

TT REPORTS 2018-19

updated on 11/02/19

TT No.100: *Brian Buck* - Saturday 9th February 2019; **Yelverton v Fakenham Town Reserves**; Hadley & Ottaway Anglian Combination Division 1; Result: 2-3; Attendance: 20 approx.

Heavy rain on Friday afternoon not only scuppered my football watching plans that evening, but meant that I decided to wait until Saturday morning before deciding where to go. Fortunately, I got the heads up on my first-choice match and duly arrived at the Garrick Field an hour and three quarters later.

The ground is named after Mrs Y Garrick following a generous bequest from herself and other grants allowed the ground to be built in 2002. However, you would struggle to find it without prior research, as it is down a long track running parallel with the south side of the adjacent churchyard. In fact, in years gone by the chairman of the football club was the vicar at the time! No parking is allowed on site so you have to park at the nearby village hall instead.

There was hardly anyone at the ground on my arrival, but I soon learned that the local pub had neither food or *Sky Sports*. Then I suddenly remembered that when I visited Poringland Wanderers FC, a couple of miles away, (on 21 April 2001 - v Bungay Town, 2-1, Lovewell Blake Anglian Combination Division 1 match, attendance c.65), there was a chip shop nearby and so, headed over to see if it was still there. It was and I found a pub which had *Sky Sports* as well.

When I returned, shortly before kick-off, there seemed to be just as many non-playing people as there were when I first arrived, an hour earlier. But come kick-off the locals and some visiting fans appeared.

Yelverton are top of this division, but they can be caught, especially after losing to their lower mid-table visitors today. They got off to a poor start and were put under immediate pressure before Fakenham deservedly took the lead on 5 minutes. From then onwards they were chasing the game throughout. Fakenham deservedly scored a second goal on 19 minutes and were technically superior to Yelverton. After a welcome cup of coffee from the pavilion, built in 2016, at half time, the hosts brought on their number 14, who managed not only to blast a penalty kick over the bar, given 88 seconds into the restart, but soon missed a chance so simple that even I could have scored it! At the time of the spot kick a Fakenham player was sin binned for ten minutes and booked for saying some naughty to the ref. On 54 minutes a clever back heel saw Yelverton reduce the arrears. But just before the sin-binned player came back on his side got a third goal and this left Yelverton frantically looking for goals. They attacked persistently and did manage to score again on 83 minutes. But it was all very disorganised and really Fakenham, who had a few first teamers in their side coming back from injury, did everything right, didn't employ gamesmanship and deserved to hang on.

If you ask me, Yelverton's biggest problem was that they play in the same colours as the Woolwich Nomads. So, what can you expect!

contributed on 10/02/19

TT No.099: Steve Hardy - Saturday 9th February 2019; **Solihull Armada** v Netherton Tigers; Birmingham & District League Division Six; Result: 2-10; Admission: Free; Programme: £1; Attendance 19 h/c

Today's fix was an easy choice to make. This was Solihull Armada's last home league game of the season, and as they are rock bottom of the whole league on -1 points I really wanted to be there to see if they could actually gain their first win of the season.

They are based at the Light Hall School in Shirley, just outside Solihull. Behind the school is a 3G pitch which appears to be used for hockey, a grass rugby pitch, and way off in the distance are two grass footie pitches. That is where we trudged today, to be met by a heavy, but perfectly playable pitch which was never likely to see the game postponed.

Armada had put a lot of stuff on their *twitter* account encouraging their supporters to get down to see them achieve their long overdue first win, and in fairness a good few people did. Visitors Netherton Tigers had beaten Armada 10-1 in the reverse fixture just 2 weeks ago and they started the match in a fashion which suggested they just thought all they had to do was step on to the pitch to repeat that victory today.

Armada bossed the first 20 minutes and took a deserved lead on 17 minutes to send their supporters in to delirium. Unfortunately for them though, Netherton then realised they would have to work for their victory and they duly equalised on 25 minutes. At that point you could see the Armada lad's heads go down and they immediately reverted to the low on confidence bottom of the table side they had been all season.

Tigers scored twice more before the break to lead 3-1 and scored another 7 by the 85th minute for a 10-1 lead. Armada kept going though and scored their second on 88 minutes to half-hearted cries of 'we're going to win 11-10' from the home fans.

And that was that, except that the school staff had locked all the school gates so nobody could get out of the sports field and back to their cars. Ho hum.

contributed on 10/02/19

TT No.098: Keith Aslan - Saturday 9th February 2019; **WAVENEY** v Beccles; Anglian Combination Premier Division; Kick-Off: 14.01; Result: 0-1; Admission: Free; Programme: £1; Attendance: 48 (43 home, 3 away & 2 neutral)

More red-hot rail replacement bus action for me today as with most weekends for the past three years the line was shut from London to Ingatestone. The return journey was pretty awful, more of which anon, but this is what 21st century travel on the privatized railways is all about. The train stopped at Beccles on the way up

and I was expecting to be inundated with away fans travelling to the match. My expectations were unfulfilled.

Waveney's ground is a half hour walk from Lowestoft station, there are plenty of buses. Neat, tidy and fully railed, next to the characterful pavilion is a small portacabin selling hot drinks, snacks and a 20-page glossy full colour programme. The ground is adjacent to the old Lowestoft to Great Yarmouth railway line. Long gone of course, this part of the track has been turned into a road. Somebody has a sense of humour, it's called Beeching Drive. Mention for the referee, Matthew Hudson from Thetford who today was officiating his 500th match and I believe there was some sort of presentation after the game. Beccles won the toss and elected to change ends to have the wind at their backs. This proved to be a shrewd move as the only goal on 20 minutes was a lob from nigh on the half way line that was very much wind assisted. A cracking first half the game lost its way a bit in the second but still overall a good 96 minutes entertainment. Mr. Hudson even celebrated his milestone by having a proper drop ball (you know, the type it says you should have in the rule book).

Shared a taxi back to the station with a fellow hopper, so in good time for my train home. Cancelled. How I laughed. We spent an hour in the *Weatherspoons*, next train delayed, arrived at Ipswich one minute after onward connection was due to leave, no problems here, that was late as well. Turfed out at Ingatestone for a bus to Newbury Park. Tootling down the A12 at night on a Rail Replacement Bus isn't as romantic as it sounds. Eventually arrived home somewhat later than expected. Did meet a group of about a dozen young Amish on the train from Stratford, you don't see many of them about. Apparently, teenagers are sent out to travel Europe unchaperoned to get a taste of the outside world to see if they want to spend the rest of their life in the Amish community. What stunned me was that most of them seemed to want to go back to their 17th century lifestyle. I suppose after travelling round on England's trains a horse drawn buggy would seem to be a pretty effective method of transport. Never got to the bottom of why God doesn't want them to have electricity though.

Changing trains at Stratford I have to walk through *Westfield Shopping Centre* which was teeming with people. Not for the first time I wondered what sort of saddo does their shopping at 9 o'clock on a Saturday evening. Probably the same sort of saddo that spends 12 hours travelling to watch an Anglian Combination game!

contributed on 10/02/19

TT No.097: Keith Aslan - Saturday 2nd February 2019; **SOUTHEND ACADEMY** v Exeter City Academy; EFL Youth Alliance Cup Southern Section Final; Kick-Off: 11.02; Result: 1-2; Admission: Free; Programme: £1; Attendance: 138 (129 home, 6 away & 3 neutral).

Something a bit different here, but having watched a number of youth cup games I knew U 18 football is often as entertaining, if not more so, than the grown-up version and today's match did not disappoint. Possibly the 16- page programme

played a part in swaying my decision. Day started off on a bit of a downer with my train cancelled (dodgy engine) so a lengthy, but scenic detour round the Kent coast was called for. The boys play at the Southend training ground, 'Boots and Laces', a 20-minute walk from Prittlewell, which is a key station in Network Rail's weekend line closure project meaning I had a tedious 40-minute slog from Southend Central. Worse was to come when I found two of the three Greggs in the High Street have shut down, with the one remaining being the only one I've done. Life can be so cruel.

Boots and Laces has three pitches, an admin. block and most importantly 'Carmel's Kitchen' which served drinks and hot food throughout the morning, but Carmel could have done with a bit of assistance to cope with the half time rush. The middle pitch is where Youth games are played and standing is only allowed behind the goals. I can see why you can't stand along the same side as the players benches but I couldn't understand why supporters on the opposite touchline were driven back to the ends. The reason, I later found out, was at an earlier game this season a spectator standing along the side was injured by a ball so they made it out of bounds on Health and Safety grounds. Presumably you can't get hit by a ball if you're standing behind the goal!

The one-off programme was 16 pages of undiluted pleasure, perfectly laid out, no adverts and plenty of reading material with a colour photograph on the front of Freddy Eastwood Junior, a dead ringer for his dad but hopefully with more mainstream accommodation arrangements! The accompanying game held the interest with Exeter's winner coming deep into the second half. With no injuries or stoppages of any kind as far as I could see, the referee added on five minutes just because he could. The 'injury time' gave Exeter the opportunity to fill it up with a couple of substitutions and here the players showed their naivete. When their number was shown the trotted off the field. O.k. Usain Bolt hasn't got anything to worry about but I'm sure the coach will be telling the players when you're 2-1 up in stoppage time and substituted you don't trot off the pitch, you walk in a zig zag incredibly slowly. Why do these youngsters think the substitutions were made?

With most of the crowd going on to Southend United's match (same result) a fellow hopper invited me to join him at a nearby Southend Combination game. I'd rather spend the afternoon watching a box set of Mrs. Browns Boys, life is just too short. So, a rare Saturday evening for me luxuriating in my Broadstairs dacha. I soon got over the trauma of cancelled trains and closed Greggs to reflect on another Saturday well spent.

contributed on 03/02/19

TT No.096: Brian Buck - Saturday 26th January 2019; **Castle Cary v AFC** Brislington; uhlspport Somerset County League Division 2; Result: 4-1; Attendance: 20 approx.

Once again, I was fortunate to be given a lift today, with my driver and co-passenger going on to watch Street play, I was dropped off here instead. January is a good time for driving and there were no traffic jams either on the M25 or at

Stonehenge where there were quite a lot of people circling around waiting for the match to start! No pre-match food today, but the bar was open and I made use of it whilst I watched Accrington Stanley play Derby County on the TV. Their pitch looked awful, but it was nowhere near as bad as the one I was about to see today's match take place on.

Meanwhile on this cold blustery day rain was imminent and I was told that if you can't see Glastonbury Tor, about 8 miles away, you should head to the clubhouse immediately, as it was about to rain. This turned out to be correct in that in the first half I could sometimes see it, but not at all in the second half. As the game started so I walked round the pitch, looking for the best view of the game. The sensible place to stand would have been along the side where the permanent brick dug outs were. On this side there was a paved footpath and at one point a wall to lean against. The footpath was a public right of way and was frequently used by people going to and from the town centre. However, I couldn't get a clear view of all of the pitch from here, so I walked back round to the clubhouse side. As I did so I saw the full nature of this undulating pitch and from one corner it was a struggle to see all of the diagonally opposite corner flag. Also, at this end the pitch sloped dramatically down from the penalty area to the goal. The other half of the pitch was flatter. Well, as flat as you are going to get in these parts!

Castle Cary opened the scoring on ten minutes when a blocked shot was followed up and it seemed for a long while that the worsening wet and very windy conditions would prevent any more goals being scored. But on 63 minutes the hosts doubled their lead and then tripled it five minutes after that when a wind assisted free kick was parried by the keeper to the scorer who nodded the ball back over him. A further five minutes later Castle Cary concluded their scoring for the day. Brislington then deservedly pulled a goal back with a curling 25-yard direct free kick which kept low and out of the sight of the keeper. Afterwards it was back into the bar to wait for my chauffer to reappear. While I waited my genial hosts brought me some of the hot food the players were having and this was exceptionally well appreciated. This was washed down with a couple of cans of Scrumpy Jack to bring to a close an enjoyable day in awful conditions, but also one in which I was thankfully well looked after by my hosts.

contributed on 31/01/19

TT No.095: Steve Hardy - Saturday 26th January 2019; **KCC Old Boys** v Liobians; Liverpool Old Boys League Division Two; Venue: Football at Simpson, Hillfoot Road, Woolton, Liverpool, L257UJ; Result: 2-3; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 1 h/c

Liverpool has recently agreed a deal with the FA for the building of 4 'football hubs' around the city, at a cost of some £17m. Each hub consists of 3 floodlit 4G pitches in cages, lovely new changing rooms and even a café. All of these hubs have now been completed, so I decided yesterday to visit one of them, at the **Simpsons Ground in Woolton**, and attempt a very audacious triple.

Before the revamp, the Simpsons ground had been home to MSB Woolton and all their various aged teams. Even with the new hub now built, there are still at least 8 grass pitches left on the site, although all of them were waterlogged today so no matches could be played.

My epic trip didn't get off to the best of starts, when my morning game disappeared from the fixtures list on Friday night. I eventually did get my treble, but only on 2 of the pitches and not all three as I had hoped.

Rather than bore you all with details of 3 matches that you have probably no interest in at all, here is a quick summary:

Match One: KCC Old Boys 2-3 Liobians - Liverpool Old Boys League Division Two. Bottom of the table Liobians in their wonderful red and green quartered shirts pulled off a shock, but well deserved, win over their mid table opponents.

Match Two: MSB Woolton Reserves 2-1 Old Xavarians Reserves - Liverpool Premier League - Division Two. A match that had 1-1 written all over it was won in the 90th minute by a blatantly offside poke in following a goalmouth scramble.

Match Three: South Mersey 1-0 MSB Woolton 3rds - Liverpool Old Boys League Division One. Apparently, Woolton beat South Mersey 4-1 in the reverse fixture last week. Difficult to see how they managed that as they never looked like scoring today.

Then the fun and games started. On my way back to South Liverpool Station after the game, to save time and ensure I made it in time for my booked train, I decided to take a short cut down a public footpath that I had noticed on my way up in the morning. Not the most sensible decision I have ever made, as this involved a trudge along a muddy waterlogged path, through the middle of Springwood Cemetery, in fading light and pouring rain. There were some strange noises emanating from the surrounding headstones, I can tell you, and several ghostly shapes passed me on the path. Of course, they could have been dog walkers taking Fido out for his evening constitutional, but we know better than that, don't we readers?

Just one question remains to be answered now. I was the only spectator at all three games today. Does that mean my total attendance figure today was 3 or one?

contributed on 27/01/19

TT No.094: *Keith Aslan* - Saturday 26th January 2019; **CAISTER** v Scole; Anglian Combination Premier Division; Kick-Off: 13.58 (yippee); Result: 4-2; Admission: Free; Programme £1 with a free slice of cake for every one purchased; Attendance: 39 (37 home, 0 away & 2 neutral)

If like me football programmes and wanton greed are your two primary lifestyle choices then this is the club for you with a free slice of cake issued with every programme (what am I going to do with six programmes?). It proves you can have your cake and eat it but I wouldn't hang about paying Caister a visit as it can't be

long before they sus that a 16-page proggy. and a slice of cake for a quid is never going to be a money spinner.

Great Yarmouth is the railhead for this one with frequent buses travelling three miles up the coast to Caister. The ground is part roped, part railed with a new changing room block containing a comfortable refreshment room that doubles as a village hall. There is a large banner outside advertising that here is the headquarters of the 'Darling Cat Lounge' providing 'Cat therapy in your local community'. They meet on Thursdays if you're ever up this way but it seems you have to bring a cat along, a safe environment for them to interact with other felines apparently. Their facebook page is a wonder to behold with lots of photographs of the cats Christmas party and this wonderful institution is summed up by one poster 'It's a great way to meet cats'.

Back to the football, twice league leaders Caister took the lead only for Scole to equalise before the third went unanswered, the fourth was a penalty in the 93rd of the 90 minutes. Prior to the match I visited a nearby pub the 'Never Turn Back' which is adjacent to the site of Caister's original ground. Situated on the edge of a whopping great Caravan Park the place must get packed in the summer but today there were just two of us (plus two very sociable dogs) enjoying the thrills of Accrington Stanley v Derby County on the big screen. The somewhat unusual pub name is the motto of the local Lifeboat crew - Caister men never turn back.

With the Non-League Paper having an in-depth article on ground grading by the Head of the National League System now is an appropriate time for a rant. Top of the league, Caister will never be allowed promotion with this ground (getting promotion by winning football matches isn't an option). They have a site earmarked for a new ground on the outskirts of the village (you pass it on the bus) but of course finding the money to build it is a different matter. I told them they were better off staying where they are, promotion just wouldn't be worth the expense and hassle. I could write a thesis on what's wrong with the article on ground grading in the N.L.P. but to quote the sentence relevant to Caister "People who pay to watch football want to watch football in good facilities". Rubbish. Caister is a village club and proud of it. They provide a local football team for 40 or so local people to watch on a Saturday afternoon and the spectators are getting the facilities they expect from a club living hand to mouth that's kept going by a host of hard-working volunteers. Yes, the fans wouldn't say no to a covered stand, but unlike the F.A. they live in the real world where they understand the money isn't there to build them for clubs like Caister. In the unlikely event the new ground, enclosed with stands and floodlights, is ever built I would expect it would still only be the same 40 or so that turn up every week. Caister are a wonderful club, just keep on doing what you're doing at this level, serving the local community. Rant over (until next week).

contributed on 27/01/19

TT No.093: Brian Buck - Saturday 19th January 2019; Morecambe v Stevenage; Sky Bet League 2; Result: 1-2; Attendance: 1,422.

Today I travelled with the Stevenage Supporters Association, as I ticked off one of my few remaining football league grounds. Unlike many of my Groundhopping friends I have never been in a rush to complete 'the 92'. Although this was a very long day it was easy, because for the most part all I had to do was sit there and I doubt if I walked more than 100 yards all day!

So, it was that the coach departed the Lamex Stadium at 8.30am, which roughly coincided with the moment I realised that I had left my sandwiches at home! There were just 25 fans on board, with two more intended passengers never showing. The journey both ways was free of traffic problems and the only issue was one passenger who never shut up during the whole journey. He must have been on a sponsored yap! Within the hour we pulled into Peterborough Services where we swapped drivers. Soon afterwards for some unexplained reason I sustained a nose bleed. I had no idea that sitting around doing nothing was so stressful! Anyway, I managed to sort that out without troubling anyone and our next pit stop was somewhere on the M62 where we encountered fans from Ipswich Town, Gateshead and of course Manchester United, this lot coming from Lincoln. Do they have any fans who actually live in Manchester? Around this time, we passed by the snow covered Saddleworth Moor.

Eventually we arrived at the ground shortly after 1.30pm and there weren't many people around. With time to kill before kick-off we went into the pub by the entrance to the ground. We wondered if we would be let in here as we expected it to be heaving with home fans. But basically, such was the local enthusiasm here it was almost empty. We still had to drink out of plastic glasses though.

Then it was time for the match. All Stevenage fans were put in the seats and our coach load were joined by another 20 fans, who had made their own way to the game. We were housed in one end of the stand, but we got a good, high, view roughly level with just outside the penalty area. I'd been to Morecambe's old Christie Park ground once before, on Tuesday 11th October 1983, when they beat Worksop Town 5-1 in front of a 250 crowd (approx.). The early 80's were my halcyon days of Groundhopping and on the previous Saturday I'd seen Wigton (on the Carlisle to Workington railway line) play in an FA Vase match. Then on the Monday I was at Easington Colliery for an early evening FA Cup 2nd Replay and the night after the Morecambe game I was at Eastwood Town. I'd done all four of these games by public transport, returning home to Cheshunt after each game.

Meanwhile back to this game and after they played 'Bring me Sunshine' by Morecambe & Wise, the game started and Stevenage had a good first half, playing as well as I've seen them play this season. However, when they went into the lead from the spot on 25 minutes one wondered if the ref had made the right decision. Morecambe briefly came into it just before the break. In the second half it was largely the reverse of the first half. Now Morecambe piled on the pressure and when they equalised on 70 minutes with a hugely deflected shot it was well deserved. Furthermore, they had a better penalty claim turned down than the one that Stevenage were given. But Stevenage got the ball forward as much as they were allowed to and just when it seemed that a draw would be the likely outcome

and rightly so, Stevenage got the winner on 90(+4) minutes when the ball was headed home from a corner. Even then Morecambe had a chance to equalise.

