Birmingham & District league and knew that Wake Green were no mugs.

So, it turned out, with Borough enjoying most of the possession but not able to get too close to the Wake Green goal to get a shot off. WGA relied on breakaways, and it was from one of those that they took the lead in the 26<sup>th</sup> minute. At half time the other groundhoppers in attendance were saying Borough should have been at least 4 goals ahead, which I didn't quite see myself. What we did agree on though, was that the game needed a quick response from Borough if they were to get anything out of the game. Well, we got a quick response, but it wasn't from Borough, as a WGA forward set off on a mazy run towards the Borough penalty area after 50 minutes, where he was unceremoniously hacked down for a penalty. The spot kick was scored with ease and at 2-0 that was it for the Borough, with no way back. The action took place on Borough's new ground at the Mettis Aerospace Sports & Social club in the Batchley district of Redditch, not a million miles from the Redditch United's ground which is also on the Bromsgrove Road. A large car park is in front of the huge social club, and to your left, past a 3g caged pitch is the grass pitch used by Borough. A few spectator improvements have been made to the ground, with a small area of covered standing down one side of the pitch, and hard standing along two sides as well. The changing room block is behind one goal and refreshments were available from a mobile burger van which had set up next to the changing rooms. I went to the match by train, with bus 42/43 from the bus station opposite the railway station being just four stops down the Bromsgrove road from the ground.

*contributed on 22/10/17*

**TT No.44: Steve Hardy** - Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> October 2017; **Madeley White Star** v Rushall Olympic u21; Staffordshire Challenge Cup Second Round; Result: 1-0; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 13

The Challenge cup is the lowest ranking cup organised by the Staffordshire FA and can normally be relied on to find a new venue for yours truly. This year is no exception. When I saw a club called Madeley had a home tie, I wondered why a Shropshire club were playing in Staffordshire? Turned out to be a different

Madeley, with this one being some 4 miles from Newcastle-Under-Lyme, and west of Stoke.

The home club have been an active junior set up for many years, but this is the first season for the newly formed adult team. They have joined the Crewe league, rather than the Staffs County league, and today they were entertaining Midland league U21 division side Rushall Olympic U21s.

The council owned Manor Road playing fields has four football pitches, and three portacabins for dressing rooms and storage of nets, mowers etc. I had no idea of what to expect from either team, but it turned out to be a very close affair between two equally matched sides, which Madeley eventually won through a superb free kick after 26 minutes. Rushall played some lovely passing football, but didn't have anyone to finish off the flowing moves. In fact I don't think they had a single shot on goal during the entire 90 minutes.

A crowd of 13 were there to witness events, mostly supporting the numberless shirted home team. Glorious sunshine too. Something not seen around these parts for some weeks!

*contributed on 15/10/17*

**TT No.43:** *Brian Buck* - Tuesday 10th October 2017; **Little Oakley** v Cornard United; Thurlow Nunn League Division 1; Result: 1-1; Attendance: 173.

Tonight, I accompanied my friend who was making his first visit to this ground. I'd already been here a few years ago when it was in its 'raw' state. Since then it's been enclosed so it's fit for Step 6 football and they've done it surprisingly well and without destroying the beauty of the area. Three sides of the ground were already impregnable, as far as I know and the fourth side of the ground was mainly fenced off by a small 3G pitch. Tonight, they only had one bit of standing cover, behind the clubhouse goal and that was filled up by some good-natured football chanting from some senior adults, unable to quite shake off their teenage years. We arrived early enough for a pre-match slurp and we walked the 15 minutes or so it took to get to the pub. Here we encounter three men who soon realised that we were Groundhoppers and they asked us if we were going to the game. When we confirmed this, they told us that they were going as well and they offered to show us a shortcut. We accepted. Our walk initially followed the road we had just walked down. But suddenly they turned off and very soon we found ourselves in a middle of a dark field. Visions of us being beaten up and robbed by people who were in effect strangers to us entered my mind, but fortunately they were the genuine article and we arrived at the ground safely. The game wasn't great, especially in the first half, but it picked up after the break. As the players returned to the pitch for the second half one aging home fan told his sides manager that he and his mates had their boots in their cars if he needed them. But they were not needed as Oakley took the lead with 85 seconds of the restart with a weak shot which went in off the post. But on 49 minutes Cornard levelled the scores. Thereafter both sides had spells of dominance, but mainly Oakley. The tackles started to fly in. So, did the feigning injury. One home player went down and must have been convincing because he was subbed. Much to his annoyance as when he got up he ready to continue. Towards the end a Cornard player picked up a second yellow card, but Oakley were unable to capitalise on this.

*contributed on 12/10/17*

**TT No.42:** *Brian Buck* - Sunday 8th October 2017. **Hitchin Belles** v Welwyn Pegasus (Adult) Sapphires Women; Beds & Herts Women's League Division 2; Venue: played at St Christopher School, Barrington Road, Letchworth; Result: 3-3; Attendance: 20 approx.

Today, as my wife decided that she wanted to visit her friend in Baldock, I was presented with a rare opportunity to watch a non-Spurs Sunday match. So, I went for somewhere nearby and picked this game, because it also presented me with a new ground. Initially I was worried that it might not be new for me as I'd seen the now defunct Bridger Packaging play very close by. But the entrance to that ground was down Muddy Lane and therefore this was a different venue. The school itself was very clean and tidy and rather picturesque looking. It is a fee paying Independent school. The playing fields were also well maintained and the playing surface was excellent. The game was also good to watch and quite frankly men's football can learn a lot from how women's football is played. I don't know about you, but the real reason that I started watching football was because I loved it as a sport. Basically, two teams just trying to play football to the best of their ability and doing it as fairly as they can, without cheating and respecting their opponents and the match officials. This is what we got. The players came in all shapes and sizes and were of varying ages. When a foul was committed it was generally by accident. Early on it looked as though Pegasus might run away with it, especially after they took the lead on 5 minutes. But Hitchin stuck with it and they equalised on 23 minutes, perhaps slightly against the run of play. They on 39 minutes they took the leading by way of a curling shot from the edge of the area. But on 49 minutes Pegasus equalised from the spot following an intended nudge. Then on 63 minutes a high, dropping cross from the byline somehow ended up in the net to make it 3-2 to Hitchin, but a defensive cock up, if you can have that in women's football saw the game end up 3-3, which was probably the right result, as both sides were evenly matched.

*contributed on 11/10/17*

**TT No.41: Brian Buck - Saturday 7th October 2017. May & Baker EC v Rayleigh Town; ProKit UK Essex Olympian League Premier Division; Venue: played at Barking Rugby Club, Gale Street, Becontree; Result: 2-2; Attendance: 35 approx.**

Today I needed to visit London, firstly to get my recently renewed Senior Railcard linked up with my Oyster Card and secondly to obtain a Delay Repay form from Virgin Trains after they kindly delayed my trip home from Newcastle by about six hours two weeks earlier. I'm sure they realise that many people can't do this by email, by scanning your ticket into their computerised Delay Repay form, so they make it as difficult as possible to get one in paper form. So you can't get them from Stevenage or Peterborough. Anyway, with that resolved I was off on my travels and after alighting from Becontree I was at the ground about ten minutes later, or to be more precise, the bar! Here they also did decent food, although my request for two sausages and chips was responded to by bringing me a large plate of chips and two 'sausage burgers'- £6.50 please! However, by now I had discovered that the hosts had done a free 16-page programme, their first issue either ever, or for some considerable time. This was a match between the top of the table hosts and their bottom of the table visitors. Earlier in the morning M & B's fixture secretary had told me not to under estimate Rayleigh. Perhaps he should have told his team this as well! I watched the game from the 300-seater stand from where I got a good view. It was a bit noisy as the ground backs on to

the busy A13 where traffic was continually passing by. Rayleigh took the lead on 14 minutes by way of an own goal when an M & B player, in trying to clear the ball, expertly diverted a cross into his own net. But M & B were level four minutes later following a header from a deep cross. Rayleigh went ahead again on 24 minutes, but M & B equalised again a minute later. For most of the rest of the game the only difference between the sides was the erratic passing of the visitors, but in the last few minutes Rayleigh stirred themselves and they missed two very good chances, at least, to win the match. Overall a decent day out.

*contributed on 11/10/17*

**TT No.40:** *Brian Buck* - Saturday 30th September 2017; **Gimingham United** v Runton United; Walcott Lighthouse Inn North East Norfolk League Sanders Coaches Division 1; Result: 1-2; Attendance: 15 approx.

Today we had rather a pleasant day out, close to the North-East Norfolk coast. We arrived in the area well before kick-off, but the lure of a pub 'on the list' and a decent church in Southrepps, delayed us getting there. Furthermore, we also went to another pub close to the ground, where we ordered food. So just how long does it take to knock up a burger, chips and beans, plus two cheese and onion rolls? The consequence of this was that we arrived at the ground just as they were kicking off. The reason why this game was chosen today was that the fact that Runton United have won every league match since they drew 2-2 with Plumstead Rangers on 15 November 2014. The league table shows that their last league defeat came in the 2013/14 season. They'd already won their first five games of this season and today they faced their hosts who had won all of their six opening games. Nothing against Runton, but this was a good chance to say, "I was there," when they finally dropped some points. However today was not that day! The pitch sloped slightly and they had a stand here as well, complete with a few concrete steps. But it must have been made by the 'friends' of Luton Town, as it had loads of posts blocking one's view. Furthermore, there was a perspex dugout almost in front of it. So, it was unused and indeed would probably only be used when it rains. To a degree the game did not quite live up to expectations. Both sides were evenly matched and so although it was entertaining, it wasn't that exciting. The inevitable happened on 16 minutes when Runton took the lead, but Gimingham regrouped and started to see a lot of the ball. So, when they equalised on 33 minutes, it was just about deserved. Runton then scored what would turn out to be the winning goal on 40 minutes, but it might not have been so had the home lino raised his flag for offside, which I believe it was. The second half saw the hosts run out of ideas and Runton, without looking brilliant, go on and create quite a few scoring chances. So, their run continues. Afterwards as we drove away we passed the players walking back down the road to the Village Hall where they got changed.

*contributed on 11/10/17*

**TT No.39:** *Brian Buck* - Tuesday 26th September 201; **CB Hounslow United** v Eversley & California; Cherry Red Records Combined Counties League Premier Challenge Cup 1st Round; Result: 5-2; Attendance: 55.