Afterwards we were soon all back on the coach and after stopping once we were back in Stevenage shortly after 10pm. This was a decent if tiring day out and it made a pleasant change from watching Step 7 and below football, although I'm not sure if I'd want to do this every week!

contributed on 23/01/19

TT No.092: *Steve Hardy* - Sunday 20th January 2019; **Bloxwich Rangers U21** v Dudley Rangers United Beacon League Division 2; Result: 2-1; Admission; Free; Programme: No; Attendance 18 h/c

The Beacon League is quite a rarity amongst Sunday leagues, as they play on a Sunday afternoon, and not the traditional Sunday morning. Absolute boon for groundhoppers, of course, as you can do 2 matches in a day without much travelling involved either.

Today's game meant a mere 7-mile trip down the A34 to the 'delightful' town of Bloxwich, and the venue of the Stafford Road Sports Club where I had previously seen Bloxwich Cricket Club in action. The pitch is one of several at the rear of the club, and is reached by walking across the cricket square and through a hole in the fence.

Bloxwich Rangers U21s are top of the table, with Dudley Rangers in mid table, and a great many goals were anticipated by the crowd of 18. Sadly, it wasn't to be, as neither team seemed remotely interested in being there. In summary, Dudley took the lead on 10 minutes when the Bloxwich defence parted like the Red Sea and allowed the Dudley forward to run through and pick his spot. Bloxwich then equalised on 39 minutes, when the Referee overruled the Dudley linesman who was flagging furiously for offside, and awarded a debatable equaliser. 1-1 at half-time then.

As the two teams came to the touchline to have their half-time orange segment and pep talk, we noticed that the home keeper had joined three of his friends on the far side of the pitch. After a few minutes chatting the four of them just left the ground and disappeared in to the nearby housing estate and were never seen again. This left Bloxwich without a keeper for the second half, but in truth the substitute was rarely troubled as the second half was even more dire than the first. Bloxwich eventually scored the winner on 83 minutes and with the fog getting worse we were really relieved to hear the final whistle, and get back into our warm cars and go home.

contributed on 20/01/19

TT No.091: *Keith Aslan* - Saturday 19th January 2019; **PARK VIEW** v Bedford (they dropped the United bit 10 years ago without telling me); South Midland League Division 1; Kick-Off: 15.03; Result: 0-1; Admission and programme: £5 for young and old alike; Attendance: 16 (3home, 10 away & 3 neutral)

Park View don't actually have any supporters, the three 'home' spectators were the secretary, the programme seller and a WAG who turned up 28 minutes into the match.

I awoke this morning to see the winter sun beating down on my Thanet dacha but in the far-off land they call 'The North of England', snow was sweeping across the Staffordshire tundra, putting paid to my first choice of Foley Meir. But unlike our wonderful politicians I had a plan B and this was it.

Park View, a 15-minute walk from Wood Green tube station, play at a ground graders wet dream. A 2,000 seat stand down one touchline with a massive bank of terracing along the other, just what you need for 16 people. The 'New River Sports Stadium' is also home to Rugby League Club London Skolars, which with that spelling they obviously aren't. The view from the top of the stand must be one of the best vantage points in non-league football, it's just a pity there weren't more to people to enjoy it. If you came to a match against a team without such a large away following (by South Midlands standards) you could get very lonely. There is a spacious on-site café with hot drinks and nibbles served by a very obliging young lady.

I last saw Park View 5 years ago during their brief spell in the Middlesex Premier League. Same ebullient secretary, they played on the adjacent pitch, about the only 3g 'cage' I've come across containing a substantial amount of terracing. They only played a couple more games after I watched them before being thrown out after some injudicious tactile activity between one of their players and a referee. When the club refused to identify the offending player, the league took the view of collective culpability and expelled them. For some reason the detailed club history in the programme didn't mention any of this.

The real victims were the groundhoppers who were saving the ground for a rainy day and missed out. The programme then, as now, contained much about anti-racism, all very laudable but I'm not so sure about Park View's diversity credentials. I don't think you'd get very far in their team if you weren't Ghanaian. They pottered around the footballing backwaters for a few seasons before resurfacing in the South Midland League and gaining promotion at the first attempt. They are obviously thriving, but I can't imagine where the money comes from to keep the club going. A great set up, they even have a 'programme's officer' although a fellow hopper told me it doesn't mean what I think it does.

Harringay Borough's ground is only 400 yards down the road and you could hear the cheers as they beat my local bunch of no-hopers, Margate. When I did Harringay you couldn't even hear the crowd when you were in the ground. Good to see them progressing. Today's mid table match mirrored the one I watched a week ago with the away side snatching the only goal a quarter of an hour from time. Park View are a great little club creating a top notch matchday experience but I can't help thinking that a 2,000-seat stadium, programme and a café for an attendance of 16 isn't sustainable in the long run.

contributed on 20/01/19

TT No.090: *Steve Hardy* - Saturday 19th January 2019; **Netherton Tigers** v Armada; Birmingham & District League Division Six; Result: 3-0; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 4 h/c

Back to watching my favourite league in the world, this week. During the previous week I had been delighted to discover that two of the league's clubs had moved to new grounds, making 4 that I now need to recomplete the league. Two of those were at home today, so I decided to go to the club that first responded positively to my 'is it on?' text. That was Netherton, so off I went.

Their new ground is in Cradley Heath, at the Bearmore Playing Fields. This is basically a local park, with kiddies play area, a large car park, dressing rooms and two full size football pitches. As I drove in to the car park, my phone went off, and it was Shahid, the Secretary of Netherton, kindly ringing to tell me the game was definitely on. What a lovely man he is. He does everything for the club, even paying for equipment etc out of his own pocket, and we soon bonded over such things as both of us having Mo Salah in our fantasy league teams!

The match itself had been billed as the runners up spot showdown, with the two teams in 3rd and 4th places in the division 6 table. The result looks like a one-sided match, but Armada played their part, and if they had anyone to finish off their many chances, they could well have taken something from the game. As it was, Netherton scored on 4 minutes, and after a long spell of Armada pressure, they scored a second on 44 minutes, for a 2-0 half time lead. The Armada manager reminded me at half-time that the last time I had watched his boys play, they had been 3-1 down with 10 minutes to play, and won 4-3. Could they do the same today? Well, no, is the answer to that one, as Netherton defended very well, before scoring the 3rd goal after 80 minutes.

Finally, a brief word about our diminutive lady referee today. She was superb, and even a 22 man punch up didn't faze her. Can't give you her name, but she certainly wasn't Bob Griffin as the fixtures would have you believe!

contributed on 19/01/19

TT No.089: *Brian Buck* - Saturday 12th January 2019; **Denver** v Birchwood; UK Van Solutions North West Norfolk League Division 1; Result: 2-0; Attendance: 10 approx.

Although I could have reached this ground within about an hour from home by car, I elected to do the greater part of it by public transport instead. So today I used Cambridge North station for the first time, primarily because street parking here is easier than in Central Cambridge. My only gripe here was that they don't actually have a ticket office and it's all done by machines, although there was a man sitting at a table selling tickets. Anyway, 35 minutes later I was in Downham Market. From here it was a mile and a half walk to the ground which is right by the turning into the village of Denver off the southern bypass. With 75 minutes to kick off I was the first to arrive. Then someone else did and having confirmed that the match was on I headed off to the pub, a few minutes-walk-away.

Here I encountered four Denver players, to whom I said, "I hope what you are drinking isn't going to affect your performance as I've come to watch you lot play." They said that they weren't drinking alcohol, a fact supported by the barmaid. I then bought a pint of cider and ordered some food. However, while I was in the process of paying for it, I accidentally knocked over my pint, which partially went over the barmaid. Luckily, she was wearing black. This caused one of the Denver players to suggest to me, "Perhaps it's you who should stick to the orange juice!"

Anyway, I was back at the ground well before kick-off and already my reputation had gone before me! However, having seen the Tweet about this match I'd sent to both sides on the previous day I was warmly greeted by officials of both teams. The Birchwood manager told me that they were five key players missing with long term injuries. Meanwhile the hosts had been picking up some useful points in their past few games. Also, today we had a National League ref in charge, although as he explained to me, he usually only does lines and on the previous afternoon he was one of the lino's for Watford's U23 match at Wingate & Finchley.

So, a keen contest ensued and by the break things were evenly balanced. The second half saw Denver get on top and soon they were creating chances when Birchwood weren't. Then on 73 minutes the hosts number 7, having a couple of unsuccessful chances earlier, finally scored at the second attempt. However, in scoring his head came into contact with the keeper's knee. It was a complete accident. He collapsed to the ground with blood gushing everywhere. An ambulance was called, but it never came while I was at the ground. Eventually the player was carried off. For a while the bleeding stopped, by the end of the match it had started again. But both sides wanted to carry on playing and so after a 16-minute injury break they did. On 86 minutes Denver scored a second goal and the game finished at about 4.12pm with the light still OK. Then it was back into town to watch the scores come through in a pub before catching the train home.

contributed on 15/01/19

TT No.088: Keith Aslan - Saturday 12th January 2019; TREHARRIS WESTERN ATHLETIC v Trefelin Boys & Girls Club; Welsh League Division 3; Kick-Off: 14.02; Result: 0-1; Admission: £3; Programme: £1; Attendance: 89 (82 home, 6 away & 1 neutral).

Quakers Yard is the station for this one, a few stops down the line from Merthyr Tydfil and having visited this awful place a few weeks ago how my spirits rose knowing I wasn't having to go back to the 'Mad Max Heritage Site'. Treharris's ground is a half hour walk from the station, no buses. It is superbly situated in the middle of the local Parc Taff Bargoed regeneration scheme with the former colliery site being turned into a fabulous country park, well worth a wander round. They've made a very good job of this. Having said all that, the ground itself is pretty standard. *Atcost* architecture of course, floodlights which I don't believe are in use yet, and surrounded by a fence that you can watch the game through for free. No cheapskates at today's match. The changing rooms are a long way from

the pitch with the tea room doubling as a tourist information centre for the park with photographs of the old coal mine adorning the walls. Still a work in progress a canteen with hot meals will be coming on line in the summer, too late for me, I had to suffer malnutrition having failed to find a *Greggs* locally.

Three times in the programme opposing forward Lee Trundle was described as a 'Swansea Legend'. Surprisingly therefore that out of a 24-year playing career he only spent 4 seasons with the Swans. He has played for 17 (seventeen) clubs which makes him the playing equivalent of a groundhopper in my eyes. In his 45 games for Llanelli he scored 68 goals which is going it a bit. Today he is greyer, porkier and slower than his days as a 'Swansea Legend' and I'd be very interested to know how much he's getting paid.

Treharris Football Club is steeped in history. Formed by miners in 1889 they were one of the original members of the Welsh League and have had unbroken membership since its formation in 1902 although they've never managed to win it. By comparison Trefelin are new kids on the block, coming into being in 1984. Currently walking away with the league there is obviously someone at the club with a bit of spare cash.

I felt a bit sorry for Treharris who I would like to have seen get a point from the game, an ambition that was scuppered 15 minutes from time with a Lee Trundle assisted goal. The home side had Leighton James playing for them but I doubt it's the same one. No 'Respect' handshakes here, the Welsh think they are a waste of time. Believe me, so do the English. Down to 10 a side by the end, the Trefelin player was sent off with a second yellow for kicking the ball away. I doubt he'll be applying for membership of Mensa any time soon. The referee, who had an excellent game, looked about the same age as me, although obviously more mobile. Much kudos to him when the home side inexplicably decide to traipse the long distance back to the changing room at the break, he followed them and got them back out and playing for a 13-minute half time.

The trains all did what they were supposed to do, I spent my afternoon watching a tubby 42-year old 'Swansea Legend', and I got a programme. Perfick.

contributed on 13/01/19

TT No.087: *Steve Hardy* - Saturday 5th January 2019; **Corwen** v Pwllheli; FA of Wales Trophy Round 5; Result: 6-1; Admission: £2; Programme: No; Attendance: 48 h/c

The A5, is one of the UK's longest roads. Today I was able to get on it about a mile from my home, and get off it, 86 miles later, at Corwen. Sarah the Satnav girl was bored to tears. 'Follow this road for the next 80 miles' etc.

This was a minor champagne job for me, with the Wrexham Area league being finally completed after about 40 years of trying. I had deliberately avoided going to Corwen as it seemed like a super set up to end on, although it turned out to not quite as charming as I had hoped. The pitch is basically a railed off part of a public park, with a kiddie's play area near the entrance, then the footie pitch, and then

what looked like a cricket square behind that. Huge changing room/clubhouse complex along one side of the pitch, which also provided a veranda type covered walkway, which kept most of the crowd dry in continuous drizzle.

The match itself certainly started with a bang, as Corwen were awarded a penalty, missed it by miles, and nearly conceded themselves with barely a minute on the clock. That seemed to knock their confidence a bit, and it was no surprise to anyone that Pwllheli opened the scoring with a well worked goal on 7 minutes. Slowly but surely though, Corwen took control of the game after that and the equaliser came when the Pwllheli keeper flapped at a cross, and only presented the Corwen forward with a simple tap in.

1-1 at half time then. More of the same please, was the general feeling of those I spoke to for the second half. It wasn't to be though as it was virtually one-way traffic, unfortunately for Pwllheli, as Corwen ran them ragged with 5 more goals, the last one of which came in injury time at the end of the game.

I felt a bit sorry for the Pwllheli players and their coach load of supporters, as they were never 5 goals worse than Corwen. Still, that is why we all love non-league football. You just never know what is going to happen next.

contributed on 12/01/19

TT No.086: *Brian Buck* - Saturday 5th January 2019; **Marsh Rovers** v Alford Town Reserves; East Lincs Combination Division 3; Result: 6-0; Attendance: 10.

My chauffeur kindly dropped me off at this ground, which is in the village of Marshchapel, before he and our mutual friend headed off to Cleethorpes together, about 10 miles further north, although I'm not sure that they took the quickest route to get there! Now, I don't know what your definition of grassroots football is but for me you can't do much better than coming to a place like this. To start with, the ground is in the back garden of the White Horse pub and furthermore the club's secretary is Fiona, the landlady of the pub.

So, after a pre-match I headed off to the pitch. There was no sense of urgency to start especially after I pointed out to the ref that there were no corner flags. This was soon remedied. Then the match nearly started, but it was decided that there wasn't enough air in the balls. So, one of the away team returned to the changing rooms in a potakabin, brought back a pump, gave it to the ref and it was he who pumped up the balls. Eventually we started twelve minutes late, but no one was fussed really. Then the aforementioned Fiona appeared, with at least three bottles of *Smirnoff Ice* jangling in her coat pocket. In fact, as the game progressed, I held one of them for her as she retrieved a stray ball out of the adjacent dyke with a fishing net!

She told me that the current Marsh Rovers had only been formed two years ago after another side, Marshchapel folded. But years ago, her father played for the original Marsh Rovers. At that time, they couldn't afford any shirts, so Grimsby Town gave them a set. So, in forming this club Fiona insisted that they were called Marsh Rovers and played in Grimsby Town colours, in respect of how things were

when she watched her father play. Today she was a bit worried that as the first team of Alford Town didn't have a match, they might play a few first teamers in their reserves here. But although that looked a possibility in the first half when the game was fairly even, as the game panned out after the break it soon became obvious that this wasn't the case. In fact, one of their players looked even older than me and he was one of their better ones.

Rovers took the lead by way of a direct free kick from the edge of the area with just about the last kick of the first half. Then after the break things remained much the same, with Rovers being well on top, but being unable to score. Then on 63 minutes someone called Holland doubled the lead. Two minutes later he scored again and Fiona said that she would buy him a pint if he got a hat-trick. Well he didn't get the fourth goal, but he did get the fifth and sixth ones and by now he was demanding two pints! But he was lucky to avoid the ref's eye when he got his third goal, as he dropped his shorts and if there was anything to see then he flashed it at the keeper!

After the match had finished, I then returned to the pub to kill an hour or so before my driver came to pick me up to bring to a close a really enjoyable day out here with some lovely people on a day when I didn't have to do any driving at all, which was pure heaven!

contributed on 09/01/19

TT No.085: *Brian Buck* - Wednesday 2nd January 2019; **Walthamstow** v Redbridge; Essex Senior League Errington Challenge Cup 2nd Round; Venue: played at Wadham Lodge Stadium; Result: 5-0; Attendance:81.

I'd been meaning to revisit this ground for some time as my only other time I'd seen a game on this particular pitch in the complex was on 21st August 1985 when I watched Pennant beat Crown & Manor 3-1 in a London Spartan League Premier Division match (att: 50 approx). However, I have seen a few matches on the adjacent 3G pitch in the meantime. In those days the ground was rather basic, but I'm pleased to report that it now looks much smarter, even if it has a lived-in look about it.

There is full length covered terracing behind both goals, a bit of uncovered terracing in between the dugouts on the far side and a decent size main stand with good viewing sightlines. In short, the place has character. Walthamstow are last season's Waltham Forest, not to be confused with the other ground-sharers here, Leyton Athletic, who are last season's Wadham Lodge. It seems that around this part of East London no club keeps their name for very long.

As for the match, it was initially full of huff and puff with much of the talk amongst the Groundhoppers around me being about the sad passing of Les Bull and Colin Kempster, both well respected Groundhoppers. The former would have been in his element here tonight. Then on 28 minutes the game finally kick-started into action when the ball was bundled in almost on the line from an in-swinging corner. The hosts then doubled their lead on 47 minutes from the spot following a difficult

to see handball. The same player then hit home an impressive 30 yarder on 65 minutes and then seven minutes later a visiting player was red carded after getting a second yellow one. The game was now over but when the next goal went in on 74 minutes the home fans behind the goal apparently started shouting out, "We want four!" seemingly oblivious to the fact that their heroes had already obliged! However, when Walthamstow did get a fifth goal on 82 minutes, no more demands were made on the team. Overall a lovely return to a venue in an area East London I don't get to as much as I would like these days.

contributed on 09/01/19

TT No.084: *Keith Aslan* - Saturday 5th January 2019; **LAMPTON PARK** v Larkspur Rovers; Middlesex League Premier Division; Kick-Off: 15.00; Result: 3-1; Admission: Free; Programme: ha! ha! Attendance: 28 (10 home, 17 away & 1 neutral)

Having often 'bigged-up' the Middlesex County for its programme issuing credentials I came unstuck here. Programmes 'sold out'. Do I really look that stupid (no need to answer that!). If you haven't done one just 'fess up. I trust the league will be taking action, demotion would be an appropriate response. I put that idea on the back burner in my letter to the league secretary in which I asked if they could send me a photocopy when the club sent them in a programme for the game. I enclosed a stamped addressed envelope and ten-bob to cover the cost of photocopying and I await the reply (if any) with eager anticipation.

Lampton Park play at the brand-new Middlesex FA ground, Rectory Park. Northolt on the central line is about an-half-hour's walk away but as this is London buses from outside the ground are flying around to everywhere every few minutes. The set up here is very impressive. Two plastic pitches with the main one containing not one but two *Atcost* stands, floodlights and of course the reassuring green fence. There is a grass pitch 100 yards away that had a lower division Middlesex League match taking place. For me the on-site café was the big selling point with hot and cold drinks and meals available. A comfortable venue to relax while waiting for the game to start, watching the cup scores coming through on TV. With the games in blocks of 7 or 8 and three different kick off times I couldn't build up any interest in the FA Cup. It's been done for foreign television, but if I don't care how Cardiff City reserves are getting on why should anybody from the other side of the world?

Local derbies don't come any more local than this one with Larkspur Rovers playing just a mile away as the crow flies, but a bit further using the mean streets of Northolt. Having seen Larkspur a few weeks ago I couldn't make out why they had over 4 times as many supporters at this one than at their home fixtures. Clearly a big game (but not big enough to do a programme). A good match with the home side worthy winners.

All in all, another good day out. Apart from one aspect.

contributed on 07/01/19

TT No.083: *Steve Hardy* - Saturday 5th January 2019; **Balsall & Berkswell** v Gurdwara GNP; Coventry Alliance Division One; Result: 4-0; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 11 h/c

A definite case of CBA today, as I really didn't want to travel any great distance for my fix. Luckily, the Coventry Alliance is only about 30 miles away and the football served up is generally very good.