A rare new midweek ground under floodlights for me this evening, almost a year ago to the day, my driver informed me and I remain very grateful to him for carting me around from time to time. We left early enough to deal with any problems the M25 might throw at us, but for once we didn't encounter any traffic hold ups and we arrived in time to have a quick slurp in a pub near the ground. This was one of those places where there seemed to be more cars than people. CB Hounslow United are now playing at their new ground, called The Lair, Green Lane, Hounslow after spending many years at Osterley Sports Club. With a few minor alterations needed this ground is geared up for Step 3 & 4 football and the hosts are rightly proud of their achievements. Getting hold of any spare land in London is difficult enough in its own right. To make a success of it is even more difficult. I didn't venture inside the clubhouse, so the two outstanding features for me were the stand, from which you could get a good elevated view of proceedings and the pitch. With apologies to other grounds-men who also produce great pitches, this one was simply the best I've seen outside the Football League. It was truly flat and the grass coverage on it was so good that I had to look twice to make sure that it wasn't a 3G pitch. There were two flies in the ointment though. Firstly, the planes going in, or coming out of Heathrow Airport. They were so deafening as they passed above us. I'm not sure if the ref would be heard if he were trying to speak to a player when one came across. Secondly, we had the obligatory noisy young kids sitting in front of us. They were no serious problem really, but we moved away from them because they were irritating me! As for the game it turned out to be a good one. Both sides behaved themselves and gave the match officials no hassle at all. So, this was great for people who just want to watch football as a sport, like me. The score was 2-2 at half time, with Hounslow equalised about a minute after Eversley scored each time. After the break Hounslow slowly moved the game away from the visitors with three further goals, the last one being a follow up header after the taker of a spot kick had his effort saved.

*contributed on 11/10/17*

**TT No.38:** *Keith Aslan* - Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> October 2017; **COVENTRY ALVIS** v Littleton; Midland League Division 1; Kick-Off: 14.59; Result: 0-4; Admission: £4; Programme: £1; Attendance: 52 (40 home, 9 away, 3 neutral)

Netball: COVENTRY ALVIS v Offchurch; Coventry & Warwickshire Netball League Division 3; Tip off 14.59; Result: 47-52; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 12, all home.

I've been to a lot of grounds in Coventry which is why I thought I'd already done this one. However, thanks go to the many professional groundhoppers who have much more idea of where I've been than I have, who put me right and told me a visit would be required to complete the top two divisions of the Midland League. Easy to get to for the carless with the number 9 offering a half hourly door to door service from the station. For the athletic groundhopper (surely an oxymoron) the ground would be about an hour's walk on the southern extremity of the city with fields rather than buildings offering a backdrop to the match.

Nice setting, enclosed, railed, floodlit with an *Atcost* stand to one side of the dugouts and a much larger and older covered stand to the other. The clubhouse serves hot drinks and rolls consumed while 'enjoying' the high-octane thrills of Barnet's goalless draw with Coventry which in view of the location received a more attentive audience than it would have done elsewhere in the country. The home club are nicknamed 'The Tankmen' due to the fact Alvis make armoured vehicles and not because they get tanked every week, which at the moment, they do. Bottom of the table with only two wins, a tally they never looked like adding to today and Littleton are unlikely to have an easier afternoon, scoring a couple of goals in each half. It's going to be a long hard season for the home side. The club have been going since 1928 and have played at a number of grounds in Coventry, including the Butts Arena where Coventry United are currently located. They are one of the few teams to have kept playing throughout the 2nd World War, probably because they didn't lose any players as tank building must have been a reserved occupation. Alvis have been climbing up the pyramid of late, playing their football in the Coventry Alliance as recently as 2011.

Spookily the adjacent netball match tipped off within two seconds of the footy which presented me with a bit of a dilemma and I found it difficult to concentrate on the game, being constantly distracted by the football. The 'Tankgirls' also lost, but this one was much closer. They could teach footballers a thing or two about water consumption. As I'm sure everyone knows, netball is divided into four 15minute quarters, and at the first break there was a rush to tip H2O down their throats in alarming quantity's. My Broadstairs dacha is on a water meter and if I drunk as much as them I'd be destitute. They've just played a quarter of an hour of a non-contact sport where running is penalised. It's a cold day with a constant drizzle so who tells them they need to stave off dehydration by knocking back water at every opportunity? The footballers were doing the same thing and at one stage I was in grave danger of being knocked out by flying water bottles coming at me from two directions. Maybe throwing plastic bottles around is part of the water drinking experience. Why don't they just put a trough by the side of the pitch?

Alvis is hopper friendly, don't be put off by the secretary's brusque recorded phone message saying he doesn't reply to voicemails. A text message elicits a very helpful response and there was a programme with my name on it waiting for me on arrival. The club bemoans the fact travellers visit it from all over the country but the locals don't want to know. I wish them well but I'm afraid this is the way of things these days. And the icing on the gateaux, the match finished at 4.46.

*contributed on 09/10/17*

**TT No.37:** *Colin Marshall* - Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> October 2017; **Fisher** v Forest Hill Park; Southern Counties East League; Result: 1-3; Attendance: 159; Admission: Pay what you want - Non League Day; Programme: £2:00; Tea (in a Fisher FC mug): £1:00

A day with no railworks but the clubs I could visit were all away. Next Saturday works resume on both South Western and Great Western when Slough are at home for the third consecutive round of the FA Cup but the journey will be a nightmare.

So, another club on my radar were at home - Fisher and a doable trip with the 381 running between Waterloo and literally outside the ground with several breaks for refreshment. I worked in the Borough of Southwark between 1976 and 1986 and this was a trip down memory lane although that told me how much had changed in Southwark Street and Tooley Street. But nothing compared to the old Surrey Docks area of Rotherhithe which was derelict, wild and lawless in those days. Now it is a perfect example of suburbia. The whole scene was treeless now they abound everywhere.

1) Bridge House, Tower Bridge - the only Adnams pub in London but very standard range with Broadside at £4.90. Lacking in atmosphere, a tourist pub!

2) Gregorian, Bermondsey - my 33rd Antic pub and well up to standards, lots of snugs etc and the obligatory chandelier. None of their own beers on sale all from the Tribute/ Bath range. Christmas style lights outside.

3) Mayflower, Rotherhithe - where the Pilgrim fathers supposedly sailed from. Probably the last time I was here was about 1985 (so I missed their departure by about 365 years) and surprisingly unchanged but as the sign on the door says: "keeping the noise down and respecting our neighbours since 1620" and I don't think they mean twenty past four! I thought this was a Greene King pub but none of their beers sold. Didn't strike as a "locals" pub. Excellent views of the river from the patio next door.

Turning into Salter Road I spotted a figure in the distance who looked a lot like Steve of *Pieandmushypeas* fame not surprising as when I caught him up it was.



The new ground is on the left whereas the original was on the right and no sign of it exists. This ground confuses me in that it could quite easily be in a rural location not nearly central London. Tree lined on three sides and, also on the 4th side over the road. Only the mass of towers at Canary Wharf give the location away. Otherwise basic new ground, *Atcost* stand with cover behind one goal. Very narrow strip on the far side with limited standing at each end due to council restrictions on obstruction on the floodlights meaning you can't go past them. Not possible to walk full length anyway as the dugouts block the centre.

Fisher started the better and should have scored several in the first 15 but it seemed the easier the chance the more they contrived to mess it up. In a rare foray forward a tackle inside the area by the keeper following a corner gave FHP a penalty which the burly number nine converted.

*contributed on 09/10/17 (via Brian Buck)*

**TT No.36: Keith Aslan - Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> September 2017; SWALLOWNEST v Glasshoughton; Northern Counties East League Division 1; Kick-Off: 15.00; Result: 3-5; Admission: £4; Programme: £1.50p; Attendance: 68 (56 home, 8 away, 4 neutral)**

What better way to celebrate 'National Poetry Day' than a tidy up of the North-East Counties League, or as it has inventively been renamed, the Northern Counties East League. Swallownest is a ride from Sheffield, with the X5, X54 and X55 providing a 15-minute service from the bus interchange. It is a long time since I last visited the 'Steel City' and they have built a waterfall feature outside the station which I can best describe as Wow! Well worth a visit if you happen to be in these parts. The club play at Swallownest Miners Welfare, which is thriving considering there aren't any miners left. The bus went through Oregrave scene of some of the worst violence during the miners' strike. I always think it's sad that the mining industry in this country has disappeared, but I might have a different viewpoint if I'd actually had to work in one. The Welfare appears to be the main attraction in the village with a pool table and dartboard and anybody who's been in a coma for the past 50 years would instantly recognise the place, with the only change in that time being a screen showing the football. From the bar I picked up a sixteen-page programme from Swallownest Beighton Ladies recent match against Malet Lambert YC. An unexpected issuer, but given the pile left over, not a best seller.

Plenty of food here with the meat pies proving popular, the ground has undergone a transformation to bring it up to spec. with newly built cover behind the goal providing a very welcome respite from the weather. Only two sides open, with the grass banking along one touchline out of bounds for spectators presumably due to health and safety. As it's the first season of programme production a few tips for them. A current table would be good, rather than last season's final North-East Counties tables when Swallownest weren't even in it. Last season's top league goal-scorers weren't particularly useful either and a list of all previous Cup winners and League champions would suggest the editor has carried out a mining

expedition on the North-East Counties Website. And the team page was blank. Quite understandable if you can't get the away side but surely somebody could have taken a punt on the home line up? Surprisingly the officials were named, and if the referee really did come from Cambridgeshire the home club are going to be hit with a rather large bill for travelling expenses.

The match was top quality entertainment, 2-2 at the break surprisingly the visitors ran away with it a bit in the second half with Swallownest's third of no consequence coming as it did in the time referees add on at the end because their wives have told them not to get home too early. To add to the fun, we had the usual mass brawl and after a long consultation with both linesman the ref. only sent off two players (one from each side wouldn't you know). I didn't envy him the task of sorting it out, from where I was standing he could have picked any two to go from about a dozen.

Among the neutrals today was legendary blind hopper John Stancombe and his guide dog Eric. (Eric?). It is beyond me how he manages to travel all over the country on his own by public transport from his home in Norwich. He used to be a regular programme producer until his sight went completely and I have got many of his excellent issues in my collection. I salute you John.

Good game, good grub, good company, cheap lager and the trains behaved themselves. It's days like this that make life almost worth living.

*contributed on 01/10/17*

**TT No.35: Brian Buck - Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2017; Team Northumbria v Durham City; Buildbase FA Vase 2<sup>nd</sup> Qualifying Round; Result: 2-0; Attendance: 85.**

This could have been a really nice day out. I left home to start my 501 miles round trip shortly after 8.30am, not realising that it would be about 19 hours before I would finally get home. The outward journey was fine. Train to Peterborough and then another one to Newcastle. From here it was a short walk to the bus stop where I picked up the Stagecoach Number 1 bus which took me direct to about 50 yards from the pitch, which was in the Coach Lane Campus, which forms part of Northumbria University. No bar here though and the ground wasn't open yet. So, I nipped off to a pub, some ten minutes-walk away and had lunch. By the time I returned, about 25 minutes before kick-off, they were just opening up and I was the first in, getting a programme free with my admission, despite it carrying a cover price of £1. The ground ticked all the boxes for football at this level. It had a 200 approximate *Atcost* stand and a small bit of cover on the same side of the pitch. Both of these sides play in the Northern League, with Durham playing in the lower division. The game was full of energy and both sides did their best. But the hosts made up of University students (I assume) looked to have more stamina than the visitors and goals on 2 and 45 minutes were enough to give them a lead they never looked like losing after the break. The only irritants present both came from the visitors. One was an adult, who stopped moaning at the ref at half time and one teenage kid, who didn't! He must have thought that he was the manager, but overall, he was just frustrated really. Then the fun and games started. As I waited

for the match to finish I noted two buses waiting to leave. Just like to old Football Specials I thought. So, I ran over and got on the first one to leave. I was soon joined by another spectator! Had it left straightaway then I may have been able to catch the 5.26pm train from Newcastle and so get back indoors by about 10pm. But this 25-minute bus journey inexplicably took 40 minutes as the driver was in no hurry and so I missed the train. So, I got on the 6.30pm train instead. Things went well until it suddenly stopped halfway between Grantham and Peterborough. And there we waited for something like three hours. Apparently, a train coming the other way had brought down the overhead wires. When they finally decided what to do about it we reversed to Grantham, where we joined an already full diesel train. We then headed towards Peterborough, but coming to a halt where we had come to a halt earlier. Eventually we crawled into Peterborough, arriving at 2.20am. From here a taxi was provided to get me to my starting station and I was indoors at 3.45am. I just got in three hours sleep until it was time to get up to get ready for Church. Apparently, the Dover Athletic team were somewhere on the train, coming back from their 1-1 draw at Guiseley!