I eventually chose Balsall Common as my destination. The two villages that make up this merged club are midway between Coventry and Solihull and the team are the adult side of a very successful junior outfit. Their Lavender Hall Lane ground is most impressive for the level they play at, with an FA funded clubhouse/dressing room block, a huge car park, and several grass pitches for all ages.

Today's visitors are rock bottom Gurdwara GNP. They have only won once all season, and the 3 points they gained then have been taken away for an infringement of some sort.

The match itself looks to have been one-way traffic doesn't it? In fact, though it wasn't until late in the second half that B & B scored their last two goals to make the game safe. I thought GNP tried very hard, but just didn't ever look like scoring. In fact, I don't think they had a shot on target during the entire 90 minutes, so that is obviously why they are bottom of the division.

With two very zealous club linesmen, we had a great many debatable offside decisions throughout. Ironically, one that wasn't given, on 12 minutes, led to B & B taking the lead, and they lead 1-0 at half time. Just 5 minutes for the break and off we went again. The second half was more comfortable for B & B really. Despite missing a penalty on 55 minutes, they did manage a second on 66 minutes, and then a couple more in the last 10 minutes wrapped things up.

Overall, excellent entertainment. When I arrived, I was mistaken for the Ref, as he hadn't turned up by then. Luckily, the real Ref turned up 10 minutes before KO, and was very good, I thought. He handled all the moaning and abuse very well, and even earned praise from B & B on their *twitter* account.

contributed on 06/01/19

TT No.082: *Steve Hardy* - Saturday 29th December 2018; **Barnton** v Cheadle Heath Nomads; North West Counties League First Division South; Result: 2-0; Admission: £3; Programme: No; Team-sheet (full colour): Free; Attendance: 34 h/c (60 officially)

Match two today followed a speed limit-breaking 12-mile drive to Barnton. I have always had a soft spot for Barnton. No idea why, they just have always seemed like a nice friendly club from afar. And so, it turned out, with everybody very friendly, a super tea bar selling all kinds of hot food, and free biscuits with my coffee too.

The ground is loveably eccentric too. Four unmatching covered areas, one with seats that are all at the same level, so those on the back row can't see a thing. None of this mattered today though, as the crowd was tiny, but for a bigger game

it might be a bit claustrophobic. The far end of the ground is off limits to spectators too, but for a basically 3-sided ground I loved it!

I wish I could say the same about their players though, but I can't. Throughout, their language was dreadful, they were completely disrespectful to their opponents and the poor old Ref, who seemed used to the 90-minute tirade they gave him.

They won thanks to an own-goal on 18 minutes, where the unfortunate Cheadle player simply couldn't get out of the way of a cross shot, and a second right near the end of the 90 minutes. I thought this was a bit harsh on Cheadle actually, but for all the passing play on a really heavy pitch, they didn't actually have anyone to score a goal.

No programme today, 'due to printers being on holiday', but there was a free full colour team-sheet available at the turnstiles.

For a change, the M6 behaved itself in both directions, making for another top afternoon out for yours truly.

contributed on 30/12/18

TT No.081: Steve Hardy - Saturday 29th December 2018; Holmes Chapel Hurricanes v Winnington Avenue YC 94; Cheshire League Division Two; Result: 0-5; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 11 h/c

Part one of today's double was an easy choice. Holmes Chapel play on a 3G pitch at Holmes Chapel Leisure Centre, and with the Centre closing at 4.00pm during the festive period an early kick off was agreed upon to ensure the game finished early.

Both these teams are new to the Cheshire League this season. The visitors came from the Crewe & District league, with Holmes Chapel being a newly formed adult side for the very successful youth team set up here.

The match itself was as one sided as the score-line suggests. Winnington led 3-0 at the break with their third goal being a comical error by the home keeper. Attempting a clearance on the edge of his area he accidentally hacked the ball back across his area to a Winnington forward who had the simple task of tapping into an empty net. After the break a response from Holmes Chapel was essential, but it never looked like coming. Avenue scored a couple more around the hour mark and that was that.

So, another 3G pitch to add to my already large collection of them. Spectators are allowed in a standing area along one side of the pitch with the eleven present today being predominantly groundhoppers, judging by the conversations I overheard.

contributed on 30/12/18

TT No.080: Keith Aslan - Saturday 29th December 2018; LONGRIDGE v Cleator Moor Celtic; North West Counties League Division 1 North; Kick-Off: 15.00; Result:

4-0; Admission & Programme: £4 for geriatrics: Attendance: 131 (120 home, 10 away & 1 neutral)

It's a half hour bus ride for this one with a 12-minute service from Preston city centre. Preston looked much the same as it always does. Dispiriting. By contrast Longridge is a pleasant town, anywhere that has a glazing business called '*A touch of Glass*' is ok by me. The old station has been turned into a heritage centre with a café and would have been the ideal place to tarry a while had it not been closed for Christmas.

The match was played to the stunning backdrop of the Forest of Bowland Fells with two stands, one older and the other an *Atcost* structure erected to please our old friends the ground graders. The clubhouse has a TV and hot drinks with free biccys, plus everything a hungry hopper could desire. The meat pies were a treat and they didn't run out in spite of some greedy individuals (well just me actually) scoffing two of them.

While some clubs fail to issue over the Christmas period, no problems here with the glossy programme, free on entry, bang up to date with a report on their previous home game on Boxing Day. Richard Allen was the subject of the player profile and he supports, hold the front page, Manchester United. Playing North West Counties football at least he should know where Manchester actually is, which gives him an advantage over most of their 'fans'. I also liked the page with the latest news, and a map of the clubs, from the South West Peninsula League! It was written by someone who calls himself *Zimmerframe Zidane*.

The match was a strange one, I don't ever recall seeing a more one-sided match that didn't involve Ferring. And yet the home side failed to score for an hour and a quarter of the game. For the first 29 minutes they contented themselves with belting shots into the next postcode before finding their range and scoring four before the interval. At half-time (17 minutes for some reason) the talk was all about how many more Longridge would get in part two. None as it happened with another 45 minutes of total dominance producing more misses than the latest Applejacks' single on *Juke Box Jury* (If you're under 60 you won't get that one). The approach play was superb and it's not hard to see why they are top of the league, but the finishing was woeful. Give credit to the Cleator Moor goalkeeper who was on the top of his game, but really Longridge should have got double figures. The crowd became increasingly restless, not the usual reaction when your team is 4-0 up.

Longridge are a club on the up. Ten years ago, they were strutting their stuff in the Preston and District League, now they are red hot favourites for promotion to the North West Counties Premier Division. Surprisingly their reserves in the West Lancashire League are bottom of the table and have yet to win this season.

Walking back to the station all the Christmas lights were on in Preston. Still dispiriting though.

contributed on 30/12/18

TT No.079: *Brian Buck* - Saturday 22nd December 2018; **Shipston Excelsior** v Castle Vale Town; Total Motion Midland League Division 3; Result: 1-1; Attendance: 35 approx.

With many leagues below Step 5 & 6 declining to play today the best area to go for my fix was the Cotswolds and so we decided to visit what I believe is the most southerly ground in the Total Motion Midland League. I was a bit worried about the leagues sponsors, but investigation later on revealed that they are a car and van leasing company and not anything to do with resolving constipation problems as I had first feared! The ground can be found in the delightful town of Shipston-on-Stour, which is about 10 miles south of Stratford-upon-Avon. We arrived here early enough to have a wander around the town first of all, something I don't do enough of on my days out. Then it was time for lunch before returning to the club to wash it down with a pint before the game started. The bar is upstairs in the social club and here we encountered a lot of non-playing players. Later I was told that this was the Sunday side, getting 'warmed up' before they headed out for a night in Stratford-upon-Avon later on that night. I wasn't expecting too much from this game. The hosts are bottom of this division and the visitors were only a few places above them. But as we watched the match from the decent sized stand (no seats) I was pleasantly surprised as both sides expounded a lot of energy and they both gave it a go. However, both sides gave the ball away a lot and you could see why they were where they are in the league. But they both created a number of chances, the visitors more so. Back to the clubhouse at half time and my unasked question of why don't some of the Sunday side turn out and play for the Saturday side to help them climb the league was soon answered. They were in no fit state to do so. Back to the game and on 55 minutes Castle Vale took the lead on 55 minutes. The shot took a big deflection and the keeper stood no chance, even though he decided not to move for it anyway. Two minutes later there was a punch up, right in front of not only us, but also the referee observer standing next to us. So it wasn't too surprising that the two protagonists got sent off. Further bookings followed later on, by which time the hosts were starting to look worthy of a point, which they got by way of a 20 yard direct free kick on 84 minutes. The visitors offered nothing in reply and as the players walked off at the final whistle, they were cheered off the pitch by the Sunday side, still in the bar, but now hanging out through some open windows. It was like they'd won the league. Soon we were on our way home and as we left the bar staff were hoping that the rat-arsed Sunday side would soon be on their way as well! Another really enjoyable day out.

contributed on 26/12/18

TT No.078: *Keith Aslan* - Saturday 22nd December 2018; **ROCKLEAZE RANGERS** v Patchway; Gloucester County League; Kick Off: 15.00; Result: 1-2; Admission: Free; Programme: £2; Attendance: 31 (18 home, 3 away & 10 neutral)

This one brought out a sizeable slice of groundhoppers with some of our more loquacious brethren in attendance and the lift back to Reading Station from a well-known postman was much appreciated. The brand-new ground is a 45-minute walk from Bristol Parkway with no buses. I liked the place much more than I was

expecting. Two plastic pitch's adjacent to each other with a covered stand (no seats) running along one side acting as a viewpoint and shelter for spectators for both pitches. Although the second one is primarily for rugby, the reserves have played some games here. The changing rooms and dugouts are wooden, which is far more aesthetically pleasing to the eye than brick-builds, with the whole caboodle surrounded by the ubiquitous fence, but with an exciting twist. This is the first one I've ever come across that isn't painted green. Black is the colour here.

Andrew Myland is the main man. Ex-Manager; current Chairman; Programme Editor; Tea Boy and everything else. In a conversation regarding programmes I learnt that they are still very much compulsory in this league with fines for non-issuing. Something the Isthmian League should take note of with a website that weekly praises member clubs that can't be bothered to produce the paper as though it's something to be proud of. You'll get 20 pages of glorious colour at Rockleaze.

Formed in 1976 as Nat, West Court, previous names have been Avon Court, B & W Avonside and Rockleaze Avonside before taking on their current moniker in 2010. Patchway were formed a bit earlier in 1954 and were founder members of the Gloucester County League in 1968. Today's local derby produced some quality entertainment which as well as the goals the metal work was pinged 4 times (3-1 to the home side). One all with 5 minutes to go it was never going to end in a draw with both teams only having one stalemate between them all season and a Patchway goal late doors gave them the points.

Another good day out in good company and I didn't get wet. Result.

contributed on 23/12/18

TT No.077: Steve Hardy - Saturday 22nd December 2018; **Foley Meir** v Ashbourne; Staffordshire County League Premier Division; Kick-Off: 2pm; Result: 2-0; Admission: Free; Programme: £1; Attendance: 23 (h/c)

Once again, all the matches I had pencilled in for a visit, bit the dust by mid-morning. A great many phone calls later and I was off to Meir, near Stoke, for a revisit to Foley Meir FC. They were just plain Foley last time I visited them in 2004, and there have been a good few changes to the ground since then too. The remains of terracing behind one goal, and along the side where the dugouts are now placed, are still visible, as are a couple of the old safety barriers as well.

Inside the clubhouse I was shown plans of the improvements they hope to make when money allows, with promotion to the North West Counties League their aim.

After a great start to the season, Foley have lost their last five matches in all competitions, and seemed rather short of confidence initially today. Luckily for them, visitors Ashbourne offered very little up front, giving Foley a fairly comfortable win. I reckon they scored their opener on 18 minutes, but the club *twitter* page says 31 minutes. The chap who scored it tried to convince everyone

his mis-hit cross was deliberate, but whatever it was it sailed over the Ashbourne keeper's head and in to the top corner and Foley lead 1-0 at the break.

To their credit, Ashbourne got a bit more involved in the second half, without ever looking like scoring though. With bookings a plenty, but not much skill from either side, Foley doubled their lead on 76 minutes, and that was that.

Very friendly folk at the club, and I was delighted to find they have introduced a programme this season, which is either included with the £2 admission, or £1 if no admission is charged. The rain held off for most of the afternoon too, so another top afternoon out, just 25 miles from home.

contributed on 22/12/18

TT No.076: Steve Hardy - Wednesday 19th December 2018; **Tamworth U19s** v Boldmere St Michaels U19s; National League U19's Alliance Division H; Kick-Off: 1pm; Result: 2-1; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 23 (h/c)

More 'let's make the most of our retirement' football for most of the 23 hardy souls at this afternoon's fix on the 3G at Tamworth. The weather was actually stunning sunshine throughout. So much so, that I had to leave the main stand and walk to the opposite side of the ground to be able to stand in the shade at one point!

The Lamb has seen better days, it must be said. It all looks splendid at first glance, but most of the areas behind all the stands and terracing are starting to look shabby. The 3G pitch is a Godsend though, as despite the recent heavy rains, everybody knew the match was sure to be on.

Today's match featured 5th place Tamworth against next to bottom Boldmere St Michaels, and whilst Tamworth deserved their win, they wasted so many easy chances that BSM's 77th minute penalty, which brought the score back to 2-1, made the last ten minutes a bit more-nervy than it should have been really.

Like most midweek leagues, the National U19 league now closes down until January. Suffice to say I will be back as soon as it reopens again.

contributed on 20/12/18

TT No.075: Keith Aslan - Saturday 15th December 2018; **EASTWOOD HANLEY** v Hanley Reserves; Leek Cup; Kick-Off: 14.03; Result: 0-1; Admission & programme: £3; Attendance: 30 (24 home, 4 away & 2 neutral).

A truly miserable afternoon, this was one of those 'what am I doing here?' days. Suffering a debilitating bout of Man Flu and making a round trip of over 400 miles to stand in the freezing cold and driving rain watching a game of football in a cage is not the action of a sane man, but sanity has never been my strong point. Eastwood Hanley play at the Northwood Stadium, I would guesstimate it's about a 45-minute walk from Stoke Station. No buses, they all to go to Hanley bus station, which is where I went and cut out about two thirds of the walk. My orienteering skills were tested to the max. getting to the ground with only a 50-year old

Ordinance Survey Map to help me. Coming back, I splashed out (literally) on a taxi which was only £1.90p more expensive than the bus. Taxis are pretty cheap in Stoke, bus fares most certainly aren't. Northwood Stadium has a large stand that would provide shelter from the deluge, unfortunately the adjacent 3g pitch where Eastwood actually play has nothing but a rail to lean surrounded by the ubiquitous green fence. Boy did I get wet.

With the clubs playing only a mile apart this was the last chance to watch this local derby until, well next Saturday actually when they meet again in the league. They've already played each other in the 'Hanley Cup' so not exactly strangers. The last time I saw Eastwood Hanley play they were in the Northern Premier League, but repeated vandalism saw them go out of business. The revived club are hoping to move back to their original ground, and made an unsuccessful attempt to get into the North West Counties this season. The leisure centre, which contains the changing rooms, has tables and chairs and central heating where I made a futile attempt to get dry while giving the hot drinks machine a good workout. A 20-page glossy colour programme is included in admission and was available at the gate with the poor chap selling them trying to take some shelter from the upturned boot of his car. Eastwood are one of the very few Staffordshire League teams that issue.

The Under 9 team were acting as mascots and part of the deal was that they had to watch the match and I felt sorry for the parents who stoically stood with the little sods, I mean offspring, throughout the match. As we all got pneumonia together at least I had the consolation that my martyrdom was through choice. This was an awful afternoon with the will to live diminishing the wetter I got. This is no reflection on the football, both sides gave it a good go in spite of the conditions and I will be forever indebted to Jordan Hall for scoring the second half goal that spared everybody the abomination of extra time.

I got back to my country dacha miserable, cold, wet and flu laden. After I'd dried out, I immediately got stuck into my double issue '*Traveller*' to see where to go next week.

contributed on 17/12/18

TT No.074: Brian Buck - Monday 10th December 2018; Haringey Borough v Bishop's Stortford; Bostik League Premier Division; Result: 3-1; Attendance: 296.

With my being informed early enough that my chosen youth game tonight was off, because the opposition couldn't raise a side, I re-routed to Coles Park, where I am a season ticket holder. Thus, admission to league matches here is free for me and many others! In fact, the club encourage people to take up their offer and they kind of get some of their money back through people buying programmes and refreshments and seemingly some merchandise as well.

Anyway, it seems to be working and with the team moving up to second place in the league after tonight's win, the fans are flocking in and there was an excellent atmosphere here. It reminded me of Monday nights at Dagenham in the 1970's

when many Groundhoppers would assemble, not only to watch the matches but in pre-internet days to swap fixtures as well. Tonight, Borough got off to a good start when on 10 minutes they took the lead after the ball was stabbed home from close range. After this under the leadership of the legend that is player manager Jamie Cureton, Stortford grew into the match, creating several chances. But in truth the game faded a bit. But the second half was much more-lively, and, on 49 minutes a trip inside the box saw Borough double the lead from the spot. Then three minutes later a well-placed header saw Stortford reduce the arrears. But on 66 minutes Borough restored their two-goal advantage with a shot which went through the keeper's legs. This set off some chanting from the home fans, both in the stand and behind the goal, the main one being, "We're just a bus stop in Tottenham!" It's a big step forward from the days, not so long ago, when they were watched by two men and a dog, especially after the dog died!

contributed on 12/12/18

TT No.073: *Brian Buck* - Saturday 8th December 2018; **Wortham** v Tattlingstone United; Touchline Suffolk & Ipswich League Division 3; Result: 2-2; Attendance: 4.

With checking time limited because of the time I spent watching two games on the previous day I got home from the first of them to find that my intended game had been called off. This scenario also applied to my next choice when I got home from my evening game. I decided to sort it all out next morning, knowing that today was now going to be a car job. I chose the only ground in the Suffolk & Ipswich League where from those sides playing today, I hadn't seen a game on. Once I'd confirmed the fixture, with the away secretary, I set off and about an hour and a half later I had arrived at Wortham, which is a small village just before you reach Diss, if you come in via Bury St Edmunds.

I'd passed through here many times before on my way to other grounds in the vicinity and I think that there used to be a fish and chip wagon here as well. Anyway, the ground wasn't difficult to find. It was on the common and therefore rather exposed. As I'd left enough time to go elsewhere if things went wrong, I now had time to kill. So, I left the car where it was and I went to the tea shop from where I procured a very tasty sausages and chips takeaway, which was roughly half the price I'd paid had I bought it in the pub it visited after devouring it. Then after having something to wash it down and confirming that the TV would be showing the football results on my return, I then returned to the ground and sat on a bench outside the clubhouse to wait for the game to start. Soon a lady appeared and initially I thought that she would be serving me my half time cuppa, but she was waiting for her mate to appear so she could serve a tennis ball in the nearby court instead. Then the game started. Although this is a sand-based pitch it still waterlogs in some areas sometimes. Furthermore, it is affected by moles and today there were two un-flattened ones visible. But the home manager seemed to accept this. His third from bottom side had lost 12-0 away last week and he was complimentary about the moles, saying. "At least they turn up every week. In fact, I might sign them on. If they can force their way out of the ground then they might just be able to head a football!" Today they were up against the second placed

visitors and with the strong wind behind them it was they who took the lead on 5 minutes with their fourth attempt of the game. But somehow Wortham equalised five minutes later. But Tattlingstone kept pressing and really should have scored a hatful in the first period, but their shooting was awful and they only scored once more before half time. Meanwhile at one point the game was stopped when some dog poo was found on the pitch. The home players, knowing shit when they see it, could tell that it came from the same dog that always craps here. After the break the wind was in favour of the hosts as was some rain and although their keeper made some fine blocks Wortham were now playing better, helped by the fact that they had stopped arguing amongst themselves. On 69 minutes they managed to equalise. Then after some minor handbags a minute later the hosts set about holding on. This became more difficult when on 88 minutes they lost their keeper due to an injury. They did have another 'proper' keeper to bring on. But he looked rather like a younger looking Jack Duckworth formerly of Coronation Street, complete with glasses. Although he took them off to go in goal, his side held on for a deserved draw. Then it was back to the pub to bring to a close a day low on quality, apart from the food, but one high on endeavour.

contributed on 12/12/18

TT No.072: Keith Aslan - Saturday 8th December 2018; STAPLEFORD TOWN v Keyworth; Notts Senior League Premier Division; Kick-Off: 13.58; Result: 3-1; Admission: Free; Programme: £1; Attendance: 20 (14 home, 4 away & 2 neutral).

Brian Bucks report on Stapleford set my juices flowing, and a copy of the programme on the home club's website sent my hormones into overdrive, this was the only place to be today. Brian got a bus from Nottingham, but if travelling from London, Long Eaton is the station with a 15-minute door to door service operated by 'Trent Barton', my favourite bus company. I have always had good experiences travelling with them although I do realise that having a favourite bus company is probably a sign that I should get out less. I read with interest that Brian temporarily lost his bus pass on the return journey. Not a problem I ever have as I think I might have mentioned before, they won't give me one.

Stapleford have recently returned to their home town and are intending to upgrade the facilities here with the plans, and more importantly, the finance, in place for permanent barriers and dugouts. Currently roped off, there are two Perspex dugouts that are unusable because a) they aren't anywhere near the pitch and b) Ronnie Corbett would have found them too small. There is a tea bar offering hot drinks and sweeties with a signed photograph of Kenny Burns on the wall from his heyday when he still had hair and was going around maiming people. It was spoilt by the awful music being played at full blast from the adjacent dressing room. 'It inspires them' explained the secretary. The only thing it would inspire me to do would be to cut off my ears. I was joined by amazing hopper John Stancombe, now totally blind but managing to make the journey here solo by train and taxi from his Norwich base. Kinda' puts my problems into perspective.

1-1 at the end of a bitchy first half it all kicked off in the second with Keyworth being the major culprits, whingeing at the referee at every decision that went against them. I guess the pre. match 'Respect' handshakes didn't work then? Keyworth's hopes of victory went the same way as Ant McPartland's no claims bonus when they had a player sent off midway through the second half. We then had a four-minute timeout while they argued about it, Stapleford scored direct from the free kick, then another three-minute break while they argued about it some more. 'You've ruined the game ref.' screamed the opposition. Apparently, nothing to do with the players, the problem is all down to the referee sending a player off for committing a sending off offence. A man disadvantage and much more interested in admonishing the referee than playing football, Keyworth went down to a well-deserved defeat.

This was my third match on the trot that kicked off on time, and two of them were correctly timed at just 90 minutes, although I suspect today's 3.43 finish was down to the referee deciding 45 minutes aggravation was quite enough. It meant I reacquainted myself with the joys of 'Trent Barton' buses 15 minutes earlier than anticipated. On the train back to London the buffet staff went through the train handing out free raffle tickets. They announced the winning numbers with prizes ranging from free teas and coffees to bottles of wine and first-class upgrades for your next journey. What a nice idea and it was well received by all of the customers (nee passengers). Obviously, I didn't win anything.

contributed on 10/12/18

TT No.071: Brian Buck - Saturday 1st December 2018; Stapleford Town v Newark Flowserve; Notts Senior Cup 3rd Round; Result: 1-3; Programme: £1; Attendance: 120 approx.

Today this was the place to be for me as seeing a match here enabled me to complete the top division of the Notts Senior League. Travel was fairly straightforward and fairly easy, but not without a few minor hiccups. I travelled by train from Peterborough to Nottingham, fully aware that I would be sharing the train with some Ipswich Town fans, who were on their way to watch their side lose 2-0 at Forest. They were loud and chanted a lot. Bearing in mind that they are rock bottom of the Championship then they really had nothing to boast about. The train would have got in ten minutes early, but for some secret reason, known only to the Nottingham station staff, we were held up for 25 minutes just outside the station and thus arrived 15 minutes late. This meant I missed my intended curiously numbered i4 bus to the ground. No big deal, as they run every 10 minutes, but it was 10 minutes lost drinking time!

Anyway, I arrived at the ground about 45 minutes before kick-off and picked up my £1 informative programme. No bar here. So, I shot off to the nearest pub. Here it took me a good five minutes to get served. The young bar maid seemed insistent on refilling existing customers glasses first. Then when I did get served, she didn't seem to know what two bottles of Newcastle Brown Ale looked like and when she did find them it took her an age to find a suitable glass to drink it from. By now

cactuses were starting to grow on my tongue and so I instructed her to give me any glass capable of holding liquid!

My hurried stay here lasted less than twenty minutes and I was back well before kick-off, only to find that they weren't playing on the pitch in front of the changing rooms like I thought they would. In fact, it was played out on a semi enclosed pitch, slightly divorced from the rest of the recreation ground. I still had time for a quick hot dog before I followed the players and the match officials out as we all made this short walk to the pitch. The club hope to relocate permanently to here, enclosing it more fully to make it more suitable for higher grade football, I wish them well, but it's not going to be easy to do this in a public park!

The match was a feisty one. The lovely Zoe, secretary of Flowserve, who've I met several times before, told me that they were three players short today. I was tempted to tell her to get some taller ones. But in a first half devoid of many pots at goal, they did score on 35 minutes. However, the hosts equalised just 44 seconds into the restart, but Flowserve were ahead again five minutes later. On 75 minutes there was a punch up which saw a player from each side dismissed. There should have been more! Now Flowserve were struggling to see off a spirited home side and it was in the 90th minute before they made the game safe, from the spot, following a handball. Overall a decent game in front of large crowd for a public park match.

Then came the getting home experience. The bus stop was merely two minutes away and one came almost immediately. I got on it only to find that I'd mislaid some of my travel documents where I keep my bus pass. So, I got off the bus to see if I could find them. I walked back to the ground without success, gave up and caught the next bus back to Nottingham. Suddenly I found them. They were in my coat pocket rather than my jacket pocket. The bus got back early enough to allow me to catch the 4.24pm train back from Nottingham, thus avoiding those nice Ipswich Town fans, or so I thought! Just before the train left, I was joined by four of them. These 'loyal' fans must have left soon after half time by which time their side was losing 2-0. They'd be better off focusing on air ventilators and becoming ex-tractor fans!

v2 contributed on 07/12/18

TT No.070: Steve Hardy - Wednesday 5th December 2018; Shrewsbury School v Millfield School; ISFA U18s Cup Quarter Final; Kick-Off: 1.30pm; Result: 0-0 AET (7-8 on penalties); Admission: Free; Programme: Free; Attendance: 250+

Well, what a cracking way to spend a Wednesday afternoon. There may have been no goals, but there was no lack of effort from both sides who entertained us regally for the whole 100 minutes. In the end it came down to penalties, and after both sides missed early on, we got to 7-7 before the home keeper missed his effort. The Millfield player overcame his obvious nerves to bang home the winner, and that was that.

The action took place at the beautiful Shrewsbury School which has a couple of grass football pitches, a floodlit 3G pitch where a ladies' hockey match was under way this afternoon, and an immaculate cricket square where, I was told, Shropshire CCC play some of their Minor Counties games. Despite the heavy rain throughout, the pitch was superb, and only began to cut up near the end of extra time.

A final comment has to be made about the crowd. The main pitch has a few bleacher type benches along one side and these were occupied from the start by the Shrewsbury Ultras, who sang, chanted, cheered the home team and booed the visitors throughout. By the final whistle there were nearly 300 of them cheering away, and the atmosphere they created was fabulous.

Absolutely top afternoon out.

contributed on 05/12/18

TT No.069: *Keith Aslan* - Saturday 1st December 2018; **WHITE ENSIGN** v Holland; Eastern Counties Division 1 South; Kick-Off: 15.00; Result: 2-3; Admission: £2 for old folk; Programme: £1; Attendance: 59 (37 home, 12 away & 10 neutral)

Oh, the glamour of groundhopping, one week it's Merthyr Tydfil, the next it's Basildon, most people can only dream about visiting these exotic tourist hotspots. Changing trains at Stratford, Westfields was packed with Christmas shoppers, what sort of saddo spends their Saturdays shopping? Basildon was its usual welcoming self with the overcast drizzle adding to the charisma of Essex's premier town. Basildon Bowl as it should still be called, is a 25-minute stroll from the station, and has officially changed its name to the pretentious 'Basildon Sporting Village' Building a leisure centre next to the ground doesn't make it a village. The aforementioned leisure centre has a fabulous café with full meals available where you can enjoy your food amid lots of fit and healthy people, apart from the groundhoppers who were out in force for this one. The programme was dated Tuesday December 1st, so half right then. Don't be put off by the running track, although a bit of a distance from the pitch the gargantuan stand, running the entire length of the touchline, provides an excellent view of proceedings.

White Ensign have been forced to move here from their Southend base because their pitch was too small. It really beggars-belief that in the bonkers world of non-league football you need a bigger pitch to play in the Eastern Counties League than the Essex Olympian. They will only be allowed to play here for one season because, among other reasons, the pitch is too small here too! This was only discovered after they'd been playing here a few months. Now I would have thought that those wonderful ground grading people would have noticed this when they did their inspection, but apparently not. I assume they were so overawed with the massive stand they didn't bother with anything else. At last they've found a club with the same vision as the FA, a stand with 25 seats for every spectator. One day all non-league grounds will be like this. Another problem is the pay box. Built specially to please the ground graders, at no small cost I would imagine, this wooden building is apparently no good because it's moveable. Yes really. How it

must spoil the matchday experience for spectators when they enter the ground knowing that if a few of them got together they could move the paybox. As well as spending more money bolting it to the ground turnstiles and presumably a Doric arch are musts for next season, I'm sure the 37 home supporters will appreciate it. If I was in charge at White Ensign, I wouldn't bother with all this nonsense and just carry on playing in the Essex Olympian.

White Ensign was formed in 1951 by, among others, current chairman Alan Day who is retiring at the end of the season. That's 67 years-service during which time he's filled every post at the club. With that nice Mr. Scudamore getting a £5-million-pound payoff for a few years of well-paid employment negotiating TV deals, Alan Day's contribution to football should be worth much more on his retirement, but if I was him, I wouldn't go booking that world cruise just yet.

The match was excellent with two teams fighting out an honourable and deserved draw after 90 minutes. The referee had other ideas and kept the game going to give one of the teams a chance to score a winner, which Holland did in the 95th minute. This gave the game an unfair and false result. Why do referees do this? Oh, for a Clive Thomas today, so misunderstood for correctly timing a football match.

White Ensign have taken the step up in their stride and at the start of play were top of the league, but achieving promotion just by winning football match's is so last century, much more important to get that pay box bolted to the ground.

contributed on 01/12/18

TT No.068: *Steve Hardy* - Saturday 1st December 2018; **Brocton U21s** v Cheadle Town Reserves; Staffordshire FA Challenge Cup Quarter-Final; Result: 3-0; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 32 h/c

As all of my planned fixtures disappeared one by one, I texted 5 local clubs with the intention of going to the first club that replied positively. That turned out to be a very easy choice, as only one club bothered to reply, and that was Brocton. What the club didn't tell me though, was that the match wasn't being played on the main pitch, but on the one that is next to it! Didn't bother me that, as I hadn't seen a game on the second pitch before, but I can think of several groundhoppers who would have driven away once they discovered that.

This match was in the quarter finals of the Staffordshire Challenge Cup. This is the lowest of the three county cups organised by the Staffordshire FA, and features plenty of reserve teams, several U21 sides as well as clubs from the lower divisions of the Staffs Senior league. Brocton play in the under 21 division of the Midland league, and Cheadle Town Stiffs are in the Staffordshire Senior league.

The match itself turned out to be a comfortable win for the Brocton team. They took the lead through a penalty in the 27th minute, when a Cheadle defender decided to jump up and punch a cross away for no apparent reason, and led 1-0 at the break. Their second goal came on 71 minutes when a corner was headed in and the 3rd arrived on 77 minutes to wrap up a decisive victory. Cheadle gave it a good

shot, but their heads went down once the second goal went in, and that was that really.

I always enjoy visiting Brocton, a club who do things correctly both on and off the pitch. A top afternoon out and only 10 miles from home too!

contributed on 01/12/18

TT No.067: Brian Buck - Saturday 24th November 2018; Old Lyonians v AFC Oldsmiths; Southern Amateur League Senior Section Division 3; Result: 3-2; Kick-Off: 2pm; Attendance: 2.

Ironically had Spurs not been at home to Chelsea at Wembley Stadium after this game had concluded, where my friend and I were headed next, then there would have been a zero attendance for this game. Who said that the big boys don't help out grassroots football?! We got here from the previous game by way of a train from Carpenders Park to Wembley Central, from where we took about a 15-minute number 92 bus ride to practically outside the ground. But on our arrival at the ground, the John Lyon School Playing Fields, Sudbury Fields, as we found that the bar wouldn't open until Silvia arrived at half-time, we rerouted to a pub a couple of minutes away instead.

We returned shortly before kick-off, or I did, as my friend had left me to it! I'd seen an Old Lyonians home match before, on 5th April 1983, when I saw them beat Broomfield 2-1 in precisely the same division of the league as was today's match. So, you can see just how far the club has come on in 35 years! That game was played at 74 Pinner View. Oh, how the occupants must have hated the players walking through their house with muddy boots every week! The big thing about that ground though was the fact that it had a substantial stand and if you go onto the Old Lyonians website you can see a home movie of a 1963 match with the said stand in the background.

Anyway, back to today's game and it was played out on an immaculately prepared pitch. Something that John Lyon, the founder of the John Lyon School would be proud of today. He wouldn't have known what was going on though as he died in 1592 before football was invented! The match was refereed by a smiling chap who looked not unlike Kenneth Clark the MP, wearing a black wig! He didn't really have that much to do. The players near enough totally behaved themselves and without the aid of any linos, which is customary in this league, he got right everything that could be expected of him, including most offsides. As for the game what we got was an old-fashioned game of good honest graft and with no gamesmanship (cheating). After 12 minutes the score was 2-2 and the winning goal came the hosts way on 64 minutes and was a miscued own goal. Then there was just time to grab a quick cup of coffee and to make sure that the Silvia here was not another Silvia I know, before setting out for the final game of the day. Looks like the players are well fed here as well. Apart from the fact there was no TV this was a lovely old-fashioned place I could come back to again!

contributed on 29/11/18

TT No.066: *Brian Buck* - Saturday 24th November 2018; **London School of Theology** v Ruislip Baptists; Herts & Borders Churches League Division 1; Venue: played at South Oxhey Playing Fields, The Pavillion, Green Lane, South Oxhey; Kick-Off: 10.30am; Result: 0-1; Attendance: 25 approx.

Although this was a twelve-hour day out for me today, it was a rather easy way to pick up three matches. I parked the car close to Carpenders Park, as I usually do when I'm on my way to watch Spurs play at Wembley and from there it was a short walk to the ground, which is in part of a former golf course. What I hadn't realised before my arrival was that this was a game between the top two sides in the league, both of whom had won all of their opening five matches. On a pitch which was truly dreadful in the middle part, both sides went at it from the start. On six minutes the visitors changed their lino. I had no idea that he was wearing nappies! There was plenty going to hold the ref's interest, but he did have a habit of seeming to scratch his tits whenever he looked like he was going to book someone though! In the first half you couldn't really pick a winner, even from the tame coming together in the 40th minute. Talk about fight the good fight! As the match moved through the second half so you could see subtle changes taking place. Ruislip began to seem more organised, whereas the hosts started to look more disjointed, especially up front. So, it wasn't a total surprise when Ruislip took the lead on 71 minutes, by way of a well-placed header from a corner. Then, although possession was still roughly equal, Ruislip saw the game out using a new tactic to me, something called 'Game Management'. I'll have to pop into my local book shop and get a copy! Anyway, this was an excellent mornings football.

contributed on 29/11/18

TT No.065: *Steve Hardy* - Wednesday 28th November 2018; **Newman University 1sts** v Aston University 1sts; BUCS Football Division Midlands 3A; Result: 1-7; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 6 h/c

More joys of retirement. A 1.30pm KO at Newman University which is in the Bartley Green district of south Birmingham was just the ticket. Parking was a huge problem, but I managed to find a spot and hike round to the brand new 4G pitch by 1.15pm, only to find the game in progress, having started at 12.55am I was told. Spectators are allowed inside the cage, and there is a small viewing area set aside down one side of the pitch, where we 6 spectators huddled in the driving rain.

On the pitch, Newman are rock bottom of their little six team group with minus 3 points after 4 games. Visitors Aston are a couple of places above them on four points, and by the time I arrived, Newman were already 1-0 up with a shock on the cards. That was as good as it got for them though, as Aston soon equalised on 28 minutes and an excellent first half finished all square.

After the break, Aston took advantage of the strong wind at their backs to score 6 more goals with the last one coming on 86 minutes. I felt this was a little harsh on Newman, who had more than held their own in the first half. Sadly, once Aston took the lead again, the Newman heads went down and they looked a well beaten side by the end.

So, my never-ending quest to visit every ground in Birmingham continues. My fellow attendees were both off to watch another BUCS game at Birmingham University in the evening, but I had had more than enough of the driving rain by then, so went home to a nice cup of coffee and some parkin.

contributed on 28/11/18

TT No.064: *Steve Hardy* - Saturday 24th November 2018; **Wirksworth Town** v Holbrook St Michaels Reserves; Central Midlands League Division One South; Kick-Off: 2.00pm; Result: 6-0; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 5 h/c

Match two today, meant a slow drive up into the beautiful Derbyshire Dales, to the lovely town of Wirksworth. For such a small town, it is perhaps a surprise that there are two Central Midland league clubs based here, with Ivanhoe also scheduled to be at home today, although I see their game was actually postponed.

Town play at the rear of the Anthony Gell School, although the changing rooms etc are in the Wirksworth Leisure Centre on the same site. The venue has a couple of adult pitches, plus one small school's pitch and a floodlit 3G pitch in a cage. There were several hockey matches on this pitch today, with three games being played one after the other.

Town's pitch is roped off before each game, but they have no spectator facilities at all. I did see people coming back after half-time with cups of coffee though, so they were presumably available from the Leisure Centre.

Just like my morning match, this was one-way traffic from start to finish. Holbrook Stiffs tried very hard though and I thought 6-0 was a bit harsh on them. 3-0 at the break with the highlight of the second half being an old steam train with several vintage coaches, chugging past the ground on the adjacent railway track. I didn't see any normal trains go past though, so perhaps this line is not in service any more.

So, all in all, another top day out with either 16 or 17 goals to savour as well.

contributed on 25/11/18

TT No.063: *Steve Hardy* - Saturday 24th November 2018; **New Life Christians** v Grace Church; Derby Churches League; Kick-Off: 10.30am; Result: 10 (or 9)-1; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 1 h/c!

Today's Derby double started at the vast *Rolls-Royce* complex in the Allenton district of the City. There have been a few changes to the area since I last saw a game here, including a road that is so new it doesn't appear on any maps or, more worryingly, my Satnav. I eventually found the ground though, with the help of the match ref, who was equally as lost as I was.

The venue is actually the Rolls Royce Rugby club. Three rugby pitches and one football pitch are served by 4 small portakabins, housing the changing rooms and an equipment store. Absolutely no spectator facilities at all, but none were needed today as I was, once again, the only spectator.

On the pitch, visitors Grace Church started the day in rock bottom place, with NLC just a few places above them following a points deduction. From the start though, NLC were in complete control, possibly because their shirts say they are sponsored by *Jesus*. The only problem I had was the final score. I made it 9-1, but the league web site has it down as 10-1. Still, what is one goal between friends, and I am more than happy to take the extra goal to boost my flagging goals per match total.

contributed on 25/11/18

TT No.062: Keith Aslan - Saturday 24th November 2018; PENYDARREN BOYS & GIRLS CLUB v Ynystawe; FAW Trophy; Kick-Off: 13.24 (6 mins early wow!); Result: 7-1; Admission & programme: £3; Attendance: 59 (41 home 12 away & 6 neutral)

A recent *Channel 5* survey made Merthyr Tydfil the third worst place to live in the UK (Hackney and Tower Hamlets filled the top two spots); I don't want to be too unkind but the town is a total tip. Boarded up shops and houses, everywhere vandalised, sky high crime rates and drug taking, eloquently summed up on the internet "*If you have forgotten who you are, where you live and can hold your head high while drinking cider and smoke ten packs of fags a day, Merthyr Tydfil is the pace for you*". The town is a vision of hell but on the upside the Christmas Lights were good and I got a new *Greggs* tick.