*contributed on 26/09/17*

**TT No.34:** *Keith Aslan* - Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2017; **Lutterworth Town v Teversal**; FA Vase 2Q; Kick-Off: 15.00; Result: 7-0; Admission: £4, Programme: £1; Attendance: 68 (48 home including 7 wag's; 8 away & 12 neutral)

There's only two teams in Lutterworth and the Town have made very rapid strides over the past 12 months to bring themselves up to the same level as the Athletic with both just a couple of points apart in the United Counties League. Having won the Leicestershire Senior last season without losing a game they really went for it, carrying out major ground improvements including floodlights. All very neat and tidy, but closely surrounded by houses on three sides leaving no space for added infrastructure the small metal stand (no seating) is behind the goal, as is the changing rooms and a very cheap clubhouse. An unusual set up here with the club leasing it out as a business which is open non matchdays as a pub and has a loyal group of regulars. Given the prices they charge it deserves to be a success. There was a welcome barbecue which apparently takes place at every home game. I was surprised there weren't problems with the floodlights given the close proximity of houses all-round the ground. This was rather smartly circumnavigated by telling the locals that the club was only willing to take out a 29 year- lease on the land if they could erect floodlights, otherwise they were off and the council would be building houses on the site. Suddenly all floodlight protests magically vanished. Nice one.

On arrival, I was greeted with 'You must be a groundhopper' I really do need to change my image. When I proffered my entrance money the gateman tactfully said 'That'll be £2, you're obviously a concession' There was a small pile of programmes that clearly weren't going to last the distance and a 2.15 sell out left a lot of unhappy punters, and not just groundhoppers either. I'm sure I keep reading that programmes are obsolete and nobody buys them anymore? The game was enlivened by a rather succulent bevy of Lutterworth wag's who I'm told follow their men home and away (young love eh, that won't last!). I'm ashamed to say that

certain groundhoppers paid rather more attention to the young ladies than they did to the football.

Lutterworth's previous forays into the Vase have been short and not very sweet and up to now haven't made it past the preliminary stage while today's match sees them in the third qualifying round. The large margin of victory, while partly down to the home side playing some pretty good stuff, owed more to Teversal missing six first teamers who were in Prague on a Stag weekend. When did stag nights turn into a weekend away in a foreign country? It used to be a local pub crawl then tying the condemned man naked to a lamppost. Job done apart from popping into the police station next morning to bail out the groom so he made it to the wedding. We knew how to enjoy ourselves in those days.

The ground is a twelve-minute walk from the centre of town, unlike Lutterworth Athletic which is in the middle of nowhere. The nearest railhead is eight miles away at Rugby and it's the X84 you want. While the timetables on the local bus stops tantalisingly showed a 5 o'clock bus back, this is just a tease and in reality, you're stuck in Lutterworth after the match for an hour and a quarter. The place is pretty drab and while there are worst places to kill time there are certainly a lot better. I ensconced myself in the town's main pub, appropriately called 'The Shambles' which has a large banner festooned across the outside proudly announcing it was Marston's Pub. of the year in 2015. All I can say is the competition can't have been up to much. I won't dwell on the fraught journey back to my Kentish dacha, let's just say that railway privatization is a big pile of manure.

*contributed on 24/09/17*

**TT No.33: Steve Hardy - Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2017; AVRO Reserves v Stockport Georgians Reserves; Manchester League Division Three; Result: 2-0; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 18 h/c**

At the end of last season, AVRO moved out of their Lancaster club set up in Failsworth, Manchester, and have now pitched up at White Bank Road in Oldham. Rugby league enthusiasts might be familiar with that address, as it is the former home of the Oldham Roughyeds RL club, as well as Oldham Dew/Town and Borough football clubs. The Roughyeds had to move out of the Whitebank Stadium in 2016 as it had failed to meet minimum standard requirements, and it now looks as if they will never return as AVRO completed the purchase of the ground this summer.

Talking to locals who were watching the game yesterday, it seems AVRO have done a great deal of work at the renamed Vestacare Stadium, in a very short time. By all accounts, the place was a dump before, but AVRO have installed a shiny new 3G pitch, and built a new stand half the length of one side of the ground. Floodlights were already in place and the former Roughyeds social club has now been rebranded as the new Lancaster Club, although this is still a work in progress and builders are still on site refurbishing the place. On the pitch yesterday I watched a very competitive Reserve team fixture between AVRO and Stockport Georgians which the home team won 2-0 thanks to a last minute goal sealing the points. This

match was a 1.00pm ko, so that groundsharers Mostonians of the Lancashire Amateur league could start their match at 3.15pm.

AVRO are aiming for the NWCL. With their first team top of the league after 8 straight wins, and with the facilities they now have, they would seem a shoe-in. I really enjoyed my visit there and wish them luck in their venture to better themselves.

*contributed on 24/09/17*

**TT No.32: Ian Brown** - Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> September; **Donegal Celtic** v Newington YC; Bluefin Sport Premier Intermediate League; Result: 1-2; Admission: £5 (no concessions); Programme: No; Attendance: less than 100; Catering: "Dermos Chippy Van" - Teas, Coffees, Soft Drinks, Chips, Burgers, Hot Dogs & Filled Sodas.

Donegal Celtic was formed in 1970 when a group of young men who had a huge interest in football decided to form a team in the Lenadoon district of West Belfast.

With no facilities, kits, pitch or equipment, the first few years were spent playing friendlies and entering local summer competitions which helped to enhance and promote their reputation and name. They registered their chosen name with the Irish Football League, taking the name from the area they were based, Lenadoon, Gweedore, Glenveagh are all local areas named after towns in County Donegal, with the Celtic part being taken on due to the massive local following for Glasgow Celtic, and formerly Belfast Celtic.

To reach Donegal Celtic Park from Belfast City Centre by bus take the 10B (towards Poleglass, Glenkeen) & 10F (towards Lagmore View). Alight at Suffolk Heights, Hannahstown, where it is a short stroll to the ground

The ground sits on the side of a hill. The Social Club and the ground floor of the clubhouse sit lower than the pitch. On the side of the social club there is a mural depicting "a huddle" the club crest and a former player Paul "Maxi" McVeigh", impressive it looks too, the two-storey clubhouse leads out to the ground car park, the players have a fair walk to reach the pitch, between two small *Atcost* structures.

As mentioned above two 75 seat structures flank the players entrance. To the right of the *Atcost* structure is a long low cover leading down towards the Suffolk Road end of the ground. To the left-hand side is the Main Stand - which seats 568 speccies over 12 rows. Beyond this is the Glen Forest End, basically a narrow strip of concrete. Opposite the main stand is another covered structure providing both seating and standing; 315 seats on 5 rows with a wide area at the rear. The rest of this side is a raised narrow strip of concrete leading towards the away turnstile on Suffolk Road. The Suffolk Road end is basically a grass verge with again a narrow strip of concrete providing hard standing. The stadium control tower dominates the corner of the Suffolk Road End.

The game was competitive enough but seemed to fall down when the ball reached the danger zones. Before the game the Chairman came over to speak us, a nice touch. Half time 0-0.

Newington took the lead when Peter Gilgun slotted home after hesitancy in the homesters' rearguard. Shortly afterwards a Conal Burns penalty doubled the visitors the lead. DC set up a grandstand finish by converting a penalty given away by the keeper.

*contributed on 19/09/17*

**TT No.31: Brian Buck - Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> September 2017; NUFC Oilers v Crouch End Vampires; Southern Amateur League Senior Division 2; Result: 0-2**

I was due to watch a match on the previous evening, but on the way to Boreham Wood, to see the Woolwich Nomads play, the gear stick on my car suddenly wouldn't move and I got stuck on the southbound A1(M) and so I invited the AA to come and see me and my companion. An hour and a quarter later they accepted and I was towed to my garage. But there was good and bad news to follow. The bad news was that I missed not only my Friday night match, but also my intended Saturday morning game. The good news was that they identified the problem and got my car fixed, free of charge, after admitting to a mistake they'd made two days earlier and I was back on the road by 12.30pm.

So, I reached my chosen afternoon match at The Hive with time enough for a quick slurp in the club's bar which they like to call The Pecking Order. Didn't see any chickens cross the road though! More drink needed! Anyway, this game was played on the most northerly of the 9 full size pitches they have here, which was handy for later on as it was only a short walk from there to Canons Park Tube station, making it easy get to Wembley Stadium for my evening match. This was the fifth of the 9 pitches that I've seen games on here and that doesn't include Barnet FC on the main pitch, who were away today.

I tried to find out more about the name NUFC Oilers. The first bit was easy, NUFC stands for Nottingham University and they are really their Old Boys side. But no one seemed to know where the 'Oilers' part came in. I was fobbed off with the fact that it was their nickname. Then one chap said it was because they played slick football and I suggested that it might be because they looked a greasy bunch to me. I know how to make friends easily you know! Anyway, this wasn't a great game. It seems that the visitors, newly relegated, play their best stuff in midweek games at the end of the season, just as it is getting dark! They spent a lot of time trying to wind up the ref. I've seen him ref quite a bit and I like him, especially as he can be just as awkward if he doesn't get respect he should have. So, on a decent but exposed pitch on a raised plateau it was the hosts who won this rather ordinary match with goals on 18 and 26 minutes with the second one going in off the post and the keeper. While this game was going on I kept my eye on another match being played out two pitches down which was Old Garchonians 1 Polytechnic 1, which was a bit of a surprise as the hosts usually play their home games at the London Lions complex.

*contributed on 19/09/17*

**TT No.30: Steve Hardy** - Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> September 2017; **Olton Ravens** v **Bartley Reds South**; Birmingham & District Football League Division Six; Result: 3-13; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 14 H/C

Well, where to start with this afternoon's fun and games? Probably at the beginning is as good a place as any. Olton Ravens are one of several new clubs in the Birmingham & District League this season, but more importantly they are one of only three new venues left for me to visit.

Their base is the Land Rover Social club, near Solihull. This is an excellent facility with umpteen football pitches and also a rugby pitch, although ours was the only game taking place there today. The social club is massive, with loads of people watching the football on the wide screen TVs, or sitting outside in family groups enjoying the fine weather (until the heavens opened, that is). There are several portakabin style dressing rooms near the entrance to the site, and plenty of car parking for visitors and players.