Penydarren Boys & Girls (grown-ups too) Club is about a 40- minute uphill walk from the station, but considerably quicker coming back. There are buses. Here is one bit of Merthyr that is actually thriving with numerous kids' sides and the first team going places with this their debut season in the Welsh League. A brick-built stand with seats, and further cover along the side means you won't get wet here. The tea bar does hot food with old photos adorning the walls.

Penydarren reached the semi-final of this competition last season and today's result would appear to indicate their opponents from the Swansea Senior League took a bit of a pasting from their higher ranked opponents. That doesn't tell the whole story, half-time it was only 2-1 and Ynystawe could consider themselves unlucky to be losing in a very even 45 minutes. It was only in the second bit that it all went wrong and quietened down the vociferous away support. Seven of the Penydarren team have been playing in Bulgaria for the South Wales FA team in the UEFA Regions Cup with the stand out player being one Christopher Colvin-Owens. Stand out because he was completely bald and sported a full beard that players seem to think are so cool these days (they aren't). Half-time in this game he was to be found outside the changing rooms enjoying a cigarette, a proper non-league footballer. Testament to the health-giving properties of nicotine he scored two goals in the second half.

A 1.30 kick off that finished at 7 minutes past 3. Oh joy. I would like to think this was the referee's usual *modus operandi* on the time-keeping front but I have a suspicion he just wanted to get home in time to watch the Welsh Rugby International. Whatever, I was not the only groundhopper present who remarked how much better football would be if all games were like this one time-wise. One major plus was that I got out of Merthyr Tydfil a bit sooner.

contributed on 25/11/18

TT No.061: *Brian Buck* - Wednesday 21st November 2018; **Unite MK** v Aston Clinton; Spartan South Midlands League Division 2; Venue: played at MK Irish Centre, Manor Fields, Bletchley; Result: 2-3; Programme: 16pp, £1; Attendance: 22.

I have come here rather intermittently over the years, since my first visit on 8 August 1978 when I saw Spurs Reserves beat Milton Keynes City 4-1 (Micky Hazard, Alan Cochrane, Mark Falco and Paul Bowgett) in a pre-season friendly. Since then many clubs have made this ground their home and the current users are Buckingham Town and Unite MK (formerly Wolverton Town). In recent years the ground has been spruced up and these days it compares favourably to my first visit. The floodlights were fine and the pitch was in good nick. But the ground came with a stern warning for spectators in that there was a board which included the words: *'This is an all-seater stadium. Standing may lead to ejection from the stadium and possible arrest'*. Well in the first half 10 of the spectators complied and by the end only I would have avoided the attentions of the police, who of course never showed up! Actually, I think that this sign and another one may have made its way to this ground from the now demolished MK Hockey Stadium. In fact, his ground has about 350 seats, spread over stands on each side of the pitch, most of them being down one side.

Admission here was free, unless you wanted to lash out a quid on a well presented 16-page programme, all in colour. The game was entertaining but it was a bit like watching a load of primary school children playing in the school playground, as players would often not release the ball when decisions went against them. So, it was that there were quite a lot of stoppages to sort out the friction and the ref did quite well not to send anyone off. Under the old laws he could have done so on 17 minutes when the rotund home keeper flattened an attacker in the area. But his only punishment was a yellow card and having to pick the ball out of the net after the resultant spot kick was smashed past him! Unite equalised on 29 minutes but conceded again three minutes later, but it was 1-3 by the 50th minute. However, three minutes after that a Unite player ran through the visiting defence to make it 2-3. Unite dominated the remainder of the half and probably deserved a draw. Also, I need to report that Clinton didn't receive any cards in this match!

v2 contributed on 22/11/18

TT No.060: *Brian Buck* - Saturday 17th November 2018; **Bromleians** v Peckham Town; Andreas Carter Kent County League Premier Division; Result: 2-6; Attendance: 10 approx.

This was quite an easy ground to get to and thus 'complete' the Kent County League Premier Division. It involved catching a tube to Victoria and going from there to Bromley South by train. Then it was a 15-minute bus ride to Bromley Garage and finally a 5-minute walk down Lower Gravel Road, onto a private road, past a shabby looking small industrial area before suddenly finding myself in the middle of some picturesque countryside. This walk actually took slightly longer as

knowing that there would be no food at the ground, I stopped off at a local chip shop beforehand. There weren't that many people around beforehand, or during the day actually. There seemed to be just the bar and tea-bar lady, her unenthusiastic son and also the club president, 92-year-old John Cooper, whom the ground is named after.

The club have been here since it opened on 2 October 1954 and was formed by the alumni of Bromley County School. The only other active person within the club was possibly part of the management team. He came into the clubhouse, opened in 1992, to fix the TV, which was no longer there! This came as a surprise to the lady in the tea bar who had only seen it on the previous Wednesday! Anyway, the man fixed the overhead projector so the picture shined on the wall.

As for the game, it was a good physical encounter between the second and fourth placed sides in the league. Bromleians were expected to win as I was told that Peckham were "three players light" today. But it didn't work out that way and by half time Peckham were winning 4-0. Lovely Jubbly! Peckham started the second half with ten men. I suggested to one of their fans that the missing player was probably having a number two, but she said, "Oh no, he's praying!" The second half was more even and the hosts pulled a goal back on 69 minutes, but six minutes later they had a player sent off (second yellow). Despite this they scored again on 84 minutes. 2-4 would have been about the right result but Peckham scored twice more in injury time and this enabled our 'praying friend' to complete his hat-trick. Overall a disappointing day for the home players and management but the long serving president wasn't particularly phased by the result as he'd seen it all before.

contributed on 22/11/18

TT No.059: *Steve Hardy* - Saturday 17th November 2018; **Albrighton** v Prees United; Shropshire Premier League; Result: 0-3; No admission charge or programme; Attendance: 3 h/c

With a trip to the theatre planned for tonight, I really needed a local game that would get me home by 4.30pm. Albrighton seemed the perfect choice and even though this was a revisit, it was still my first look at the newly formed Shropshire Premier League.

Football in Shropshire is in a bad way at the moment. The County league has just 11 teams in it now and, unless new teams are found very soon, I can see it going the way of two other local leagues, the Worcestershire league, and Kidderminster league and disappearing altogether.

Today's game was a mid-table battle between two teams who seem to be going nowhere, and it showed. Nothing much happened on the pitch with Prees deservedly winning with a goal on 11 minutes, and two more on 76 and 83 minutes for an easy 3-0 win. The word I am looking for is 'boring'. Things were so torpid that I actually fell asleep in my car at half time and was only woken up by the cries of the two teams at the restart.

On the plus side, the ground in Loak Road is very good, and perfect for this level. Fully railed off with an excellent clubhouse/changing room block behind one goal. No floodlights of course, but they don't need them as there are so few clubs in the league that no midweek games are ever necessary.

So, what is the future for this league. Well, frankly, unless there is a change in policy from the Shropshire FA, I can see it staggering along for a couple more seasons before drifting into oblivion. Great shame.

contributed on 18/11/18

TT No.058: *Keith Aslan* - Saturday 17th November 2018; **WALDON ATHLETIC** v Torridgeside; South West Peninsula East; Kick-Off: 14.16; Result: 1-3; Admission & programme: £2; Attendance: 31 (22 home, 4 away & 5 neutral)

Torre is the station for this one followed by a 20-minute walk that would find favour with mountaineers. The last time I was at Torre station was in the seventies and Hillingdon Borough had just pulled off an FA Cup shock beating Torquay, who were quite good in those days. The team came back by train and their manager, one Barry Fry, jumped onto the track and ran up and down the line doing a dance of celebration. What a character, easier to get away with in the days before CCC TV. On the return journey when the train stopped at Taunton a young boy walked down the platform selling classified papers. These were good times.

If you like quaint stands and beautiful views then Waldon probably won't be for you. Austere would sum it up. On top of a hill and roped with the old, very old, dressing room block also containing hot drinks and sweeties. The sunshine elsewhere in the country didn't reach this part of the world and a cold overcast afternoon enhanced the bleakness. The home team's dug out was completely empty for the first 25 minutes before a substitute and his girlfriend strolled up and sat in it. For the second half the manager appeared from somewhere to fill it up a bit more. The away team dominated the match but somehow only managed to go into the break 1-0 up with Waldon surprisingly equalizing the other side of half time, but Torridgeside eventually won comfortably and also missed a penalty.

Torridgeside bought a bevy of loquacious supporters with them with their loud potty mouthed leader having the same hairstyle and vocabulary as Alf Garnett. In the second half the referee, somewhat perplexingly, instructed them to move further away from the goal, a strange order given they were behind the rope and at the end they were defending. The home manager and his substitute went around to act as enforcers and there was an exchange of unpleasantries before the offending spectators moved a few yards down the goal line where 'Alf Garnett' was free to carry on his tirade. Like I say, all a bit strange.

The magnificent programme, 20 glossy pages of wonderfulness, had the vital pen picture of electrician Gareth McEwen. Which 3 people would he most like to be stuck in a lift with I hear you ask. Michelle Keegan (I'm with him on that one), Romesh Ranganathan (a bit odd but I suppose his jokes would keep your spirits up until help arrived) and, and here it gets really weird, James Cordon. What sort of

person would want to be stuck in a lift with James Cordon? In my list of people who I wouldn't want to share a lift with he's right up there with Richard Branson and Piers Morgan. Footballers are very strange people. From the programme I also learnt that the club, like so many, was formed after the war in 1945 and they've been playing at their current ground since 1974.

Another cracking day out in Hiscox's Kingdom where a warm welcome is assured but remember to take an oxygen mask, the ground is called 'Windmill Hill' while Windmill Mountain would be more appropriate.

contributed on 18/11/18

TT No.057: Brian Buck - Saturday 10th November 2018; **Chesterfield** v Billericay Town; Emirates FA Cup 1st Round; Result: 1-1; Attendance: 2,952.

When I discovered that it was only a fiver to get in here for old boys like myself, I jumped at it, slowly! The only other time I've seen a Chesterfield home match was at their old Saltergate ground on 24th July 1985, when Spurs won there in a pre-season friendly (Waddle (2) Roberts & Chedozie - att: 5,495). But the highlight of that day was watching the last half hour of Derbyshire playing Yorkshire at cricket beforehand, which remains the only time I've ever seen any county cricket. But I did get to see Geoff Boycott fielding! They moved to their current ground in the summer of 2010 and outside of the sponsors name for the new ground it doesn't seem to have a proper name and the best I can come up with is the Chesterfield FC Stadium, 1866 Sheffield Road, the name they use when International games are played here.

Today I travelled to the game by train and then walked a mile and a half to the ground, where I picked up my match ticket. I thought that my luck was in when I opened the envelope as there was a fiver in it as well as the match ticket. Turned out that they'd charged me twice for the game! Then it was off to the pub across the road, *The Spireite*. But as good and handy as it was, there was only one real cider available, Mango Cider. I didn't like it, but it took me three pints of the stuff to be sure. Then it was time for the match. Most of the crowd were housed either in the main west stand or the south stand of this 10,505-capacity stadium. The Billericay fans, about 250 of them were in one end of the east stand. Overall, I thought that there were more people here than was stated. As for the game, it wasn't great. Chesterfield took the lead with a headed goal on 17 minutes and Billericay equalised with a well hit 20-yarder on 52 minutes. They could be pleased with their afternoons work, but not their timewasting. The hosts meanwhile seemed incapable of responding to manager Martin Allen's encouragement and perhaps they never will. They only looked like scoring when he brought on two big lumps to play up front later on and one of them should have started. But this was all the ref's fault according to some fans who believed that he was just as crooked as the famous church spire! After the game I nearly got locked in as I was engrossed in watching the final scores come through on the TV, not noticing that I was last to leave. Luckily a steward came along and let me out through a side door. Overall a decent day out watching higher level football for a change!

contributed on 15/11/18

TT No.056: Keith Aslan - Saturday 10th November 2018; BOLDMERE SPORTS & SOCIAL FALCONS v Earlswood Town; Midland League Division 2; Kick-Off: 14.05; Result 4-1; Admission & Programme: £1 for old people; Attendance: 17 (12 home, 2 away & 3 neutral)

I am indebted to the Treharris secretary for informing me their game was called off 36 hours in advance giving me plenty of time to formulate a plan B. And what better than to spend a day than Birmingham? Practically anywhere but that's the downside of Groundhopping. Chester Road Station is a 15-minute ride from the City Centre with the ground a further 10-minute walk. Railed with a concrete walkway on three sides the area behind the far goal a no-go area. The complex contains two full-size pitches and a mini one and when I arrived it seemed like the entire child population of Boldmere had just finished their morning exercise. A large clubhouse with the lunchtime football on show supplied hot and cold drinks but no food. There was a chuck wagon set up adjacent to the pitch which drove off half an hour before kick-off! Obviously just there for the kids. Admission is by programme, a basic 4-pager a-la-Middlesex League, but most welcome given the sparse nature of the attendance. Amazingly there was a TV gantry and even more amazing one of the players was actually filming the match which he said was going to be put on *You Tube*. Now I don't know much about computer speak but I know what going viral means, and this won't.

Before kick-off there was a silence in honour of the war dead, so much more dignified than people clapping like seals for a minute which is so prevalent at games these days. If football fans are so ignorant, they can't stand in silence for a minute then don't bother with it. The weather was warm sunshine punctuated by showers, the BBC was spot on with its forecast, but why did most of the rain have to come down while the match was on. No cover of course. The game was adorned by a female referee and lineswoman who added greatly to the spectacle from my point of view. Very un-PC but women officials really do look great in all-black. Boldmere are top of the tree with Earlswood much closer to the roots but it wasn't all one way with the outcome always in doubt until the home side hit their fourth deep into the time added on for no reason. The fourth goal went in at one minute to five and was my signal to leave as I wanted to get home the same weekend. The game could still be going on now as far as I know. Can anybody tell me why these days it takes over two hours to play an hour and a half of football? Apart from the females on show, the other stand out feature of the match was the home side's number 10. Think Peter Crouch only taller and thinner. His all-important nickname was 'Matchstick' which was highly appropriate.

My day was topped and tailed with a Rail Replacement bus as *South East Trains* couldn't be bothered running any trains to Broadstairs this weekend. Whilst *Virgin* ran on time both ways, half the train was missing going up meaning it was jam packed especially with the *Classic Car Show* on at Birmingham International, and the seat reservation system didn't work coming back leaving some 'customers' mighty displeased. The joys of privatization.

contributed on 11/11/18

TT No.055: *Steve Hardy* - Saturday 10th November 2018; **Bush Vikings** v Rugby Town Juniors; Midland Junior Premier League U18 Division; Kick-Off: 10.30am; Result: 2-2; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 19 h/c

I really like this league, although only venture to U18 games and no lower. Today's game was chosen as it featured two clubs at the bottom of the table, and I thought I might get a good few goals. I was totally wrong on that count though, as the two sides put everything in to the 90 minutes, and neither side deserved to lose.

The fun took place at the Veseyans Rugby Club, which is in the village of Streetly, near Walsall. The rugby club has two rugby pitches laid out, one floodlit, and one football pitch which is home to both Bush Rangers, as well as FA Sunday cup entrants Hundred Acre FC. The clubhouse was open this morning too, with hot drinks on offer and the smell of cooking bacon, which turned into bacon butties by half time.

On the pitch it was a nervous start from both teams, and after a lot of huffing and puffing, we reached the break goalless. At this point I jumped in to my car and drove the 1.5 miles up to the village of Aldridge and the home of Walsall Phoenix FC to pick up a copy of the Walsall Phoenix U12s match programme, before zooming back to watch the second half at Bush Vikings. Naturally, when I got back, Rugby had opened the scoring, and I arrived just as the Vikings scored an equaliser after a mix up in the Rugby defence. Things got even better for the Vikings as they took the lead on 75 minutes from a long -range belter of a strike, and from then on it was 'how much longer Ref' from the Vikings players every 30 seconds.

The equaliser duly came on 81 minutes from a free kick taken some way out, which sailed in to the top corner of the net leaving the Vikings' keeper stranded. Both sides then tried to get a winner, but it wasn't to be, with a draw the fairest result I thought.

And that was it for my footie. I crawled the 11 miles down to Sheldon, near Birmingham Airport to watch a match in the Birmingham Amateur cup, only to find the venue locked up and deserted. No result is shown on the *Birmingham FA* website, and no suggestion of what went wrong. Oh well, these things happen I suppose.

contributed on 11/11/18

TT No.054: *Brian Buck* - Saturday 3rd November 2018; **Rainham Working Men's Club** v Inter Plaistow; Essex Alliance Division 2; Result: 9-2; Attendance: 15 approx.

For some time now, I've fancied visiting this club, partly because of the sound of the club's name, partly because there aren't that many Working Mens Clubs with a football pitch next door in the south of England, partly because it's uncommon these days, in the London area at least, for clubs this low down the pyramid to have their own facilities. Anyway, I was attracted to it and so off I went by public

transport, catching a train to Rainham from Fenchurch Street. From here it is about a five-minute walk to the ground. On my arrival though, some 45 minutes before kick-off, it looked like the match might not be on. I found the pitch next to the Working Mens club alright and spotted the permanent dugouts they have here. But the goal posts weren't up and the grass looked a tad long. But I soon confirmed that the game was going to happen and headed to the adjacent Working Mens Club. The door was locked but almost immediately someone appeared behind me, pressed some buttons and the door opened. He held it open for me and I followed him in. Next, I encountered the steward on the desk who told me that this was a private members club. I told him that I'd come to watch the football and he said that because I had a nice face, he'd let me in. So be warned. I was lucky! You might not be if you try! In some respects, I felt a bit of a fraud going into a Working Mens Club as I retired eight years ago! Anyway, after my alcoholic and dining needs were satisfied, I was ready for the game. There's not much to the ground, but it's basically enclosed with buildings on three sides and a car park and entrance on the fourth side. It's this side which has a raised step from the said car park to the pitch, giving the impression that there might have been a bit more here in days gone by. In fact, some old maps I looked at later on suggests that the pitch was partly railed off in years gone by. Only down side was that there was a lot of uncollected litter lying around from previous games. The game was not quite as one sided as the score-line suggests and despite getting thrashed the visitors had plenty of goal scoring chances during the match. But by the 25th minute they were 3-0 down. Then on 34 minutes the home lino gave an offside, which he later unsportingly admitted to a team mate and out of the earshot of the ref, "I had to do that or he would have scored otherwise!" By halftime the hosts were winning 5-0. Things weren't quite so friendly after the break. Early on there was a disagreement between a home player and the visiting lino, which was smoothed over. Then as the goals continued to come, from both sides now, there was a big incident on 83 minutes, not seen by the ref or me. The ref didn't see much all afternoon and booked no one at all and for the most part he didn't need to. But here one player apparently punched another in the face and he was apparently elbowed in the face in return, necessitating lengthy treatment. The 'elbower' then subbed himself and went to his car, never to be seen again! But the match finished with handshakes and I then returned to the club, repeating the access situation with the Steward, where I watched the pirate (paid for) live West Ham United v Burnley game, but the picture kept freezing. Either that or that's the way the Hammers play their football! Then it was back home with no serious transport problems to bring to a close a decent day out.

contributed on 08/11/18

TT No.053: *Keith Aslan* - Saturday 3rd November 2018; **ANGMERING SENIORS** v Westfield; Southern Combination (nee Sussex County) Division 2 Cup; Kick-Off: 13.35; Result: 5-4; Admission: Free; Programme: £2; Attendance: 32 (28 home including 5 wags, 3 away & 1 neutral)

Today is the most important day of the year, it's my birthday (I'm two hours younger than Adam Ant if you're interested) and the postman delivered a sack full of mail this morning. Unfortunately, it was just the usual bills and hate mail but I have a dream that one day I'll have a friend who'll send me a birthday card. Another year older and I still don't get a free bus pass like everyone else got at 60. Life can be so unfair.