Earlier in the season I had seen Olton Ravens play a pre-season friendly which they had lost 10-0. They were dire that day, but recent results had suggested they had tightened things up a bit, so I was not expecting a similar result again. How wrong I was. Talking to a referee's assessor before and during the game he was convinced that Olton would lose heavily again and he was correct. 4-0 down after just 10 minutes they rallied slightly to score themselves on 16. Game on? No chance, as the Reds scored another 5 at will, to lead 9-1 at half time. Their eighth goal was a long range headed OG, which resulted in the young defender who scored it, leaving the field in tears and heading straight for the dressing room, never to reappear. It seems his keeper had said some pretty stupid things to him after the OG, which, given his young age, was really sad.

After the break, it took the Reds 20 minutes to get back into their stride before three more goals came in quick succession. Credit to Olton though as they managed a couple of their own, the second of which being from a penalty in the 88<sup>th</sup>-minute, before the Reds sealed their victory with number 13 in the final minute. Olton even had a player sent off for two bookings, which he thought very harsh, and he set off for the Reds dug out to have his say. The referee followed him over and managed to move him away to his own dug out, but the funny side of that was that there was nobody in the Reds dugout for him to remonstrate with anyway!

So, another top afternoon out in one of my favourite leagues. Yes, the standard wasn't very high, but you couldn't fault the entertainment value.

*contributed on 17/09/17*

**TT No.29: Brian Buck** - Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> September 2017; **AFC Solihull** v **Enville Athletic**; Midland League Division 3 (played at Tudor Grange Leisure Centre, Solihull); Result: 1-2; Attendance: 32.

By now I was in possession of a courtesy car as my own car was at Columbo's, as I like to call it. They seem to spot things wrong with it that no one else can. So, my view that all that was needed was some gear box oil translated into over a thousand pounds of work in their eyes! So, I decided to take my replacement car for a bit of a spin today, on the basis of, why bugger up your own car when you can bugger up someone else's instead?

Anyway, I arrive at the ground just under two hours from home. Then it was time for food in the leisure centre, but no alcohol today. When I returned the £2 programmes were available. A free cup of tea or coffee comes with it, but this didn't make the programme taste any better. They make this offer to try and encourage people to pay to get in! I then took my place in the stand which had plenty of wooden seats, needed when we had a bit of rain later on. The pitch was in the middle of a running track, but the view wasn't that bad. On the other side of it there was an advert which read 'Sign manufacturers for over 65 years'. Fine for me, but what if someone under 65 years old wants one?

This was a match between two sides who had yet to win a league match prior to today. The game was almost over by the 12<sup>th</sup> minute, by which time Enville were leading 2-0. Things were going quite well until shortly before the break when the visiting keeper came out of his area and flattened the home forward, to stop him from scoring. He only got a yellow card for this, but the squabbles went on for some time. Then the ref ran over to the home bench and spoke to the manager. The reason for this was revealed by him during the break as he joined us for 'tea' rather than give his losing side a stiff team talk. He told us that he was too angry to do this. He then revealed that the female lino had complained that she had received 'gender based' abuse from one of the home players, but apparently couldn't be sure which one it was. The manager then told the ref that the camera around his neck was switched on and was recording everything he had said to him! Fortunately, things calmed down after the break. The football got better and Solihull managed to pull a goal back on 54 minutes from the spot.

*contributed on 14/09/17*

**TT No.28:** *Keith Aslan* - Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> September 2017; **Darlington** v Leamington; Conference South; Kick-Off: 15.02; Result: 0-0; Admission: £14 (£10 for old people); Programme: £2.50p (very good); Official Attendance: 1277 (including at least 7 neutral)

I'm not a fan of the Conference. Overrated, overpriced with a most ludicrous ground grading system which they use to get rid of teams they don't want. Cambridge City and Kings Lynn are just two of the clubs thrown out for minor infractions because 'rules are rules' unless of course you get crowds of six thousand then the league just ignore the rule about having a four-sided ground - Oxford United for instance. Darlington were stitched up last season, when with two months left of the season they were told they wouldn't be allowed to compete in the play offs, leaving it much too late to make the necessary ground 'improvements'. Their point that they should have been informed of ground requirements at the beginning of the season would seem to me to be quite reasonable, but reason has never featured very prominently in this league. The



club is busy making the adjustments to allow them to enter the play offs this season, but taken on today's performance it is an academic exercise. Oh yes and whoever decided that Bishops Stortford is in the north of England clearly wasn't paying attention in Geography lessons. This league is a 'shambles'.

In spite of hearing much negativity regarding Blackwell Meadows I liked the place. A 28-minute walk from the station, it has six rows of covered terracing behind one a goal, a grass bank behind the other and along the far side a local stand for local people, a no-go area for visitors who are thrown out because there isn't enough room. And here lies the problem, the ground isn't really big enough. It was o.k. for today's smallest crowd of the season but I wouldn't like to be there next week for the 2,500 they are expecting for the cup game with South Shields. It has a comfortable bar with food and the pre. match entertainment was watching Liverpool get tonked on a big screen.

Leamington were formed in 2000 two years after their predecessors A.P. folded. This is their first season in the Conference having been promoted through the play offs. Their most famous old boy is Harry Redknapp. I doubt many people could name their ground. It is of course the "Phillips 66 Community Stadium". Darlington's recent turbulent history is well documented and it's good to see them back in town although the ultimate aim of a return to the football league is unlikely to be accomplished at this ground.

The *Non-League Paper* gave this match one star which was being a tad generous. Leamington came for a point and Darlington weren't good enough to prevent them getting it. The visiting keeper started wasting time in the eighth minute with the rest of his colleagues soon joining in. The referee spent most of the match telling them to hurry up and pointing at his watch seemingly undeterred by the fact they weren't taking any notice of him. Try booking somebody mate that usually works! Leamington sucked the life out of this game in the second half, not that there was much life in it to start with. Remember when three points for a win was first introduced in we were told it would create lots of goals and exciting football as teams wouldn't settle for a draw and go all out for the win. What a load of rubbish.

The game started late presumably in homage to Darlington's sponsors, our old mates *Virgin Trains*. There is a similarity between football and the privatised railway in that being up to 8 minutes late is actually on time. Branson's private island was devastated by the hurricane and he was actually on it when 'Irma' hit. Sadly, he was unscathed so we will still have to put up with the publicity seeking little runt a while longer. The programme was an excellent read and well worth the money. And, while on the subject of football programmes, I am indebted to last week's Deal Town proggy for coming up with the most appropriate anagram in history. 'The new stadium' is an anagram of 'West Ham United'.

Another wonderful day out in the north east only partly spoilt by having to watch a turgid football match in the middle of it.

*contributed on 10/09/17*

**TT No.27: Steve Hardy** - Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> September 2017; **Rhosllanerchrugog** v Penyffordd Lions; Welsh Cup 2<sup>nd</sup> Qualifying Round; Result: 2-3; Admission: Free; Programme: by donation. Attendance: 8 h/c

I always seek out new clubs in the qualifying rounds of the Welsh FA cup, and as more often than not, there will be a new programme on offer. So, it was today with a visit to brand new club Rhosllanerchrugog, who are based at the local Rugby club on a pitch miles away from the changing rooms and clubhouse. Driving across Wales through rain of biblical proportions, I did wonder if the game would still be on, but my fears were allayed upon arrival by the sight of the goalposts being carried through the car park, past two rugby pitches, and on to the football pitch at the far end of the site. No spectator facilities at the pitch, with just a rope down one side to keep the spectator hordes at bay. In any case, the rope wasn't really needed today as the crowd peaked at just 8, with four of those being groundhoppers.

On the pitch, the visitors were another newly formed club, Penyffordd Lions. They were also formed during the summer of 2017, in their case from the ashes of the old Penyffordd club who had folded at the end of last season. The first half was dominated by Pen, who had several chances to score, but missed them all, giving us a 0-0 halftime score. A very short half time break saw us restart after just 5 minutes, and with the prospect of extra time in the rain and gloom, that was a very good decision in my opinion.

As so often happens, the homesters suddenly sprang to life, and took the lead on 49 minutes. Pen continued to be the better side though, and deservedly equalised on the hour mark. By this time the hoppers present were praying for anyone to score to avoid extra time, and we were delighted when Pen scored a second on 79 minutes. Relief all round until Rhos found the energy from somewhere to equalise two minutes later and we were back to square one. Pen continued to press though and after an almighty scramble in the Rhos penalty area, they managed to bundle what proved to be the winner with two minutes left. Phew!

*contributed on 10/09/17*

**TT No.26: Brian Buck** - Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> August 2017; **Hilton Harriers** v Pinxton; Abacus Lighting Central Midlands League Black Dragon South; Result: 0-3; Attendance: 55 approx.

Today was the first in a short series of very warm days, both day and night, so there was no need for more than basic clothing. To get here I caught a number of trains to Derby. Then after just over a ten-minute walk, to the bus station, longer if you stop off at the three pubs on the way, I caught the half hourly V1 bus to Hilton and got off almost by the entrance to the ground. With just under an hour and a half to go before kick-off programmes were already available for sale. No food here, but I had brought my own and was allowed to eat it on the premises. They also have a hidden bar here and after some discussion I found something to suit my taste. I'd been to another ground in this village/town, that of the Hilton Harriers who played in the 'Derby' Summer League for a while, but this ground is nowhere near that venue.

Today this was a match between the top of the table visitors and the second placed hosts. I couldn't quite understand why they used the railed off pitch, painted in the club colours of orange and black, furthest from the clubhouse, even though it was flatter looking than the other one. Surely, they will have to switch if they become successful and erect floodlights. However, on today's performance this will not be in the immediate future, as they were well outplayed by the visitors. Pinxton's squad contained famous names such as Jack Hawkins and Jack Warner. The former scored the first goal and the latter named was suspended today. They were winning 3-0 by the break. In the second half Harriers made a token effort to get back into the match, but that was all it was. Afterwards a fellow Groundhopper kindly gave me a lift back to the station which meant that I got home earlier than expected. The only fly in the ointment today was having a disagreement with a Manchester United fan who erroneously thought that Spurs should allow more than 3,000 visiting fans into Wembley, to make for a better atmosphere! I think that there would be an even better atmosphere if none of their fans were let in!

*contributed on 04/09/17*

**TT No.25: Brian Buck** - Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> August 2017; **Worthing Town** v Sidlesham; Macron Store Southern Combination League Division 2; Result: 1-5; Attendance: 43.

I travelled here by train, accompanying by some un-forecasted rain but fortunately it stopped by the time we alighted at the station. From there we had a 15-minute walk to the ground where we met a very nice lady in reception who told us that she was whatever fancy title she had given herself. When it came down to ifontributed on 04/09/17 the bar and food would be available we were told that it would be once her catering manager arrived! However, by now we had noticed her pretty delicate fingers holding copies of the holy grail for this club, the match day programme and soon she was lighter by two. We then had a longer chat which revealed that after a falling out the club have dropped the 'Leisure' of their name last season. They then played their matches at the far end of Palatine Park. But this season, under their revised name they are playing on the pitch between the clubhouse and the adjacent *Hungry Horse* pub and rather than wait for the catering manager to arrive I decamped there for an hour or so. I returned shortly before kick-off, just before the players appeared. I was a bit worried that the ref might be the same guy who sits in front of and reads the scores off the teleprinter as they come in. But unless he is an Olympic athlete, then I saw the actual bloke doing his stuff on TV a few moments after this match had finished. As for the game, it was really as one sided as the score suggests. The hosts tried hard but were plainly nowhere near as good as the visitors, who were 2-0 up at the break. This became 0-3 after 61 minutes, but I was pleased for Worthing when they pulled a goal back on 90 minutes, as they had taken their punishment with minimal fuss, but in stoppage time Sidlesham scored twice more to win by about the right margin.