Decided to cheer myself up with a dip into one of my favourite leagues and Angmering Seniors didn't disappoint. A 35-minute walk from Angmering station - there is an hourly bus service which didn't fit in with a 1.35pm kick off but would dovetail nicely into a 2 or 3 o'clock start. Angmering is a typical Sussex picture book village, albeit a large one, and it was good to see one shop already had its Christmas display up! The scenic ground has a large wooden clubhouse (wood is so much more pleasing to the eye than brick) which contained the changing rooms, tea bar and clubhouse with the lunchtime footy showing on a big screen. It has a spacious, slightly raised veranda which would keep the entire crowd dry in the event of rain. Hot food was served throughout with the serving hatch in view of the pitch so I didn't miss any of the action while my Cheese Burger and Chips were being prepared.

I spoke to the programme editor who confirmed paper is still compulsory in this league with a £25 fine for non-compliance. So, programme enforcement in the Southern Combination but football league clubs can please themselves. It doesn't seem right somehow. Highlight of the reading matter was a coloured chart produced by the FA 'explaining' the concept of the sin bin. The editor had titled it '*Sin bins...how they work!*'. The exclamation mark would suggest that he, like myself, couldn't make head nor tail of it and unless you possessed a degree in advanced mathematics it was all a load of nonsense.

The game itself was a corker. The lead changed hands four times and when Westfield went 4-3 up with ten minutes remaining, I thought that would be that. But two goals late doors by the home side meant that it is Angmering who go on to further Macron Store Division Two Cup glory. In spite of the mess the Football Association have made of the sport a match like this is a reminder of why football is still the greatest game in the world.

contributed on 05/11/18

TT No.052: *Steve Hardy* - Saturday 3rd November 2018; **Euxton Villa** v Vickerstown; West Lancashire League Premier Division; Result: 1-2; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 25 (h/c)

I found it difficult to understand why I had never seen a game in this league before. After the Blackburn Rovers U18s game, I had a choice of six clubs I could have visited, and I chose this one simply because they were the first to reply to my text confirming the game was on.

Euxton (pronounced Exton I understand) is just outside Chorley. Today they had a nice local derby with Vickerstown, who hail from Barrow and had probably taken

about two days to get there. They certainly didn't bring any supporters with them, probably due to problems in getting a visa to leave Barrow.

The ground is excellent, although a bit basic, I thought. Perfect for step 7 though, with a fully railed off pitch and concrete walkway all the way round. The clubhouse is super with hot and cold food and drinks available from the tea bar and there was talk of a huge casserole having been prepared for the visitors for after the game. Behind the car park, there is another full-size pitch, and behind a hedge in the distance I was told there were two more pitches for the use of their numerous junior teams.

On the pitch it was pretty close in the first half, with neither side able to make a breakthrough. The second half was lots better, with Euxton taking the lead on 52 minutes when the unfortunate Vickerstown number 2 placed a perfect header in to his own net. They weren't behind for long though, as a breakaway from the half way line saw them equalise from a very acute angle on the hour mark.

After that it was end to end stuff, and I really thought a draw would have been the fairest result. It wasn't to be though as Vickerstown won it on 86 minutes to the dismay of the Euxton faithful.

So, a long and tiring day out, and I got home just in time for *Strictly*. Result.

contributed on 04/11/18

TT No.051: Steve Hardy - Saturday 3rd November 2018; Blackburn Rovers U18s v West Bromwich Albion U18s; FA Premier Academy League U18 Division; Result: 4-1; Admission and team-sheet: Free; Attendance: 44 (h/c)

Definitely one of the poshest places I have seen a game at, this one. Blackburn Rovers training ground and academy are based in a gated community called Brockhall Village, which is in the village of Old Langho, just north of Blackburn. You have to drive through a couple of barriers to get to the Academy, but this was no problem as they just automatically raise as you approach them. In fact, there was no problem getting in to the Academy at all. Staff are really friendly, there are free hot drinks in reception for all spectators, and the team-sheet was also available from there too.

There are several immaculate pitches outside the changing room block, and today we had two games being played as the U16s, of the two teams, I watched were playing on an adjacent pitch.

The football was a bit different to normal too. Academy matches are often sterile affairs with technically gifted lads cancelling each other out. Not today though, and that is probably due to the Baggies kids not really being that organised I thought. Blackburn scored on 22 minutes as the Albion keeper spilled the ball for a simple tap in, and again on 38 minutes for a 2-0 half time lead.

What we needed in the second half was an early Baggies response. We didn't get it though, as Rovers scored a 3rd on 53 minutes and bossed the game thereafter. A flurry of substitutions led to an unlikely Albion goal on 62 minutes, but that was as

good as it got for them, with Rovers scoring a fourth on 75 minutes to complete the scoring.

Most of the spectators left at half time to get to Blackburn in time to watch the first team play QPR and this made it a lot less hassle for me to set off for my second game of the day.

contributed on 04/11/18

TT No.050: Brian Buck - Saturday 27th October 2018; Newcastle Blue Star v Whitley Bay 'A'; Northern Alliance Bay Plastics Premier Division; Venue: played at Scotswood Sports Centre, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne; Result: 7-0; Attendance: 30 approx.

Today it was time to use up my rail vouchers, gleaned after my last visit up here saw the train arrive back into Peterborough some six hours late, due to overhead wire damage. As I also had a voucher for the precise amount the fare had gone up by since then my public transport travelling expenses were zilch today. Before going to the ground, I spent a bit of time in a pub in the city centre and unwittingly caught site of Glen Hoddle trying to beat Robbie Savage at table football on TV as the credits rolled at the end of a programme. I knew that something was wrong the minute he mis-controlled a ball. Moments later and off screen he had his heart attack from which he is now thankfully recovering.

Anyway, I then caught the number 38 bus from outside the station to near the ground and then walked a short distance to it from there. However, the number 1 bus would have dropped me off right outside the ground. Anyway, I arrived at the ground just as they were putting up the goals and soon the manager appeared and opened up the clubhouse. This until recently housed the boxing club, but has since relocated inside the sports centre and only days earlier it had been opened by the widow of Bobby Robson. Newcastle Blue Star are last year's Hazlerigg Victory but the owner wants to get the club going again as he has fond memories of the original club when he used to play for them. He's pumped a lot of money into the club. I'm guessing that he's paid for the pitch railing and dugouts and also all the sports clothing which appears in the club-shop inside the clubhouse, where there's a bar, teas and coffee's and limited hot food available. The club also issue a glossy four-page programme and today's was issue 8. As the clubhouse was out of sight of the pitch it was handy that they had a webcam inside the clubhouse, so you could see when the players returned to the playing arena at the start of the second half. I too have fond memories of Newcastle Blue Star as they were the only team I have ever 'scouted'! This was when I was living in Cheshunt and they were drawn away to them in the FA Vase Quarter Final. So also, with my Groundhopping hat on, I watched them play Stockton away a week or so before the big match took place on 13 March 1982 and I reported my findings back to the then manager John Drabwell, with whom I became good friends, although I haven't seen him for some time now. Cheshunt did well in the Vase tie and got a creditable draw there, att: 605. I spent that day with an extremely attractive reporter from the Newcastle Chronicle and my biggest regret was that I was out when she phoned me at home during the

following week. I was out watching football of course and Spurs were at home on the date of the replay, which Cheshunt lost 1-0.

Today on a sunny but very cold day, the hosts won as easily as the score-line suggests. Although Whitley Bay add the suffix 'A' to their name, this was in fact their reserves, strange in the fact that they don't actually have an official reserve team! Star were winning 4-0 by the 31st minute and their task was made even easier when a visiting player picked up a second yellow just before half time. Highlight of the day? Being nutmegged by a dog at half time. It ran between my legs!

contributed on 01/11/18

TT No.049: Keith Aslan - Saturday 27th October 2018; WYTHENSHAW AMATEURS v Stone Old Alleynians; North West Counties First Division South; Kick-Off: 14.59; Result: 3-3; Admission: £2 for the aged; Programme: £2; Attendance: 125 (111 home, 10 away & 4 neutral)

Thirty-one minutes late into Stockport, stuck behind a train waiting a guard at Milton Keynes. But good news for Dickie's "customers", it was a *London Midland* train and not *Virgin's* fault so that makes it all ok then. A half hourly bus service, 11a, from Stockport Bus station drops you outside the ground (If you are the other person in the universe who pays bus fares I was charged £3 going and £2 coming back, work that one out!). This is a brand-new stadium which was only opened for business earlier this year. Bit of a delay with the lighting, the floodlight opener was due to take place the Tuesday following my visit. There is a stand along the half way line with, I assume, seating to be put in at some stage, but all in all a good-looking ground. The inviting clubhouse was opened by Brian Robson and has many interesting photographs on the wall including one of Wythenshawe's 1956 Whittaker Cup Final winning team which contained Shay Brennan, Wilf McGuinness and Bobby Charlton. That must have been one heck of a team. You can watch the lunchtime football on a big screen, a pleasure that was denied me due to *Virgin* trains tardiness. Food and drinks were readily available.

Stone Old Alleynians are so called as they were formed in 1962 by Dave Bonnet who was a teacher and former pupil of Alleynes Grammer school in Stone while the Amateur moniker in Wythenshawe is self-explanatory. I wouldn't think there are many teams in the North West Counties League that don't pay their players but obviously money isn't everything (in spite of what the Premier League may think) and Wythenshawe currently stand third in the table.

The match was a cracker, but, and it's a very big but, Wythenshawe should be ashamed of their time wasting which they took to levels I've never seen before. 1-0, 2-0, 2-1, 3-1 then 3-2 was the signal for the home side to stop playing football. Every throw in and free kick was taken by the player furthest away and an integral part of their training must be to see how slow a player can walk without actually stopping. Twice they took so long making a substitution that the referee prevented them making the change meaning they could waste more time again just a minute later. This was quite pathetic and as they are not getting paid and only playing for

enjoyment one wonders what enjoyment they derived by trying to prevent a football match happening. Bet you can't guess what action the referee took? It was a relief as much as anything else when Stone equalized 5 minutes from the end. This was the signal for Wythenshawe to resort to playing football again and we had an entertaining last 11 minutes. The time wasting hadn't worked, perhaps if they'd tried to get another goal they could have won the game, but hey ho, what do I know. It's good to see the F.A. have suggested a fool proof plan to speed the game up. They have just discovered that teams are using the three substitutions rule to waste time (who'd have thought it?) so they aren't going to allow any changes to be made in the time referees add on to the 90 minutes for no reason. Well that'll work, stand by for a shed load of 89th minute substitutions. About as useful as the *Respect* handshakes.

As I've said, overall this was a very good game and the referee's punctual kick off meaning there was no stress catching the 16.56 bus after the match. *Virgin* ran to the timetable going back to round off a thoroughly enjoyable day. I wish Wythenshawe well, they are a lovely club, but a little tip, if you're 3-2 up with 20 minutes to go, try continuing to play football, you might be pleasantly surprised at the result.

contributed on 29/10/18

TT No.048: *Steve Hardy* - Saturday 27th October 2018; **Armada** v Bluepool; Birmingham & District League Division Six; Result: 4-3; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance; 3 h/c

When I left home to drive to this match, it was snowing. When I arrived, the snow had stopped and had been replaced by driving rain. Now it is well known in my family, that I don't 'do' rain, so I did contemplate watching the match from my car. However, ever the professional, and not wanting to let down my adoring readers, I donned my galoshes, sou'wester and camera and set off.

The action took place in Balsall Heath in south Birmingham at Calthorpe Park. As my photos show, this park is very close to Edgbaston Cricket ground with its very distinctive floodlights a wonderful backdrop. Armada are a relatively new club and decided to try their luck in the Birmingham & District league after a spell as a Sunday club. They have been placed in Division Six (the bottom division) for their debut season, and today's match was an absolute belter.

Visitors Bluepool started much the better side, and took the lead with a cheeky backheel on just 10 minutes. Armada equalised six minutes later when a shot was parried, giving the home forward a simple tap in, but after that it was all Bluepool with an Armada corner being pumped upfield and the very quick Bluepool forward racing the length of the pitch to shoot home from a tight angle on 42 minutes. This was then followed by another breakaway goal on 44 minutes, and a very deserved 3-1 halftime lead for Bluepool.

After the break, Armada stopped their internal bickering and started to play as a team again. They were rewarded with 2 penalties on 49 and 58 minutes and found

themselves back in the game at 3-3. The first penalty actually hit the bar and bounced out, but in the ensuing scramble, the same chap who had taken the penalty managed to toe poke the ball in to the corner.

Credit to Bluepool after this though, as they really gave it a go, but they were finally undone on 82 minutes when Armada scored their 4th, and, winning goal.

All in all, another top, if a tad soggy, afternoon in my favourite league in the world. Armada were a very welcoming club and I felt sorry for them that their changing room block was being used for drug dealing throughout the match.

contributed on 28/10/18

TT No.047: *Brian Buck* - Saturday 20th October 2018; **Herstmonceux** v Icklesham Casuals; Macron Store Hastings East Sussex League Division 1; Result: 3-6; Attendance: 10 approx.

Today I took my wife to see her auntie who lives in Woodingdean, near Brighton, which had the advantage in that I was well fed both before and after the game I went to see while the pair of them were yapping away in my absence. Initially I chose this match because not only is there a very attractive castle not far away, which I never got to see, but the hosts were allegedly issuing programmes. However, when I confirmed the game on the previous night I discovered that this is no longer the case. I was told that the club have had a change of management, which equates to the fact that the editor has left the club! Anyway, despite this setback I decided to go with it anyway.

You can get here by bus, an hourly service from either Polegate or Bexhill. I arrived at the ground just under an hour before kick-off and saw that things were on the move. Icklesham were getting changed from their cars, as there are no dressing rooms on site. There was no sign of the hosts. I was told that they walk up from The Woolpack Inn, a pub in the village, about a third of a mile away. But as I drove to the said pub I neither passed them or saw them in the pub. Later I was told that there are some dressing rooms between the two venues. So, it was now time for a relaxed slurp and to watch the end of the Chelsea v Man United game at the same time, with the former equalising in the last minute of injury time. This must have upset the landlord's dog as it immediately crapped close to the dining area!

I then returned to the ground where they were just about to start. The club committee, which seemed to be made up of three people, had erected a gazebo from under which hot tea, coffee and biscuits were sold. There was also a connection between the two clubs in that they are both sponsored by *Littlewood*, a local fencing company, seemingly run by two brothers. They each sponsor one of the teams! No wonder we got a catalogue of disasters during the game! Then it was time for the match to start, on this undulating pitch, which slopes in all directions. The visitors went 2-0 up against the bottom of the table hosts within 6 minutes. But by the 21st minute it was all square and then the hosts took the lead on 35 minutes. However, on 45(+2) minutes Icklesham equalised. The second half

was fairly even until the 72nd minute when the ref decided to give the visitors a spot kick. But I and the 'unbiased' home coach thought that the foul was committed just outside the area, but the ref 'won'. This displeased the home players and after Icklesham scored again, five minutes later one of their number was sin binned. But the bloke (the goalie actually) who called the ref an 'effing you know what', wasn't carded at all. He had to let that one go, because he couldn't find out who swore at him, as no one would admit to it! Then on 85 minutes Icklesham scored their 6th goal and then another home player was sin binned! When I went to get their scorers names at the end I was described as "the man from the papers wants to know!" Overall probably just another Saturday in deepest East Sussex!

contributed on 24/10/18

TT No.046: Keith Aslan - Saturday 20th October 2018; ASHLAND ROVERS v Pinxton; Central Midlands League Cup; Kick-Off: 15.02; Result: 1-4; Admission: £1! for old people; Programme: £1; Attendance: 53 (34 home, 18 away & 1 neutral)

Most Saturdays the closest you can get to this one by train is Bedford, so it would be churlish not to take advantage of East Midland railways kind gesture of running trains all the way to Nottingham today from where Kirby-in-Ashfield is a half hour ride on the Mansfield branch. The ground is a 10-minute stroll from the station and for my pre. match entertainment I found a pub. in the towns cultural quarter to watch the second half of the Chelsea Man. U. match. Chelsea's equalizer coming in the sixth Fergie minute which I found very ironic and very funny.

The ground is in the pleasant setting of Kingsway Park. Although spectators are only allowed down one side that's quite sufficient for Ashland's crowds and there is still plenty of room for any 'Atcost Action' the club might want to undertake in the future. There was a hockey match taking place on the adjacent plastic pitch (Ashland is grass) but it didn't distract me from the football due to the sex of the participants. The ground has floodlights and is enclosed by a tall fence through which cheapskates can watch the game from outside the ground. The café is the selling point here, it is closely connected to, but not owned by, the football club and has a wide range of comestibles at very cheap prices. Change from a quid for teas and coffees and double cheesburgers for £2. It deservedly did a roaring trade.

Only a pound to get in and another pound bought an excellent programme. Ashland were forcibly transferred into the Central Mids. this season from the Notts. Senior League. "The F.A. in London decided to alter the boundaries of local leagues" quotes the programme with the word 'London' in that sentence suggesting Ashland aren't too happy with the reorganization. (Don't think they're alone on that one). Any programme worth its salt has a player profile with defender Danny Smith featuring in this one. His favourite restaurant is the Harvester wouldn't you know, but the highlight of any profile is 'What four guests would you invite to a dinner party' You get some really weird foursomes turning up in these and Danny's guest list is no exception. His four were: Karl Pilkington, Bob Marley, Ricky Hatton and Paul Gascoigne. Apart from anything else I wouldn't expect Bob Marley to

contribute very much to the evening, dead people generally don't have a lot to say for themselves.

Pinxton are top of the table with six wins out of six but this is the cup and league form counts for nothing today. Well it does actually and the league leaders comfortably won this tie although Ashland were one up at the break. How fitting that a goalkeeper playing for Pinxton should play in all Pink, an interesting contrast to the day-glow orange his team mates were sporting. I would venture to suggest whoever chose their match day apparel is colour blind.

You can be sure of a warm welcome at this club although I fear the constraints of playing on a council owned ground will prevent any further upward mobility. But they seem comfortable where they are as long as the 'F.A. in London' don't decide to dump them somewhere else.

contributed on 21/10/18

TT No.045: *Steve Hardy* - Saturday 20th October 2018; **Leamington Hibernian** v AEI Rugby; Birmingham FA Saturday Vase 1st Round; Kick-Off: 2.00pm; Result: 0-1; Admission charge/Programme: No; Attendance: 8 h/c

This was the third ground I had seen the Hibs play on, and they are currently based in the small village of Cubbington, just outside Leamington Spa. The venue is the Cubbington Playing Fields which is exactly that. A park with a kiddie's play area to one side and a roped off pitch outside the excellent clubhouse/changing room block. The club also have a tea bar set up in the clubhouse, although I felt sorry for the lady running it as she would hardly have broken even with the crowd numbering just 8.

I chose this match as I was looking for a shock result. I didn't get one though, as bottom of the Midland league Hibs never looked like beating bottom of the Coventry Alliance Premier division visitors AEI Rugby. The game was strangely fascinating though, and I couldn't take my eyes off it. The visitors had a forward line of 2 chaps whose weight and age would probably be the same, 40 plus. They also had the pace of a very elderly snail, with 0 to 60 in about 4 weeks. Their winning goal came in the 29th minute when the Hibs keeper very kindly fumbled the ball into the path of the more rotund of the AEI forwards, and he just had to tap it in.

Hibs seemed a team at war with themselves really. Literally at one point, when, as the two teams emerged for the second half, a fight broke out between the Hibs keeper and one of his forwards. They exchanged blows before being separated by team mates and the second half continued with the Hibs forward concerned, screaming at his team mates to 'pass me the f***ing ball' which they steadfastly refused to do.