*contributed on 04/09/17*

**TT No.24: Brian Buck** - Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> August 2017; **Abbey Hey** v Runcorn Linnets; Hallmark Security North West Counties League Premier Division; Result: 0-4; Attendance: 165.

This was rather a long day out on the trains, but nonetheless I enjoyed it. I was able to get a direct train from Peterborough to Manchester Piccadilly, which included some stunning views between Sheffield and Stockport. Then I caught a local train to the nearest stop to the ground, Ryder Brow, some 8 minutes-walk away. By coincidence I had followed a chap I had briefly spoken to at Manchester Piccadilly station almost all the way to the ground. So, I was pleased to be able to redirect him just as he was about to take a wrong turn right at the end. Turned out that he was a huge Wigan Athletic fan and we spent some quality time together during various parts of the day. Surprisingly there was someone on the gate some 90 minutes before kickoff. £4 & £1 programme OAP admission for me. Then it was off to the bar, where I manage to bag a couple of meat and potato pies. But what was I going to wash it down with? There didn't seem to be many bottles of Magners available and I needed at least four to cover my day's needs. The barman did a quick stock take and told me that he had ten! Anyway, it appears that the locals don't drink cider much, so I was safe! Then it was time to leave the busy atmosphere of the bar, filled up mainly by good natured visiting fans, and get out and watch the game.

In fact, most of the crowd seemed to be supplied by the visitors, always a good sign if their team is fancied to do well. They did so here today as the hosts didn't really turn up on the day and were 3-0 down by the 38<sup>th</sup> minute. After the break with the match effectively decided it was much more low-key and Runcorn added one further goal, on 86 minutes. After the match, I returned to the bar, primarily to await my train, but whilst supping my last pint I noticed a well-dressed man in Runcorn colours chuck an envelope and their players sitting near me. Rumour had it that it was thrown towards the manager and that it had about £100 in it! Overall a good and probably a memorable day out! Getting home took longer than expected as my train was delayed. I met a nice lady at Manchester Piccadilly and she decided to reroute via Leeds and Doncaster, while I stuck with my train. So, it turned out to be a romantic reunion (from my point of view) when we were reunited at Peterborough! This lasted until we reached Huntingdon where she got off. Alas not with me!

*contributed on 04/09/17*

**TT No.23: Brian Buck** - Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> July 2017; **Punjab United** v Sporting Khalsa; Friendly Match; Result: 3-4; Attendance: 50 approx.

Today I decided to let the train take the strain and with engineering works going on around Dartford I lashed out a few extra pennies and got to Gravesend just 22 minutes after leaving London St Pancras International, as it is called these days. From there I caught a bus to the ground, which I had to wait some time for it to arrive. However, I was chatted up by some pink haired granny while I waited! The bus stopped almost outside the ground and I headed straight for the entrance where I picked up a free programme, on account of my senior citizen status. By now I had been joined by another groundhopping friend, a Leyton Orient fan. Next

stop was the bar, but not the main one, as there were two private functions going on here today, namely a wedding reception and a 40<sup>th</sup> birthday party celebration. We were ushered into a small bar in between the two functions where we were joined by some home officials, who were very pleasant people to talk to and they were full optimism for the coming season, having been promoted into Step 6 football after winning the Kent County League last season.

So, this season they will play in the Southern Counties East League. Just before the start I attempted to buy some food from the outdoor burger bar. But despite there being no one in the queue I was told that I would have to order it from the bar we had just come out of! When I asked I couldn't buy it direct from the burger bar I was told "Security reasons!" I decided not to partake. As for the game, it was keenly contested with the visitors, from the West Midlands, proving to be the stronger side by the end. I watched the game from the seated stand and so kept dry from the rain. Khalsa scored after 5 minutes but by the 32<sup>nd</sup> minute Punjab were winning 3-1. It could have been 4-1 by the break, but as the potential scorer bore down on goal the half time whistle was blown. After the break Punjab wilted quickly, so allowing Khalsa to score the three goals they needed to win the match.

*contributed on 04/09/17*

**TT No.22:** *Keith Aslan* - Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2017; **INFINITY** v Stockbridge; Hampshire Premier League; Kick-Off: 14.59; Result: 1-2; Admission: Free; Programme: £1; Attendance: 29 (13 home, 6 away & 10 neutral)

For those who think this one is too far to travel, good news, they don't actually play in Infinity but the at the weird and wonderful village of Knowle which is 4 miles north of Fareham Station and has a door to door bus service. I've never been to a place quite like it. Constructed on the site of an old lunatic asylum it is a microscopic Milton Keynes (and I mean that in a good way). The entire place has been built this century with the new houses blending in with the remains of the hospital which have been transformed into luxury apartments, and anybody paying the prices they are being sold for would have been candidates for residency in its previous incarnation! A new one-and-a-half mile long country road is the only access to the place, although the bus sneaks out round the back through some bollards which magically disappear into the ground on its approach (How can they tell the difference between a bus and a car?). The place is unique and would be an ideal location for a remake of 'The Prisoner' with Knowle being harder to escape from on a Sunday than 'The Village' ever was.

Myself and another hopper indulged in some serious pre-match blackberry picking, but in truth they weren't much kop (nowhere near as good as Thanet blackberries), and on arrival in the village there was a large sign saying the next day's fete was cancelled due to the dodgy weather forecast. No climatic problems today with the spectators basking in The Last of The Summer Shine. The ground is pleasantly situated with a large car park, railed down one side and a building containing the dressing rooms and grub station which, as with the rest of the village, was all new. Like Immingham they put on their twitter feed that there was going to be refreshments and a programme, but unlike Immingham they were telling the truth. (Incidentally we are still trying to squeeze the promised programme out of our

northern friends. You haven't heard the last of this saga and more pertinently, neither have they). Infinity couldn't be more different, the grub was cheap, the £1.50p cheese burgers were magnificent, and for the professional hopper the team line ups were written on a whiteboard. A good turnout of hoppers, unfortunately one of the malevolent ones disgraced us with his presence. Continually whingeing, refusing to give the club a penny, he gives ground hoppers a bad name. But the other nine of us made a contribution to club funds, buying raffles, food and programmes so they must have made a few quid out of us.

The outcome of the match was a bit of a surprise given Infinity's previous record of played 5 won 5 but in an entertaining game mid table Stockbridge scored a goal in each half with Infinity's 89th minute strike too little too late. A glorious day out in the Hampshire countryside with the bus back, tastefully timed at 8 minutes past 5, actually having people on it, not always a given on country routes.

Finally, the question everybody wants the answer to - why are they called Infinity? I can now give you the definitive answer, nobody at the club knows. Like the Marie Celeste and the popularity of Ant & Dec it will forever remain one of life's enduring mysteries.

*contributed on 03/09/17*

**TT No.21: Keith Aslan - Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> May 2017; Ford Motors v Pilkington @ STYAL. Cheshire League Presidents Cup Final; Kick-Off: 14.00; Result: 3-0 to Pilkington; Admission & Programme: £4. (£2 for me because I'm old); Attendance: 110 (45 Pilkington, 30 Ford & 35 neutral)**

My final hop of the season took me to the wonderful village of Styal deep in the heart of the Cheshire Footballers Belt. All your food and drink requirements are catered for in this tiny enclave which oozes money from every pore. Ironic then that most people will have heard of the place only because it houses one of the country's largest women's prisons. Like the rest of Styal the football ground can be summed up as neat and tidy. Fully railed with a small stand and when I arrived the clubhouse was full of unhappy cricketers staring wistfully out on the adjacent cricket pitch which was slowly subsiding in the heavy downpour. Serves them right for arranging fixtures during the Manchester Rainy Season - January to December.

Good news: The ground is 6 minutes-walk from Styal station. Bad news: There are only three trains a day that stop there. Good news: One of them fits perfectly with a 2 o' clock kick off. Bad news: To catch it the referee needs to start the game punctually and there can't be extra time. Good news: He did and there wasn't. The four people, waiting for the train had all been to the football and I puzzled with the rows of bicycle racks on the platform. Who is going to bother cycling to a station with virtually no trains? To get to the match I went to the nearest railhead with a proper service, Handforth, which is a 35- minute walk and where I got an unexpected new Greggs tick. The best way to get to the ground is by plane with Manchester Airport only one and a half miles away.

Ford can feel very aggrieved by the margin of defeat with only two late goals banishing the spectre of extra time. The closeness of the game was illustrated by

the Pilkington goalie picking up the Man of the Match award. Rob Cork was the man in question and I was very taken with the opening line of his pen picture 'Cork by name, cork by nature, a natural stopper'.

With few alternatives, so late in the season plenty of hoppers made for this one and I spent the game in the pleasant company of professional northerner known to everyone as 'Lollipop Man' so called due to a previous employment and not a Kojak-esque sweet tooth. He was coming down to the Metropolis the next day for the non-league finals and because he didn't trust Virgin Trains to get him there on time (can't think why) he was travelling overnight by coach. Rather him than me. So, it's all over for another season with only a vacuous summer stretching ahead. Could be worse, at least I've got the election to look forward to!

*v2 contributed on 13/08/17*

**TT No.20: Steve Hardy - Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2017; Steeton v Wakefield City; West Riding County Amateur League cup; Result: 5-2; Admission: Free; Programme: £1; Attendance: 31 H/C**

What a super little set up this is! The village of Steeton is some 3 miles north of Keighley in West Yorkshire, and the football team play at a facility they share with the local cricket club in Summerhill Avenue. I received an extremely warm welcome when I arrived and the facilities are first class for the level they play at. Fully railed off pitch with the dressing room and tea hut block being behind the goal nearest to the entrance. Car parking is tight, so I parked my car at the cricket club which is just a bit further down Summerhill Avenue.

Getting there was an absolute nightmare with traffic problems seemingly in all directions. The match was a 1.45 start, but by that time the visitors had just 6 players who had made it through the chaos on the roads. A few more turned up in dribs and drabs, and we eventually started at 2.00pm. The match was very high scoring again, with the visitors scoring against the run of play after 13 minutes, and goals following at fairly regular intervals after that until, by halftime, Steeton led 3-2. After the break Wakefield didn't seem to be able to recreate the high intensity of the first half, with Steeton scoring a couple more on the hour mark before easing to a 5-2 victory.

A word of praise also for the programme. Absolutely stunning effort in full colour, on glossy paper, with 40 pages for just £1. OK there are loads of adverts on every page, but the rest of the content is top notch. The journey home was a lot easier than I had feared, as most of the traffic problems had dissipated, resulting in yet another top day out in Yorkshire.