On a serious note, Hibs seem rather a pointless club to me. Nobody can be enjoying what they are doing on the pitch, surely, with constant abuse for one of their black players and each other, from both the team and management. That said, the Midland league is probably better for them than returning to the Coventry

Alliance, say, as the Alliance standard is far higher than Midland League Division 3 and their weekly thrashings would be much more severe.

contributed on 21/10/18

TT No.044: Steve Hardy - Saturday 13th October 2018; **Chasetown v Lincoln United**; FA Trophy Preliminary Round; Result: 2-1; Admission: £6 for an OAP; Programme: £2; Team sheet: Free; Attendance: 223

At 6am on Saturday morning, this match wasn't even in my top ten of potential games to watch. However, a mixture of CBA, torrential rain and having to travel by bus, meant a revisit to the beautiful Scholars ground was in order. It is one of my favourite grounds anyway, so this was no hardship at all.

Chasetown are in a spot of bother at the moment. Joint bottom of the NPL West division, they have recently changed their Manager, and were looking to start their revival against NPL East rivals Lincoln United. Lincoln brought a good few supporters with them, which was good to see, and the official crowd was announced as 223 although my headcount was just over the 100 mark!

The football was, how can I put this... poor. One team who are very low on confidence, against another who couldn't hit a barn door with a banjo. In the end it was decided by three penalties. A dire first half came to life right on 45 minutes when Chasetown won the first of their penalties, which was duly dispatched for a 1-0 half time lead. The second half was slightly better, with Lincoln equalising straight after the break from the second penalty, after a Chasetown handball in the area. It was then end to end, without either team looking like scoring, until Chasetown were awarded a second penalty on 70 minutes, and scoring what proved to be the winner.

Chasetown are always a very friendly club to visit. The clubhouse is excellent and now houses what remains of the club shop. Just club merchandise on sale now, so what happened to the huge collection of programmes they used to have, is anybody's guess.

contributed on 15/10/18

TT No.043: Keith Aslan - Saturday 13th October 2018; **BEDFORD ALBION v Sandy** (Albion free since 2001); Bedfordshire County Division 1; Kick-Off: 11.01; Result: 9-0; Admission: Free; Programme: £2; Attendance: 149 (20 home, 0 away & 129 neutral).

Another hop, another social occasion, and while I don't have many friends, most of the ones I do have were here. Everybody on my train got off at Bedford, but I was one of the few that actually wanted to. Rail Replacement buses for the poor sods who needed to go any further north, Bedford to Leicester by bus? Oh joy! An hourly-service runs from the bus station to outside the ground but I don't quite know why. 4 hoppers on the outward journey and 1 hopper (me) on the return and that was the lot. In Thanet the council are threatening to remove all bus subsidies on routes people are actually using while Bedford Council are putting their money

into running empty ones. Arrival at the ground was in pouring rain which the B.B.C. had neglected to tell anybody about but it was soon over and I was able to dry out in un-October-esque temperatures of 24 degrees during the match.

Everything you would expect from a hop match (unless it's an Eastern Counties one). Programme, hot food, drinks and the teams written on a large whiteboard. The homemade Walnut and Coffee cake was absolutely scrumptious but you needed to get in quick as some greedy people (well just me actually) had three slices. Whoever made it should be on 'The Great British Bake Off': I quote from the chairman's history of the club "We were very fortunate after (the) 2nd game of the season last season's top scorer Challi got injured which ruled him out for a full season" If I was 'Challi' I'd be a bit miffed about that sentence. Sandy have gone a long way down in the world, when I visited them they were riding high in the South Midlands League in the days before the evil of ground grading took hold. Their manager has recently done a runner taking a shed load of players with him, hence today's result.

Top v bottom this was a rerun of David and Goliath only this time Goliath came up trumps. 7-0 at half time Bedford took pity in the second half while the referee did his bit in keeping the score down by not awarding the home side the most obvious penalty you will see in your life. He had a big grin on his face as he indicated play on after the blatant foul and waved away the understandable protests from players and groundhoppers alike by forming a square with his fingers suggesting it should be referred to v.a.r. but as there wasn't any there's nothing anyone could do about it. The ref. was a bit of a character!

Having done the next two Hop games, I had the choice of doing a revisit with a programme, doing a new ground without one or going home. I went home.

contributed on 14/10/18

TT No.042: Steve Hardy - Saturday 6th October 2018; Punjab United v Little Eaton Reserves; Midland Regional Alliance Division One Cup; Kick-Off: 2.00pm; Result: 4-1; Admission charge/Programme: No; Attendance: 3 h/c

My second match of the day came at the Derby Moor Community Sports Centre, in Littleover, and followed an interesting trip through the back streets of Derby. Those of you who watch such programmes as Police Interceptors, will be familiar with the term *TPac*. Well, I found myself in the middle of one on my trip to Derby Moor as six police cars descended from all directions and stopped the car in front of me at a set of traffic lights. Two gentlemen were dragged from the car, handcuffed and driven away, before you could say 'strewth'. Quite scary really.

When I got to the venue, I had a strange feeling of *déjà-vu*. Had I been there before when it was known as something else? Well, not according to my records, but it did have a familiar feel to it, I must say. The Academy is vast, with a 3G pitch in a cage at the back, plus several grass pitches, one of which being the venue for this afternoon's fun and games.

A couple of weeks ago, Little Eaton Resses had won 3-0 here in a league match. On today's performance though it is very difficult to imagine how on earth they managed that, as they were dreadful. Punjab themselves aren't pulling up any trees in this league and are next to bottom, but they were still far too good on the day. They lead 2-0 at the break, scored two more in the second half, before a very late consolation goal from the visitors on 86 minutes gave the score-line an undeserved air of respectability.

At half time, I had a look at the goings on in the 3G pitch, where a training session was in full swing for both the Derby men and women's American Football teams. Not a pretty sight I can tell you.

contributed on 11/10/18

TT No.041: Keith Aslan - Saturday 6th October 2018; CLEETHORPES TOWN v Guiseley; FA Cup 3rd Qualifying Round; Kick-Off: 15.01; Result: 2-2; Admission: £4 for old people; Programme: £2; Attendance: 285 (225 home, 56 away & 4 neutral)

'New Linden' hosts the biggest match in its history' blazed the Cleethorpes website. Undoubtedly true, but not a particularly impressive accolade given the ground has only been open for just over two months. A new build with not one, not two but three *Atcost* structures with the stand-out feature as far as I was concerned, a large digital clock, the first one I've come across that actually keeps going until the end of the match and doesn't automatically stop on 45 minutes. A spacious and well filled clubhouse contained all the food and drink you could wish for all enjoyed while watching Brentford v Leeds on a large screen. The teams came out to the magnificent football anthem - Liquidator by Harry James and the All Stars. Took me back to my days on the terraces at Stamford Bridge and I believe Chelsea still enter the field today to this piece of music. The matchday experience is certainly top of the range here and I wonder how big the crowd would have been if Grimsby Town hadn't been playing a mile up the road.

A 25-minute walk from the station you alight from the train to be greeted by a large sign boasting "Cleethorpes - welcoming visitors since 1863". Presumably before then they just told people to push off. If like me you're into maps the framed pre-Beeching Ordinance Survey map in the booking hall is a must see. Cleethorpes wasn't at its best today with the continuous drizzle curtailing my walk along the prom. but not before I'd found a café with a glorious view of where the sea would be when the tide came in.

Cleethorpes league form is pants, they're bottom of the table, but they're virtually unbeatable in knockout football. By Tuesday they will have played 7 games in the FA Cup, probably more than the team that actually wins it. Also, through to the next round of the 'Trophy' and for good measure they've beaten Grimsby and Scunthorpe in the Lincolnshire Senior Cup, although I suspect the league teams might have used what is euphemistically called the squad rotation system for these games. This was corker of a match, with the home side matching their higher-grade opponents shot for shot. When Guiseley got their second midway through the second half word on the terraces was that would be that, but with 10 minutes

remaining Cleethorpes scored two quick goals for a replay. Even I got quite excited about the equalizer, but obviously not as excited as the home fans. In the last round they drew the home game with Bamber Bridge but won the replay (and what a fun journey that must have been midweek) 5-0, so don't write them off just yet. The coach fare for Guiseley is a remarkably cheap £5. I wish them well.

contributed on 08/10/18

TT No.040: *Steve Hardy* - Saturday 6th October 2018; **Sherwin** v Loughborough Emmanuel; Derby Church League; Kick-Off: 10.30am; Result: 7-1; Admission charge/Programme: No; Attendance 3 h/c

When I first started going to games in the Derby Church league it had two divisions and about twenty clubs participating. You could still complete the league in a couple of visits mind, as just about every game was played at the Derby Racecourse, which is a multi-pitch job almost on the scale of Hackney Marshes. Today, the league is down to one division of just 10 clubs but the good news is that a couple of new venues have been added.

One of these new venues was the setting for my fix this morning. It is the Darley Playing Fields on the Old Chester Road in Derby, and it is, once again, a multi pitch job. Sherwin are named after a Saint, Sir Ralph Sherwin and were formed back in 1973. Today's visitors are perennial strugglers Loughborough Emmanuel and, once again, I admit I chose this game as I fully expected a hat full of goals!

After the players gathered in the centre circle for a group prayer, we got on with the game. It soon became apparent that Loughborough didn't have a proper goalkeeper, and Sherwin eased to a 4-0 lead at the break. An outfield player swapped with the goalie for the second half, but it made no difference as Sherwin scored three more. The only highlight for Emmanuel came on 56 minutes, when, with the score at 5-0, they managed a goal of their own. The two Managers spent most of the game chatting with each other about the local football scene, and everything seemed very friendly and trouble free apart from one Sherwin player being booked for swearing, which is a big no-no in this league. He was immediately substituted by his Manager.

Even the rain stopped just as we were kicking off, so an excellent start to my Derby double.

contributed on 07/10/18

TT No.039: *Brian Buck* - Saturday 29th September 2018; **Cromer Youth Old Boys** v Gimingham United; Walcott Lighthouse Inn North East Norfolk League Sanders Coaches Division 1; Venue: played at Bodham Playing Field; Result: 2-2; Attendance: 10 approx.

Today I 'cherry picked' this game, as on this day Gimingham were top and Cromer second, both with a 100% playing record. To get here I travelled by train from Cambridge to Sheringham, via Norwich for a very reasonable £12.35 using my senior railcard. Trouble was that a lot of other people fancied a trip to Sheringham

as well and the train from Norwich to Sheringham was crowded and included one annoying family, complete with an irritating kid, who chose me to sit near me on the trains to and from Norwich. Anyway, once the bucket and spade brigade had bugged off, I had enough time for a quick sausage & chips before my bus 44 arrived, 15 minutes late. They are run by *Sanders Coaches*, who sponsor the only division in this league.

Anyway, I was still at the ground with at least 45 minutes to spare. There's no social club here so it was off to the Red Hart, about five minutes-walk away, time enough to knock back a couple of pints of 6.25% Norfolk Raider cider. They do food here, but I didn't partake. Dogs are also catered for and they have their own menu under the heading of 'Dogs Dinner'! Anyway, back at the ground they were nearly ready to start when I returned. I did enquire about Gimingham's name, as last season they were referred to as Gimingham United, but this season the 'United' part has been dropped. They say they are still known as Gimingham United.

With that sorted I moved round to the tin stand, a very small affair. It has two steps at the back of it, made out of railway sleepers and I sat on the top one of them. The league will have new champions this season as previously it had been won by Runton United every season since season 2012/13, the last three seasons without dropping a point. But now they have folded and the management team and some of the players have moved on to nearby Holt United of the Anglian Combination. Gimingham were winners of this league in season 2011/12, but today they got off to a poor start when they conceded an own goal on 12 minutes. They went further behind on 30 minutes from a 25-yard direct free kick. Then Gimingham got going and played a bit better. I heard their team talk at the break and they didn't seem overly concerned about their situation. On 52 minutes they pulled a goal back when a loose ball was thumped home from the edge of the area. Although they were the dominant side in this period I thought they'd run out of ideas, but on 86 minutes they proved me wrong when from a corner they forced the ball home from close range. Overall a decent game. Then it was time to catch the bus back to Sheringham and reunite with the family from hell, who finally departed the train from Norwich at Wymondham, thus leaving me in the more peaceful company of some Wigan Athletic fans, returning home from their 1-0 defeat at Norwich City!

contributed on 04/10/18

TT No.038: *Keith Aslan* - Saturday 29th September 2018; **TRIMLEY RED DEVILS** v Benhall St. Mary; Suffolk & Ipswich League Senior Division; Result: 2-0; Kick-Off: 14.30; Admission: Free; Programme: £1; Attendance: 32 (27 home, 2 away & 3 neutral)

The first thing that hits you as you enter the ground is the large brick-built structure on the far side of the pitch, I wasn't expecting a stand. I didn't get one, but Trimley must have one of the largest, most ostentatious dug outs in the country. A joy to behold for dug out spotters (believe me, they exist) and if it

rained you could just ask the subs. to budge up a bit and there'd be plenty of room for the entire crowd.

A ten-minute walk from the station I arrived at the ground 2 hours before kick-off just as the man in the tea bar was changing the price list from morning tariff to the afternoon one. Tea 20p extra for the afternoon football. Asking the obvious question, I was told that it's china cups in the morning but they must have paper ones in the afternoon which they have to pay for. This is because they would be in big trouble with the FA if there was any pitch side aggro. and the china ones were used as weapons. I did suggest the likelihood of any china related violence was pretty small but the club aren't prepared to take the chance! Why 'Red Devils' I hear you ask? The answer I was given, which I very much doubt, not least because it came from the same source as 'The China Syndrome' was when the club was formed they didn't know what to call it. Trimley perhaps? They put all the first division clubs into a hat, randomly picked out Manchester United, and hence the name. Seems a bit unlikely to me. Talking of the Salford branch of the Glazier Business Empire, the vital part of any programme, the player profile, was of Suffolk born and bred Sam Osborne whose favourite team was of course Manchester United. Of much more interest to Trimley fans was that his favourite food is Pizza. I myself went for steak and chips in nearby pub 'The Mariner' which I bet my Trimley contact would assure me was named after Ipswich legend, Paul.

With all three home goalkeepers unavailable for varying reasons they had their centre half between the sticks, and if I hadn't been told that I wouldn't have known it wasn't his regular position. The usual first team keeper was at the match but nursing an industrial injury when he did his back in on a swivel chair. It's a laugh a minute at this club. The game itself was pretty average, Benhall were the better team, Trimley scored the goals. Three officials in this league with Novak Djokovic's twin brother running one of the lines. I'll end this report like all the others, a great day out.

contributed on 01/10/18

TT No.037: *Steve Hardy* - Saturday 29th September 2018; **AFC Woods United** v Bulkington S & S; Coventry Telegraph Challenge Cup; Kick-Off: 2.32pm; Result: 0-3; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 31 h/c

The Coventry Telegraph cup is a big deal in these parts, and is taken very seriously. My match today featured two Coventry Alliance clubs, but the competition also includes several Coventry clubs from the Midland league lower reaches too.

I must admit, this wasn't my first choice for the afternoon's fun today. After my morning match I had chosen a match just 3 miles away for RS Sports of the Coventry Alliance. When I arrived there, I realised it was a 3G pitch in a cage job, so decided to save that for a rainy day, and drove off to the leafy suburb of Binley Woods instead.

The match featured teams just 3 places apart in the league. Top of Division One, AFC Woods v 2nd bottom in the Premier division, Bulkington. A close encounter with maybe a shock result was on the cards, surely? Unfortunately, not, as in truth Bulkington played a very clever game by soaking up all the Woods' pressure, before striking brilliantly on the break. They scored first on 20 minutes, totally against the run of play, and followed this with two more breakaway goals in the 43rd and 80th minute to seal a comfortable 3-0 victory.

The Binley Woods Recreation ground does exactly what it says on the tin. Just an un-roped pitch in the local park, with a kiddies' play area just next to the excellent changing room block. The only problem they have is a lack of a car park. This resulted in cars being abandoned in front of all the surrounding houses, and the locals coming out in force to take photos of the offending cars to show to the council.

Once again, we were on 'Coventry time' too. The supposed 2.15 KO time came and went as the referee hadn't arrived, ironically because he couldn't find anywhere to park his car!

contributed on 30/09/18

TT No.036: *Steve Hardy* - Saturday 29th September 2018; **Holy Trinity** v HERC Saints; Coventry & District Church League Division 2; Kick-Off: 10.01am; Result: 3-2; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance 1 h/c

I do enjoy my visits to the various Church leagues that are spread around the country. Each has their own peculiar quirks though, and with the Coventry League it is finding out where the games are actually being played, as venues are a closely guarded secret. Luckily, a couple of clubs have *twitter* accounts, so I was able to trawl through these and eventually settled on Foxford School in the north of Coventry, and close to the Ricoh, which is the home of Holy Trinity FC.

I arrived at 9.50am and wandered over to the pitch to see if anyone had turned up yet, and found the match just about to kick off. Seems several of the players wanted to get to the Coventry City early kick off, so an early start, no half-time break, and an early finish was just the ticket.

On the pitch, the Trinity took an early lead on 20 minutes, and then nothing much seemed to happen for the next 65 minutes really. Then, bang! Trinity scored twice in a minute to lead 3-0, before Saints scored 2 of their own in the final two minutes, to leave us with a 3-2 score-line.

Facilities-wise, there were none. This was just an un-roped off pitch in the middle of a school sports field. As I was the only spectator again though, it didn't matter one jot.

contributed on 30/09/18

TT No.035: *Brian Buck* - Saturday 22nd September 2018; **Fillongley** v AFC Woods United; Coventry Alliance Division 1; Kick-Off: 2.15pm; Result: 1-4; Attendance: 30 approx.

Fillongley is about a fifteen-minute drive from Christ The King and I arrived about 75 minutes before kick-off, at roughly the same time the visitors did. I then left the car here and then headed off down the hill and about five minutes later I'd arrived at Fillongley Social Club and this is where the Fillongley players were congregating and watching the football on the TV. I had to almost force my way through them to get to the bar. In fact, I was right behind one player who after paying his subs was also fined one pound for being late. Luckily the manager didn't mistake me for a player, although looking at some of them it would be an easy thing to do! Anyway, once they disappeared to get ready for the match I had a bit more space and had plenty of time for a slurp and something to eat. Nice people in here. I was back at the ground well in time for kick off. The rain from the morning game had followed me here, but it wasn't intense or windy, so a brolly did the trick.

This is quite a scenic ground and the pitch slopes quite severely from top to bottom where the changing facilities are. Although Fillongley have made a decent start to the season today they were up against their top of the table visitors, who were well supported, a sure sign that they are doing well. They went a goal up on 37 minutes when a cross was 'passed' into the net with power. They scored again on 44 minutes when with no one around him the keeper dropped the ball and was taken away from the scorer. The Fillongley half time team talk didn't go well and their captain got annoyed and walked away from the group. But he was persuaded to re-join them by a sub, before walking away again. In the second half the ref missed a potential game changing incident when he failed to pick up an obvious push on a Woods player inside the area on 58 minutes. Then 11 minutes later the hosts pulled a goal back and suddenly the game became closer than it should have been. But goals on 76 and 90(+2) minutes saw the points deservedly go the visitors' way to end a really enjoyable day out.

contributed on 27/09/18

TT No.034: Brian Buck - Saturday 22nd September 2018; Christ The King v Coventrians (Holy Family); Coventry & District Church League Division 2; Kick-Off: 10.30am; Venue: played at Bablake Playing Fields, Norman Place Road, Coventry; Result: 2-4; Attendance: 10 approx.

I was up early to get to this one, but still didn't arrive in time to get a cup of coffee when I got there. The last one, before they temporarily closed up, was taken by the visitor's secretary and she had to make it herself! I didn't know about this particular league until the previous day when the aforementioned lady put details of her club's weekend games onto *twitter*. One of the things she cares a lot about is giving all her clubs team's equal publicity. Anyway, I moved over to the other side of the pitch to watch the match, thinking that I would be free from the respective benches, but I was only half successful and the hosts contingent soon appeared as well. Nonetheless I found myself a nice bench to sit on.

This is also the venue where Christ The King of the Coventry Alliance play and their pitch was behind the top goal and was tree-lined on three sides. They have a long-

term lease here, having already done 50 years I'm told. But they do share the facilities with other clubs and sports. Soon I was joined by the visiting secretary and we spent most of the first half talking and soon found that our ideals for football in general matched. She has a tremendous vision for 'her' club and I hope that her plans come to fruition.