*contributed on 03/09/17*

**TT No.19: Steve Hardy - Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> August 2017; Spittal Rovers v Whitley Bay Sporting; Northern Alliance Division Two; Result: 3-3; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 18 H/C**

The plan today was to visit the most northerly English pyramid club I hadn't been to already, with trip to the Newfields Park home of Berwick based Spittal Rovers. I had had a few doubts about this one actually taking place, I must say, as I couldn't see how visitors Whitley Bay Sporting Club could possibly get all the way up to Berwick for a 6.15KO. It was no surprise, therefore, to arrive at the ground to find the place deserted. A quick call to Secretary Sharon soon alleviated my worries though as she said the game was still on, but that they don't play at Newfields Park anymore and that the league web site was incorrect. Turns out they have relocated 12 miles south of Berwick to the home of Lowick United, so with time running out to make kick off, it was a speedy trip back down the A1 to Lowick for me.

Remote is probably the best description of Lowick. It is a delightful village in the middle of nowhere, with the football ground right on the edge of the village. What an excellent set up though. Two portacabins for home and away dressing rooms, a separate dressing room for the ref, and what looked like a kitchen area where people were coming out with cups of tea in their hands. The pitch itself was immaculate and railed off along one side. Lowick United have been playing in the North Northumberland league recently, but don't seem to have an active adult male team at all this year. I was totally wrong about the visitors making it in time too. They had a full squad plus substitutes warming up when I finally arrived, and we kicked off spot on 6.15pm.

The match itself was superb. WBSC took the lead early on, before the homesters equalised on 30 minutes. Back came WBSC to take the lead just before the break and they led 2-1 at half time. After the break, the visitors had a defender rather harshly sent off on 55 minutes, and Spittal took full advantage by equalising almost immediately, although the goal looked very offside from where I was standing. WBSC continued to look very impressive on the counter attack though with their young number 11 the best player on the pitch, and one of his crosses looked like it had been turned in for a 3-2 lead, only for it to be hooked off the line and hoofed straight down the other end of the pitch for Spittal to take the lead themselves. I really hoped the visitors would get something out of the game though, and sure enough, that young winger crossed again in the dying minutes and a deserved equaliser went in.

A wonderful evening's entertainment and credit to both clubs to getting on with it.

*contributed on 03/09/17*

**TT No.18: Steve Hardy - Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> August 2017; Shilbottle Colliery Welfare v North Sunderland; North Northumberland League; Result: 1-2; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 29 H/C**

I have a morbid interest in endangered leagues in the UK, and following the demise of my own local league, the Wolverhampton Combination, I now try to see a game in as many leagues that are teetering on the edge, as possible.



One such league is the North Northumberland league which is still with us, but now down to just one division of ten clubs. Today I ventured to the village of Shilbottle, which is close to Alnwick, and the Shilbottle Community Centre which is the home of former Northern Alliance club, Shilbottle Colliery Welfare. Not a bad set up at all for the level, with a fully railed off pitch and dressing rooms located in the impressive Community Centre. Not really any spectator facilities as such, but I was able to gorge myself on blackberries from the numerous bushes that surround the pitch!

Today's visitors were the league's team to beat, North Sunderland. The lovely and knowledgeable Shilbottle Secretary soon spotted I wasn't a local and gave me a full history of both his own club, and the visitors, who now have their own ground being built for them in Seahouses I was told.

The game itself was very good. North Sunderland were the better team throughout, but missed a good few chances before a slip by the home goalie gave them the lead when he allowed a shot to go through his legs. To their credit, Shilbottle managed to equalise in the second half, but North Sunderland scored almost from the restart to squash any thoughts of a home win for good.

Amazingly for rural Northumberland, the ground can be reached by a bus from Alnwick, which stops just outside the ground. Not sure if you can get back to Alnwick after a midweek game though!

*contributed on 03/09/17*

**TT No.17: Brian Buck - Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> July 2017; St Clears Reserves v FC Carmarthen; Clay Shaw Butler Charity Shield; Result: 2-7; Attendance: 35 approx.**

For my last game of my tour/holiday I ventured outside of Pembrokeshire and headed into Carmarthenshire. Although this game was on my agenda before I left home, my friend from Llangwm had offered me a better option and closer to base for tonight. But I rejected this because of out all of my pre-tour/holiday planning, FC Carmarthen were the most supportive and helpful. They are a newly formed and well-organised club who have been elected into the Carmarthenshire League. They will eventually be playing their home games at the Showground, once they get their pitch there sorted. Tonight, there was a miniscule chance of the game not going ahead, as I was told that shortly before kick-off that St Clears only had seven players. Eventually they mustered 12, whilst Carmarthen had at least 17 players. There was also a problem getting the goals onto the pitch as no one knew the code to undo the lock! Looking at all the players available, I struggled to believe that none of them were capable of dealing with this! Anyway, the code was found. (2501 if it happens again lads!). It soon became clear that this was going to be a resounding away win as the hosts were playing in a way which gave geriatrics a bad name! Carmarthen, an excellent side, were soon on top and led 4-0 by the break. They should have scored goals more really. Meanwhile the hosts best player was their young centre forward, who knew where the goal was, despite

not putting it in the correct position before the start of play! After the break although St Clears pulled a goal back they were tiring quickly and by the 80<sup>th</sup> minute they were down to ten men through fatigue. Earlier a visiting player went down far too easily for the liking of one St Clears fan who told him, "Get up, the wind's stronger than that!" Carmarthen scored three more times in this period, but the goal of the night came St Clears way when a 50-yard effort went in off the crossbar. Overall this was a great night out with some lovely people.

*contributed on 23/08/17*

**TT No.16:** *Brian Buck* - Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> July 2017; **Monkton Swifts** v Pembroke Boro; Weaver Callan Memorial Trophy Semi Final; Result: 8-2; Attendance: 45 approx.

Faced with an hour and a half's drive to revisit Penypon to get my fix tonight, I was very grateful to receive a couple of texts from one of the good people of Llangwm telling me about this game at Monkton Swifts tonight. Just a pity that the first of these arrived at 7.15am while I was still asleep! I thought that it was my alarm clock! Anyway, this was much better for me as the ground was only four miles from where I was staying. I'd seen the outside of the ground on the previous Sunday when I was Church Hopping! But I hadn't realised just how nice it was until tonight. The ground is railed off on two sides. The players enter the pitch from the middle of the stand, has seating for perhaps 80 spectators. Later I found out that this club once played in the Welsh League. However, there was a massive slope on the pitch. It also need a cut and favoured players with one leg longer than the other! Meanwhile the hosts reserve team manager was sitting in front of me and he reeled off a list of dates and opposition for forthcoming friendly matches. Rattling them off rather quickly and almost in the same breath he told his listener that there would be no game on one particular Saturday because he was getting married and then continued reeling off fixtures. Not particularly funny in print, but it was at the time. The match was as one sided as the score-line suggests and the hosts were 5-0 up at the break. There was friction in the crowd though. When one Swifts player put in a dodgy tackle an elderly but very vocal visiting female fan shouted out that this game was only a friendly and it wasn't needed. But as soon as a Boro player put in a dodgy tackle her comments were repeated back to her by the Swift fans. The banter became more intense and coarse. Eventually she complained to a home official who threatened to kick the Swift fans out of the club. However, this would have created a problem, as they included the reserve team manager and some of his players. And was it not her who uttered the first 'F' word? In the second half things became more even. Monkton only score three more goals and Pembroke got a couple at the end themselves.

*contributed on 23/08/17*

**TT No.15:** *Brian Buck* - Monday 24<sup>th</sup> July 2017; **West Dragons** v Llangwm; Friendly Match; Result: 5-2; Attendance: 50 approx.

From watching football on one of the better grounds in the county on the previous Saturday, it was time to visit the worst one I saw tonight. It's in Haverfordwest and it was just as well that I took some time to find it earlier in the afternoon leading

up to the game. The entrance is a narrow driveway between two houses and there is no dropped kerb to make this any easier either. But once inside the ground the whole place opened up and there was plenty of parking. Facilities were spartan too. In terms of football furniture all they had was a couple of rusty portakabins. However, the pitch was very well prepared and also, as this ground is on the top of a hill, the views were spectacular. Furthermore, on this showing West Dragons looked as good, if not better, than Goodwick and come the end of the season it will be interesting to see which side does the best. Dragons were a goal up after 41 seconds and the scorer would also get the last goal on 73 minutes. The other three goals came in the first half and were scored by someone who should be playing at a much higher level, rather than just on the top of a hill! With both sides making a number of substitutions after the break the game became more even and Llangwm deserved their two goals.

*contributed on 23/08/17*

**TT No.14: Brian Buck - Saturday 22nd July 2017. Goodwick United v Llanelli Town; Friendly Match; Result: 1-3; Attendance: 300 approx.**

After having lunch with my wife, I left her to ponder the delights of St Davids Cathedral and headed the 16 or so miles north to Goodwick, which is near Fishguard. Parking was free and easy. There was no admission charge here and no programme issued either. But with the game attracting the attention of the locals, they could have made quite a bit today had they wanted to. Anyway, I did give them a bit of cash, via the bar, which not only has a balcony which overlooks the football pitch, but it also overlooks the rugby pitch behind it as well. The ground is railed off and has a small stand, with shallow seating, which I patronised until the partners of the home players blocked my view with their little ones, oblivious to the fact that a football match was taking place. It seemed like one of the criteria for playing for this club is that you must not only have a female partner, but also have the ability to get her pregnant as quickly as possible! As for the game, it was a decent one. Goodwick have been just about the best side in the Pembrokeshire League for a few years now and Llanelli, trying to return to their glory days, will be playing in Welsh League Division 1 this season. It was they who took the lead on 27 minutes. Then on 43 minutes, Welsh legend of the lower leagues, Lee Trundle and perhaps the reason why the attendance was so high, drew his marker into fouling him inside the box, but his resultant spot kick was saved. But he did get on the scoresheet on 53 minutes and Lanelli scored again on 8 minutes later. Goodwick did score on 75 minutes and their manager told me that his name was Dalling. At the time, I thought he said Darling, which probably explains the funny look I got when I confirmed it with him!

*contributed on 23/08/17*

**TT No.13: Brian Buck - Friday 21<sup>st</sup> July 2017; Letterston v Hundleton; Friendly Match; Result: 3-4; Attendance: 15 approx.**

This ground is just off the Haverfordwest to Fishguard road and I arrived at the same time as a short rain storm did, but fortunately the changing rooms here have a sufficiently large overhang, so no one got wet, apart from those you either

needed or wanted to! But it soon stopped and most of the game was played out in bright sunshine. This also a rather scenic ground and the pitch sloped sharply. At one point, I thought that there might be programmes for the game, but the box they might have been in was actually used to remove some shit from the playing area. Meanwhile as I watched the game a couple of girls were kicking a ball about in front of me. Bearing in mind that they were probably under the age of 15, I wondered quite what kind of person one of their mothers must be, to let her daughter go running around, with 'Nope not tonight' emblazoned on her top! Meanwhile in the distance it seemed that our attendance might get swelled as I spotted a gang of women piling out of a pub. But it seemed that they were on some kind of pub crawl and they all jumped on a waiting coach which soon drove off. As for the match, reffed for the most part by the home manager and fairly at that, Letterston went a goal up on 3 minutes with Hundleton equalising six minutes later. But kicking down the slope Letterston were winning 2-1 at the break following a successful spot kick on 20 minutes. I think words might have been said to the Hundleton players during the break as they equalised 74 seconds into the restart and then took the lead on 55 minutes. A further goal seven minutes later made it 2-4 before Letterston scored the final goal of an enjoyable even four minutes from time.

*contributed on 23/08/17*

**TT No.12: Brian Buck - Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> July 2017. Haverfordwest County U19 v Fishguard Sports (Played on Haverfordwest County Training Pitch); Friendly Match; Result: 3-3; Attendance: 35 approx.**

Today marked the first game in my football tour of West Wales, which my wife prefers to call it 'Our Holiday!' However, all did not go well. We arrived at our Bed & Breakfast in good time. I also left our base with sufficient time to get to the ground and my sat nav told me that I would get there half an hour early for this advertised 6.30pm kick off. But somehow, I ended up in Milford Haven rather than in Haverfordwest, without so much of a 'recalculating' from my normally trusty sat nav. Once I had eliminated the possibility that Haverford West had moved to Milford Haven, I headed off to the correct town, with no knowledge as to where the ground was, especially as my sat nav was playing up. Eventually I found an ambulance station where I was given directions. But I still couldn't find the place. Then I rang up the home secretary who confirmed that the postcode was actually right, a fact confirmed when I tried to enter it again in my sat nav and it now worked. Turned out that I had actually driven past the entrance to the ground without knowing it! The game was played out on the training pitch, next to the main ground, which I expected. I had missed the start and also a goal for the hosts. Then the half time whistle went at about 7.08 pm and I realized, that they must have kicked off early as I had only witnessed just over 15 minutes of football! But at least I saw Fishguard equalise in this period. The second half was thankfully quite exciting as County retook the lead on 48 minutes. But then Fishguard equalised and went into the lead with goals on 51 and 60 minutes. But now it had started to rain and I had to return to the car to get a coat and broly, but I was back in time to see County's equaliser on 71 minutes with a shot which was at least two feet over the line, even though it never reached the back of the net!

*contributed on 23/08/17*

**TT No.11: Keith Aslan - Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> August 2017; IMMINGHAM TOWN** v Sleaford Sports Amateurs; Lincolnshire League; Kick-Off: 15.02; Result: 3-0; Admission: Free; Programme: ha! ha! Attendance: 76 (67 home, 3 away & 6 neutral)

The Immingham Town *facebook* page was really promoting this one, first game on their new ground (or more accurately their new partly roped off pitch), with a programme and refreshments as part of the celebrations. This was just a tad inaccurate as there wasn't a programme or refreshments. This resulted in some unhappy hoppers, particularly the one who had phoned up a couple of days earlier to confirm the paper. An attempt was made to call the person from the ground (the culprit was apparently in Newcastle) but he wisely wasn't answering his phone. The club official we dealt with at the game was very apologetic and helpful. We gave him our names and addresses and he promised to send us a retrospective copy. He seemed pretty genuine but I shall wait and see if anything drops through my letterbox in the coming weeks. Their *facebook* page stated the reason for lack of paper was due to 'problems'. Problem was the person putting the stuff on there didn't know what he was talking about. It also gave the attendance as 130, presumably when I did my headcount 54 people had gone off looking for the programme seller.

Immingham ain't the easiest place to visit. Quickest and simplest route is to get the excellent 'Trans Pennine Express' to Haborough then walk the two and a half miles into town. But with groundhoppers and exercise having a very distant relationship, Stallingborough, the next station along the line, offers a 20- minute bus service but only local trains stop there. I chose the walking option as my knee doctor keeps insisting it's good for me! Haborough is a very small village that only has a pub and a gun shop. Handy place to live if you want to shoot somebody but not so good if you run out of milk. If you don't mind getting to the ground early there is a regular bus into Immingham from here, regular as in one a day at 8 o'clock in the morning. Immingham itself is an unexpectedly pleasant place, it got a gold award last year for the Britain in Bloom competition and looks to be aiming for a repeat this year. It has loads of seats all over the place, all freshly painted black with none of them vandalised. Only one famous person has ever come from Immingham but as it's the Soham murderer Ian Huntley I don 't expect the local tourist board push it very strongly.

If you enjoy the aesthetics of a football ground then Immingham Town probably isn't for you, soulless just about sums it up. But it does have impressive brand new changing rooms still with the lingering aroma of fresh paint. Mein host gave the hoppers a tour of the facilities but with everybody else from the north of England I had to explain what the showers were for. The team won the Supplementary Cup last season and for some unknown reason it was set up on a table in the middle of the changing rooms. Inspirational maybe? If so it worked with a fairly straightforward win for the home team.

Not for the first time a big thank you to Stockport's finest for a lift out of town after the game. Now alas flying solo after his four- legged friend went to Doggy Heaven. I do miss him in the car jumping up on my knees and licking my face. It just isn't the same when Len does it.

*contributed on 20/08/17*

**TT No.10: Steve Hardy** - Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> August 2017; **Leicester Three Lions v Kibworth Town**; Leicester & District League Premier Division; Result: 2-1; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 2 h/c

The opening round of games in the Leicester & District League threw up a fair few interesting games, with my return to the village of Desford being the one I decided on. As I arrived at the Kirkby Road ground and spotted the 'Sport in Desford' sign on the clubhouse wall, I had a horrible feeling that I had been here before. My only other visit to Desford had been to see Desford FC in 2009, and they too had a huge 'Sport in Desford' sign on their clubhouse wall. Luckily a look on the interweb allayed my fears and showed that Sport in Desford are responsible for several sports facilities in Desford including this Kirkby Road ground, and I hadn't been here before after all.

The ground is fairly basic, with two full sized grass pitches, a good sized changing room block, and a kiddie's play area next to the limited car park. With the Lions Reserves also at home today, the car park was chokka, but there is ample street parking available just outside the ground. On the pitch the Lions dominated the first half but only led 1-0

at the break. The visitors looked completely out of sorts and were arguing amongst themselves long before half time. They were slightly better in the second half but a goal each meant a deserved 2-1 win for the Lions. On the second pitch their reserves won 9-0 after leading 5-0 at the break. The league's Fulltime site initially gave the result as 9-0 to CFA FC, but it was definitely a home win!

My limited experience of this league is entirely positive, and I can thoroughly recommend seeing a match in it.

*contributed on 20/08/17*

**TT No.9: Brian Buck** - Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> July 2017. **Briston v Schoolhouse**; Nick Raven Shield Final; Result: 2-2 (Briston won 4-3 on penalties) (6.30pm kick off) Attendance: 100 approx.

After the previous match at the Haverhill Borough 3G pitch had finished we made an unhurried hour and three quarters trip to Briston, which is roughly 10 miles east of Fakenham. Here I was soon seized upon by the avid local photographer who according to his blog is Wealdstone's official photographer and five minutes later I was busy having my picture taken and very nice it looked too when I saw it. There was just time to nip off to the local chip shop and to wash it down with something from the bar before the game started. This competition was held in memory of popular and well-known local man Nick Raven, who did a lot of corporate work for Norwich City before he died following a brain tumour.

There are a number of miniature shields on the main shield and so it seems that this competition, involving 8 sides this year, will become an annual event. The game was a physical one: "something Schoolhouse didn't like," the Briston people told me. Although they are a successful Norfolk Sunday side they apparently don't

like being tackled. Briston, under the leadership of their young excitable manager, “like to get a few challenges in.” Things went well for the most part. Briston took a 34<sup>th</sup> minute lead, doubling it on 69 minutes with a tremendous 30- yarder. But within a minute Schoolhouse pulled a goal back. Then the problems started. On 78 minutes, the Schoolhouse keeper fouled a Briston player near the corner flag and the ‘middle of the pitch’ ref sent him off. Schoolhouse didn’t like this and started to walk off the pitch. Eventually they were persuaded to return and after the ref agreed to overturn his red card the game continued. Then on 90(+5) minutes Schoolhouse equalised. Eventually this half lasted 62 minutes. Then it was on to spot kicks where Briston prevailed. The order they were taken seemed to vary though and, later on, I found out that this was the new ABBA system they are trialing in some areas this season. So, this was *The Name of the Game!*

*contributed on 13/08/17*

**TT No.8:** *Steve Hardy* – Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> August 2017; **Marshalls** v West Kirby; West Cheshire League Division One; Kick-Off: 2.00pm; Result: 1-0; Admission; Free; Paper: No; Crowd of 10

Match two today was reached by a number 82 bus from Liverpool South Parkway station with a journey time of just 10 minutes. Marshalls were playing their first home match in the top division of the West Cheshire league, following promotion last season. The action took place at the John Moores University IM Marsh campus. This is the Sports campus for all the John Moores students, and has an outdoor grass rugby pitch, fully railed off football pitch and a 3G in a cage hockey pitch. Indoors there are also a couple of gymnasiums and a sports hall for badminton etc. All very impressive, and I am guessing that the university play BUCS matches here as well.

The visitors today were West Kirby, from the Wirral, and most of the crowd of just 10 were following them. A very even first half saw both sides cancel each other out and end goalless. It would take a moment of magic to separate the two sides, and this came in the form of a mazy run and excellent finish by a Marshalls forward on the hour mark, which sent the home bench wild with joy.

I much prefer the West Cheshire league to the Liverpool League as the latter is far more violent in my limited experience. That said, today’s match had a few handbags moments as well, but they were well handled by the excellent referee.

Another very long and tiring day out eventually game good, despite the problems created by the *Merseytravel* bus companies!

*contributed on 13/08/17*

**TT No.7:** *Keith Aslan* - Saturday 12th August 2017; **JARROW** v Easington Colliery; Northern League Div. 2; Kick-Off: 14.59; Result: 3-2; Admission: £5; Programme: £1; Attendance: 116 (81 home, 22 away & 14neutral)

Jarrow have made it into the Northern League at last and there is a buzz about the place to complement their new- found status. The ground is a 15-minute walk from Brockley Whinns metro station, the same alighting point for Jarrow Roofing which is 25 minutes in the opposite direction. The ground is pretty basic, obviously

enclosed, railed and floodlit with the obligatory *Atcost* structure, one of the smaller examples of the genre and, it would have been woefully inadequate to shelter the crowd had the incessant precipitation not taken a welcome tea break during the match. Pies, burgers and my personal favourite, hot dogs, were on sale an hour before kick-off but somewhere to sit and eat them out of the rain would have been welcome. There is no clubhouse here. Badges were also available for metal detectorists.

There are two large flags tied up behind the goal with one of them proudly stating that 'there is only one team in Jarrow'. When I queried the numerical accuracy of that statement with an official I was put right in no uncertain terms. Jarrow Roofing don't play in Jarrow, it is in fact the name of a local company. Now I didn't think that sort of advertising was allowed at this level, but I suppose you can forgive the F.A. for not picking up on it, they must have their hands full at the moment, with the banning of cutting pretty patterns into a football pitch. It's good to see them tackling the major issues that blight our national sport. How often have you heard the plaintive lament from football supporters "if only the pitch was cut in straight lines".

Having rained all morning up to kick off, and again in the evening, the weather gods took pity on the spectators and the sun shone during the game in which Jarrow garnered their first Northern League points at the third attempt with an exciting comeback. As half time approached the home side were 2-0 down with 43 minutes on the clock. When the referee blew up for the interval dead on 45, it was 2-2, meaning some hasty alterations to both managers half time team talks. Jarrow got a deserved winner 20 minutes from the end of an entertaining game of football.

I might have mentioned referee's punctuality on an odd occasion before, but I make no apologies for starting the season off by saying that I can't recall ever having been at a Northern League game that's kicked off late and today was no exception. It's so basic why can't other leagues do it? So, hats off to Mike Amos (inventor of the groundhop) and his crew for running a highly professional league. I assume there's no secret to it, you just tell the referees to start on time and they do. Simple. And while on the subject of punctuality, *Virgin Trains* were spot on both ways today. What is happening?

*contributed on 13/08/17*

**TT No.6:** *Ian Brown* - Wednesday 9th August 2017; **Windle Labour** v Halebank; Cheshire Football League Division One; Result: 1-1; Venue: Bobbies Lane, Eccleston, St Helens. Admission/Paper/Refreshments: N/A.

Last season Windle Labour used a pitch adjacent to the St Helens Town facility on the Ruskin Drive Complex . A well-known traveller from a place on the A6 north of Preston turned up there this evening expecting to see this game only to be informed they no longer are there due to non payment for the use of the facilities.



Windle Labour now ply their trade at Bobbies Lane in Eccleston, it is the St Helens College (Bobbies Lane Sports Campus).

The pitch is behind the campus building, no furniture, it has the feeling of being enclosed though. There is no permanent rail, a taped barrier ran round the perimeter of the pitch. As mentioned above there were facilities for refreshments though toilets were available.

As mentioned above the member of the "Hopperati" latched onto the Mersey Don and spent most of the game bending his ear with his latest tales of travelling woe Wink ( lucky guy), whilst the Don's Henchman & yours truly retreated a safe distance. The other member The Litherland Scribemiester found a victim, sorry someone to talk to, as the don told us later on he was a traveller from the Warrington area.

As Halebank turned up in their red kit, as the name suggests the homesters also play in red and had to play in blue bibs.

With regards to the game it ebbed and flowed, with it usually coming up short in the final third at both ends, of the chances that were created it was a mix of good goalkeeping and profligate finishing kept the score line blank at half time.

The second stanza followed in the same vein, with one who does not like 0-0 's getting increasingly agitated as the half progressed. On 70 minutes relief, Halebank took the lead when an attempt at the far post floatingly deceived the keeper. Parity was restored shortly afterwards when Dean Curtis slotted home. Windle Labour had a goal chalked off much to the chagrin of the home dugout.

It was a pleasant way to spend a Wednesday evening in August.

*contributed on 09/08/17*

**TT No.5: Steve Hardy - Saturday 5th August 2017; Burton Park Wanderers v Blackstones; United Counties League Division One; Kick-Off: 3.00pm; Result: 0-3; Admission for a grockle: £3; Programme: £1. Attendance: just 19.**

Match 2 today was just 10 miles up the A43 in Burton Latimer, and was reached by driving through a rain storm of biblical proportions where only the plague of frogs was absent.

I knew that BPW are now sharing their ground with Kettering Town, but I had no inkling of the developments that had occurred in the last year. For a start, BPW are no longer the lessees of Latimer Park, their home since 1973. Their landlord had been charging them a peppercorn rent for the past 40 years, but once Kettering Town asked for permission to play there, the landlord immediately upped the rent to a figure that BPW could no longer afford and so Kettering became the main tenant. Speaking to club officials I learned that Kettering had built a brand new clubhouse which they don't let BPW use, and have plans to

demolish the whole place to build their own state of the art ground at which there will be no place for BPW at all.

The whole matchday experience was very depressing I thought. A crowd of just 19 assembled, including several from Blackstones, and a more one-sided match would be difficult to find. The visitors led 2-0 at the break and, in all honesty, it could have been 6 or 7. They added a third in the second half before taking their foot off the gas as BPW were offering nothing up front to challenge them at all.

A small portakabin was serving hot drinks and snacks, and the programme consisted of a 4 page insert inside a last season's cover. All very sad in my opinion.

*contributed on 07/08/17*

**TT No.4: Steve Hardy** - Saturday 5th August 2017; Kick-Off: 11.00am; **Northampton Town U18 v Southend United U18**; Football League Youth Alliance South East Division; Result: 2-1; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 42 Northampton Town's youth teams play at Moulton College in the village of Moulton. This is a far bigger facility than I first thought with umpteen football and rugby pitches spread over a vast area and no fewer than 5 different entrances to choose from. When I got there I chose the nearest entrance, through gate 3, and spotting a bus from Southend disgorging loads of young footballers, thought I must be in the right place. I was wrong. This lot turned out to be the Southend U16 team who were also playing Northampton Town today. To cut a very long story short, I eventually discovered the U18s were playing some way away through a hole in a hedge and along a narrow lane at the Chris Moody Centre, which I could have accessed through gate 4!!

The match itself was excellent. Northampton edged an even first half and went in 1-0 up. After the break it was still very tight until Southend got a deserved equaliser on 70 minutes. They were still celebrating when Northampton went straight down the other end and won the game with a far post header.

My headcount was 42 parents and groundhoppers watching the game, with a good few from Southend. There was also a small-drinks dispensing area back near the main car park.

*contributed on 07/08/17*

**TT No.3: Ian Brown** - Saturday 5th August 2017; **Creetown v Heston Rovers**; South of Scotland League; Result: 2-3; Admission: £4; (£2 Concessions); Refreshments available: Pies £1.50; Hot Beverages £1; Paper: No

Creetown is a small seaport town in the Stewartry of Kirkcudbright, which forms part of the Galloway in the Dumfries and Galloway council area in south-west Scotland. Its population is about 750 people. It is situated near the head of Wigtown Bay, 18 miles (29 km) west of Castle Douglas. The town was originally named Ferrytown of Cree (Scottish Gaelic: Port Aiseig a' Chrìch) as it formed one end of a ferry route that took pilgrims across the River Cree estuary to the shrine

of St Ninian at Whithorn. This is the reason why the local football team, formed in 1895, are known as 'The Ferrytoun'.

Creetown was formerly served by the Portpatrick and Wigtownshire Railway. The granite quarries in the vicinity constitute the leading industry, the stone for the Liverpool docks and other public works having been obtained from them. The village dates from 1785, and became a burgh of barony in 1792. Sir Walter Scott laid part of the scene of *Guy Mannering* in this neighborhood. Dr Thomas Brown, the metaphysician (1778-1820), was a native of the parish in which Creetown lies.

As mentioned above Creetown Football Club was originally formed in 1895 as Barholm Rovers and played their home games at Barholm Park Creetown. In 1905 Barholm Rovers became Creetown Rifle Volunteers Football Club before becoming Creetown Football Club in 1920.

Castlecary Park is clearly visible from the A75 with Wigtown Bay in the background looking resplendent on this august Saturday afternoon. If approaching from the east, exit at the first Creetown junction and the entrance to the ground is immediately on the right. From the west, take the second exit for Creetown. Entrance to the ground is on the right. Castlecary Park is basically part of a farmer's field, although a new log-cabin-style club building was constructed in 2013. It is the only feature of note at the ground. Refreshments were available from the side of the cabin.

The game began with the visitors attacking the Wigtown Bay end, the home keeper making a fine stop diverting a long-range strike over the bar. The match ebbed and flowed with the home taking the lead when Michael Sutherland tapped in from close range just before the half hour, chances came and went for both sides. HT: 1-0 Creetown.

The second stanza followed the same pattern of the first, end to end being profligate in front of the goal for both sides until Alex Dick gave Creetown a 2-0 advantage. The next goal would be crucial in the context of the game it was, a ball was floated in behind the rear guard of the Creetown defence and Sam Hughes ghosted in to the head into the net. Game On. Hesitancy in the Creetown defence saw Sam Hughes double his tally, it was now anybody's, both teams were not settling for a draw going toe to toe both teams had chances to take the spoils, in the end a cool finish from Sam Hughes maintained the visitors 100% record: played 3 won 3.

A decent day out helped by the friendliness of the locals. A pleasant place to watch football at this time of year.

*contributed on 07/08/17*

**TT No.2: Steve Hardy - Saturday July 15th 2017; Nantlle Vale v Meliden; Pre-Season Friendly; 2.30pm start; Result: 5-1; Admission: £2; Programme/team sheet: No; Attendance: 61.**

Nantlle Vale play in the village of Penygroes in North Wales, and are a club I have wanted to visit for some time. With several of my partner's family living there it was a good time to visit the in-laws!

A slightly better set up than the previous evening at Llanrug, I thought, with a proper stand down one side of the pitch and a length of covered terracing next to it, which proved most useful when the inevitable heavy rain started.

On the pitch it was a bit of a one-sided mis-match really and I couldn't understand why Welsh Alliance division two side Meliden would travel all the way over from Prestatyn to play division one side Nantlle Vale when there must have been more local clubs they could have played, surely? Perhaps the players were having a night out in the fleshpots of Penygroes afterwards. They certainly played like they had their minds elsewhere with comical defending contributing to at least 3 of the Vale goals.

Once again, the home players and officials were all Welsh speakers with the visitors speaking with that strange North Wales Scouse accent that is prevalent right the way down to Bangor in my experience. As with Llanrug the night before, the Vale officials couldn't have been more friendly and I was whisked in to the committee room where about 20 years of old programmes were stuffed in to a box, and I was given a good few to take home.

More stunning scenery all-around the ground, and I can't wait for another visit to the in-laws to be suggested!

*contributed on 17/07/17*

**TT No.1: Steve Hardy** - Friday July 14th 2017; **Llanrug United** v Bontnewydd; Pre Season Friendly; 6.45pm start; Result: 2-2; Admission: Free; Programme/team sheet: No; Attendance 55.

This was a keenly contested local derby, with Welsh Alliance first division side Llanrug United, and Gwynedd league Bontnewydd being just 4 miles apart. Both sides had plenty of vocal support in the very healthy crowd of 55, and with the home side being two divisions higher than their neighbours, I was expecting a comfortable home win.

The first half was bossed by Llanrug, who could only score once to lead 1-0 at the break. More of the same after half time, as Llanrug doubled their lead, but following mass substitutions by both sides Bontnewydd suddenly scored twice in three minutes to level thing up. After that it was end to end stuff, with the two teams eventually settling for a draw at the final whistle.

Llanrug's Eithin Duon ground has an eclectic mix of spectator facilities, with two small unusable stands each the size of a large dug out behind one goal, and a tea

bar along one side of the ground which has a very welcome overhang in front of it to protect us from the torrential rain. The people running the club were really friendly, and spotting my accent wasn't from North Wales dragged out their only committee member who spoke English to talk to me.

The scenery around Llanrug was stunning, with mist covered hills everywhere you looked, and the match proved a perfect start to my 2017-18 campaign.

*contributed on 17/07/17*