The match started late because the appointed ref failed to show. But the league vice-chairman was present and so he reffed it. The visitors took the lead on two minutes and things remained that way until after half time, when some light rain had started to fall. But the nearby trees were leafy enough to stop me from getting wet. The host's keeper did their half-time team talk. I doubt if anyone understood what he said as he seemed to talk at about 100mph, faster than a racing commentator! Anyway, it did no good as Coventrians doubled their lead on 49 minutes and tripling it on 73 minutes. Then came the moment when the ref nearly sent off his own son! He was about nine or ten, but as the rain intensified he was overly keen that his father should put on his rain-jacket. His father politely ushered him away. The hosts pulled a goal back on 78 minutes, before both sides scored again before the end.

contributed on 27/09/18

TT No.033: *Keith Aslan* - Saturday 22nd September 2018; **LARKSPUR ROVERS** v Pitshanger Dynamo; Middlesex County League Premier; Kick-Off: 15.03; Result: 0-2; Admission & Programme: Free; Attendance: 18 (12 home, 2 away & 4 neutral).

Today was of course '*World Car Free Day*'. Just like every other day for some of us! The idea was everybody will save the planet by leaving their cars at home and travelling by public transport. Like that was ever going to happen! From what I saw it was about as successful as the '*Respect*' handshakes. Leaving my imaginary car at home I caught the Central Line to Northolt for this game, it's about a 20-minute walk although it took me a tad longer to navigate my way through a large housing estate that wasn't on my somewhat retro map.

There is a clubhouse here to shelter from the incessant rain and at another match you might be lucky on the hot drinks front, no milk or sugar today. The pitch was half surrounded by the ubiquitous '*Respect*' tape before someone lost the will to finish the job. I was protected from the worst of the elements from Harlow Dave's umbrella which was the only cover available. Middlesex League means 'programme'. No on-line nonsense here and Larkspur produced a basic 4 pager that contained everything you need. The teams, both clubs' histories and a league table. Just the job. With teams with vastly more resources whinging that issuing programmes costs them money here's a tip for you. Instead of glossy colour overpriced magazines do something like this and charge a few 'bob' for it, I can guarantee it would more than pay for itself. Once again well done the Middlesex League and, well done Larkspur Rovers. According to their club history Pitshanger Dynamo were formed in 2010 although I suspect that should read 're-formed'. I saw them play at their wooden railed ground in the last century and their badge on the

front cover of the programme has 1972 on it. Larkspur were founded in 1950 but only recently started to move up in the world.

Dynamo are top of the league and didn't have any problem accounting for Larkspur. With everybody wet-through (did I mention it rained all afternoon) the referee added 4 minutes onto the second half when there were no discernible stoppages. Why do they do this, what's the point, what do they think the game will lack by just playing 45 minutes. The spurious 4 minutes produced 1 booking and nothing else of note. Even the linesman couldn't understand why the match was being dragged out so long.

I acquired a lift back to the station but as it was 'World Car Free Day' I felt very guilty. Not really.

contributed on 23/09/18

TT No.032: Steve Hardy - Saturday 22nd September 2018; Manchester City U23 v Derby County U23; Elite Football Development League; Kick-Off: 1.00pm; Result: 3-2; Admission: £1; Programme: Free; Attendance: 65 H/C

Match two today was at the Manchester City Academy stadium. For those that don't know the layout of the various City grounds, the Academy is on the opposite side of the Ashton New Road from the Etihad Stadium. Having seen the U18s playing on one of the numerous grass pitches in the Academy, I had long wanted to see a match at the main Academy stadium, so today, with its 1.00pm start was just perfect.

The Academy stadium is massive. It has a 7500 capacity, and is also home to the Women's team, the City U19 team in the European Youth League as well as this side which I think might be the Reserves in old money.

Admission is by ticket only, with my OAP ticket for just £1 being bought from a portacabin ticket office on the other side of the ground. Team-sheets are handed out freely at the electronic turnstiles and everybody seems very friendly and relaxed. The crowd are restricted to just one of the massive stands though, and I was politely told I couldn't wander around the ground to take photos, as I am wont to do.

The football itself was more like a training exercise in all honesty but I was really impressed by the City team. Slowly passing the ball across the defence, back to the keeper, more slow passing in the defence, and then bang. Four really quick passes later and they have scored. In summary they were 3-0 up by the 80th minutes, having missed umpteen chances, before an unlikely Derby revival netted them 2 goals in the last five minutes. If Derby had got anything out of the game it would have been a travesty, but their rally came just too late really.

Another super day out in Manchester and two very different levels of football watched.

contributed on 23/09/18

TT No.031: Steve Hardy - Saturday 22nd September 2018; **Brendon Bees** v George; Manchester Saturday Morning League Division Two; Kick-Off: 10.15am; Result: 1-7; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 8 h/c

Two matches in rainy Manchester for me today, at opposite ends of the football hierarchy. Starting at 10.15am in Droylsden for another chance to watch my favourite MSML side, George. It must be said here straight away that I follow George simply because they are terrible, and you are always guaranteed a hat full of goals when they play. They are the Denso of the MSML if you like.

New club Brendon Bees are based at Droylsden Academy. Sports-wise, the Academy has several grass football pitches, and two 3G pitches in cages which were in constant use this morning by umpteen junior clubs. George came in to the game in their usual bottom position in the table, with the Bees third bottom. It took the Bees just 14 minutes to open the scoring, and I sat back and waited for the inevitable deluge of goals. Well, they came alright, but not even the most optimistic of their supporters would have predicted that they would all come from George. They scored three quick goals in five minutes from the 26th minute, and the Bees just simply couldn't believe it. Four more followed in the second half, and George were actually showboating by the end after recording an amazing 7-1 win.

A word of praise for the Referee too. Despite arriving 30 minutes late he managed the game splendidly. There were a couple of bouts of handbags and several nasty fouls, but he never brandished a card once, preferring to talk to the offenders instead. Very sensible.

With my bus stop right outside the ground, I watched the last five minutes from there as I waited for my number 231 bus to take me to match number two, just five stops down the line.

contributed on 23/09/18

TT No.030: Keith Aslan - Saturday 15th September 2018; **COVENTRY PLUMBING** v Bartestree; Midland League Division 3; Result: 2-1; Kick-Off: 15.00; Admission: £2; Programme (24pages, colour): £1; Attendance: 20 (13 home, 3 away & 4 neutral)

The Plumbers, no idea where that nickname comes from, play at the Coventry Sporting Ground which is not the ground Coventry Sporting used to play at. There is an hourly bus service from the city centre but I opted for the half hour stroll from the nearest station, Tile Hill. The walk goes through a very rich area, and judging by much of the architecture the Luftwaffe gave this part of Coventry a miss when they made a flying visit a few years back. There are three adjacent pitches, all part, or completely, enclosed with the match being played on the furthest away. The first one has a rather dinky bus shelter type cover but that pitch is too small for Midland League football. The dressing rooms are in the same building as the tea room with hot drinks and cold snacks available throughout the afternoon. Worth visiting the toilets to see the Coventry Plumbing mirrors.

The match was thoroughly enjoyable for all the wrong reasons, malevolent sums it up. The scoring was all over in the first half hour, but the action was just beginning. A violent first half culminated 5 minutes before half time with as good a mass punch up as you're ever likely to see. The Bartestree supporter next to me was shouting at the ref. "It's all your fault, you've lost it" I did ask what he thought the referee had actually done wrong but he was a bit vague on the matter. I even suggested that maybe the players might take some responsibility for their actions but no, it was definitely all the refs. fault. Two home and one away were sent off with one of the home miscreants not leaving without a fight and as his teammates led him away he was threatening sort out one of the away players at interval. Alas the half time entertainment never materialised. The second half began with the referee getting the two captains together and suggesting they calm their players down. He might as well have been speaking Latin for all the good it did. Barestree laid siege to the Plumbers' goal and the fouls (from both sides) kept coming. Near the end Coventry went down to eight players as another one bit the dust, this one for dissent. I didn't count the bookings but they must have hit double figures. Two Barlestree players share the honours for the stupidest yellow cards, one player managed to get himself booked for dissent directly after his team had scored a goal, while with five minutes remaining and Coventry desperately time wasting, the young Barlestree substitute was booked for kicking the ball away. Footballers eh?

I quote from the programme on the previous weeks win over Birmingham Tigers '...a convincing away win but 2 sent off isn't the way we do things' I think it is boys, 5 off in two games, can you spot a pattern emerging here? Coventry Plumbing are flying high with 5 wins from 5 but the big question is will they have enough players that aren't suspended to field a full team every week. I thoroughly enjoyed this match even though I know I shouldn't have done. I doubt the ref. walked off the pitch thinking 'This is what I became a referee for' Don't worry mate, we both know it wasn't your fault in spite of what Sun reading Barlestree supporters might think.

contributed on 16/09/18

TT No.029: Steve Hardy - Saturday 15th September 2018; Boldmere St Michael BFL v Naija; Birmingham & District League Division Two; Kick-Off: 2.30 pm; Result: 0-0; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 11 (hc)

It is only 13 miles from my morning match in Rowley Regis to this second game on the outskirts of Sutton Coldfield. However, when you add in the 'Birmingham traffic' equation, you end up sitting in your car for over an hour and finally arrive stressed and vowing 'never again'.

Boldmere St Michaels have entered a team in to the Birmingham & District league this season. Not sure what level it is, (Reserves, 'A' team?) but they are not playing on the Mike's 3G pitch every week for sure. This game was played at the Braemar Road playing fields, which after driving up and down Braemar Road several times, I found is accessed up a narrow drive marked Highclare Sports Field immediately on your left as you enter Braemar Road, from Stonehouse Road.

Quite a good set up really, with a changing room complex at the end of the drive, plenty of room for parking, and at least three grass pitches available. On one of these other pitches, the Mike's Veterans team were in action, and I soon spotted that a small tent had been erected next to this pitch where teas, coffees and sweets were available for a small donation.

I have put off talking about the match itself, as my long run without a 0-0 draw was always going to end with a bump here. It could have been salvaged when Boldmere won a penalty just before half time, but an excellent save by the Naija keeper put an end to any hopes I had of a goal.

I thought Naija were the better team in reality, but they really must stop being so selfish when presented with two or even three one-on-ones with only the keeper to beat. At least three times the winger broke through and selfishly shot at goal, when he had two unmarked colleagues standing in front of an empty net. According to Wikipedia, Naija is a Nigerian word for Freedom. Well, they certainly played with freedom today, although losing their discipline towards the end when they had a player sent off for, well, being a pratt basically, could have cost them the game, but a draw was the least they deserved.

contributed on 16/09/18

TT No.028: Steve Hardy - Saturday 15th September 2018; Living Hope Church United v Delph Athletic; West Midlands Christian League Division Two; Kick-Off: 10.30 am; Result: 3-2; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 6 (hc)

Back on home turf this week and a first look at the West Midlands Christian league for this season too. Living Hope Church are based at St Michaels C of E School in Rowley Regis according to the league web site, but upon arrival I discovered it is now known as the Rowley Learning Academy. Looks an excellent set up too, with, outdoors, a 3G pitch in a cage, plus two grass pitches as well. Indoors, we had a judo tournament in full swing today with several really beefy men and women in action.

On the pitch we were treated to an excellent game of football. It is early days, of course, but this was top v bottom with bottom club Delph much the better team for most of the game in my opinion. In summary, Delph took the lead from a penalty after 13 minutes, and were then awarded a second 3 minutes later. This one smashed against the bar and was cleared and LHC started to get more into the game without actually looking like scoring. In the final minute of the first half though a shot from some distance beat everyone, hit the post and went in, to give LHC an unlikely equaliser and a 1-1 half time score.

The second half was much the same as the first, with Delph regaining the lead after 65 minutes and seemingly on course for a first win of the season. Credit to LHC though, as they equalised on 71 minutes and then scored what proved to be the winner on 76. The final whistle brought much fist pumping from the home team, but I felt for Delph who deserved to get at least a draw out of the game, I thought.

contributed on 16/09/18

TT No.027: *Brian Buck* - Saturday 8th September 2018; **Melksham Town** v Merthyr Town; Emirates FA Cup 1st Qualifying Round; Result: 1-4; Attendance: 304.

Today I managed to get a lift to the game and as always, I was exceptionally grateful to my chauffer for the day. After having a relatively clear run we stopped off at a watering hole quite close to the ground before setting off to the match. Although they have been at their new Oakfields Stadium for a while now, you still can't see it yet on aerial views on either *Google* or *Bing Maps*, but the street signage is good and so it was easy to find. This was my third Melksham Town home match, the first being in 1986 and more recently on Saturday evening 10th April 2004 and in front of a 245 (approx.) crowd I watched them get beaten 3-0 by Paulton Rovers in a Screwfix Direct League Premier Division game at their old Conigre Ground.

The facilities at the new ground are fine, but at present it has the feel of being plonked into a field on the edge of town. In the distance you can see some new houses and I suspect that in the next few years they will quickly creep closer. The ground is also geared up for expansion should serious success come their way. I had enough time for another pre-match pint in the bar upstairs before the start, which meant that I had to walk down to my seat rather than up! From here you could see cars and people coming to the match along the dusty track, which must have been built by the same contractors who built Biggleswade Towns ground, which I understand has recently been improved. I would have thought that when any new stadium is built this should include a tarmac access way as well.

Anyway, on this cool and windy day, there was little going on in the first half. Someone had a shot on target in the first half but I can't remember from which side it came. On 30 minutes there was a handbags incident, which generated a booking for the visitors. The game desperately needed a goal and this was forthcoming on 50 minutes when the unmarked striker hooked the ball home from a cross from the right. Then the game really came to life. On 73 minutes Melksham were denied a spot kick for handball, which only I seemed to see. Then two minutes later a dreadful challenge saw a home player sent off. Then two minutes after that Merthyr doubled their lead with a spectacular shot from former St Neots player Tom Meechan. This was all too much for Melksham who quickly crumbled and conceded again on 81 minutes, although a well taken 20-yard direct free kick on 87 minutes gave them false hope, before another Merthyr goal on 90(+1) minutes finished them off. No football scores on the TV afterwards as they were showing cricket. So, we went straight home, to bring to a close, an interesting day amongst nice people.

contributed on 13/09/18

TT No.026: *Keith Aslan* - Saturday 8th September 2018; **NEWENT** v Malmesbury Victoria; Hellenic League Division 1 West; Kick Off: 12.59; Result: 0-2; Admission & Glossy programme: £2; Attendance: 41 (33 home, 2 away & 6 neutral).

With Newent's promotion to step 6 it appeared on my must do list, but logistics dictated an early kick off was needed so with today's 13.00 start there was only ever going to be one destination for yours truly. Why such an early kick off I hear you ask. Today was of course the Newent Onion Fayre. Like myself up to a few days ago I suspect that wouldn't mean much to anybody (other than onions are likely to be involved), but this is a major event round this part of the world. Fifteen thousand turn up crammed into a village with a population of just over five thousand. I realised just how big it was at Gloucester Bus Station with the queue for the Newent Bus stretching for 30 yards. The bus was chocker with people standing on the upper deck, I dread to think what it was like downstairs, and well done to the driver for letting everyone onto the bus which ran well above its capacity. Incidentally Gloucester's new bus station is still being built, the local council could raise funds by running a sweepstake on what year it will actually be finished.

The hourly bus from Gloucester stops right outside the ground but I stayed on for another one and a half miles to visit the Onion Fayre in the village. I've never seen so many stalls plus live groups, a massive funfair and of course a truly awe-inspiring display of onions. Alas I had to leave for the match before the onion eating competition got going. Newent's ground is a little gem. Neat, tidy with nice views, and a comfortable clubhouse that sold hot food and drinks throughout, and in keeping with local events, I was asked if I wanted onions on my hot dog. How could I refuse. The foundations are in place for a paved walkway, stand and floodlights all of which are completely pointless for a home attendance of 33. Indeed, there is a large area of cover outside the clubhouse with tables and chairs which would comfortably accommodate the entire crowd if the weather turned nasty. This is everything a village club should be and why are the FA, who should be helping teams like this, forcing them to spend money they haven't got on facilities they don't need. Long may clubs like this prosper in spite of having to belong to such a clueless organization. They will be celebrating their centenary next season and have managed quite well without floodlights for the first 99 years of their existence.

The home manager was not happy that 4 of his players were on holiday, why couldn't they go in June he moaned, and with a weakened team they were always going to come out second best to unbeaten Malmesbury. The game ended on a bit of a downer when a player received a serious looking injury in the 92nd minute. When a stretcher was called the referee blew for full time, if only he had finished the game on 90 minutes the player could have spent the rest of the afternoon enjoying the Onion Fayre rather than spending it in the A & E. Lovely club, lovely people, lovely programme and lovely onions.

contributed on 09/09/18

TT No.025: *Steve Hardy* - Saturday 8th September 2018; **Knaresborough Celtic** v Tingley Athletic; West Yorkshire League Division Two; Kick-Off: 2.30pm; Result: 2-4; Admission/Programme: No; Attendance: 1 h/c

Well, what an excellent set up they have at Knaresborough Celtic. Primarily for junior teams, they have a superb looking club house/dressing room block (which didn't open today) and four immaculate pitches which showed no signs of the recent drought at all. The men's senior side are unfortunately struggling on the pitch, and this defeat leaves them next to bottom of the table.

In torrential rain throughout, visitors Tingley looked much the better team for most of the game. They scored on 20 minutes after a howler by the Celtic keeper, and deservedly led 1-0 at the break. After the break though, Celtic managed to get their act together briefly, and scored twice on 51 and 57 minutes to take a surprise lead. It didn't last long though, and normal service was quickly resumed with three more Tingley goals to give them a well-earned 4-2 victory.

Surprisingly, there are no spectator facilities at all at Celtic's Thistle Hill ground. Not even a rope around the pitch. I was the only spectator today though, so it didn't matter one jot, and I was told that with neighbours Knaresborough Town at home in the FA cup as well (they won 7-3 v Kendal in front of 315 people), then the attendance here was always going to be tiny.

Celtic are a very friendly club and I was given a very warm welcome indeed. As usual, they couldn't understand why anyone would come so far to watch them, when a far bigger match was going on in Town. For me though, it was a splendid day out despite the weather!

contributed on 09/09/18

TT No.024: *Steve Hardy* - Wednesday 5th September 2018; **Bedlington** v Red Row Welfare; Northern Football Alliance Division One; Kick-Off: 6.15pm; Result: 8-1; Admission/Programme: No; Attendance 5 h/c

Bedlington FC are a comparatively new club, formed in 2017 when three local junior clubs merged. The adult teams are a recent addition, and the men's first team have been placed in Division One of the Northern Alliance this season, where they are really setting the pace at the top of the table.

The senior teams play on a 4G pitch in a cage at Bedlington Community School. Spectators are allowed inside the cage although they are restricted to just one side of the pitch. This is why all my photos are so boring as they are all taken from the same position!

Kick off on the league web site was (and still is) given as 7.00pm, but as it was practically dark by that time the day before the match I contacted the helpful club Secretary who advised me that KO had been brought forward to 6.15 for just this reason. The venue does have floodlights however, and these came on for the second half as the gloom descended.

The match itself was as one sided as the scoreline would suggest. Visitors Red Row Welfare brought 4 of the five people in the crowd today, and they were actually pretty game in the first half. An early penalty and a second after 18 minutes gave Bedlington a 2-0 half time lead, but unfortunately for Red Row the barrage

continued after the break with six more goals coming at regular intervals for the home team. The only highlight for Red Row came on 69 minutes with an absolutely belter of a goal, but they hardly celebrated it really as they knew they had been well and truly hammered.

I really enjoyed this match, with Bedlington playing an excellent passing game really well. Good luck for the rest of the season, Lads.

contributed on 09/09/18

TT No.023: Steve Hardy - Saturday 1st September 2018; Craster & Embleton United v Wooler; North Northumberland League; Kick-Off: 2.00pm; Result: 1-2; Admission/Programme: No; Attendance: 25 h/c

Craster and Embleton were two separate clubs last season, but have merged during the summer with home games being played in the tiny village of Embleton. Except today! I arrived at Embleton's Creighton Memorial Hall ground to find a cricket match in full swing and was told that until the cricket season ends, they are playing back at the old Craster ground some 3 miles away.

No problem there as I knew exactly where the Craster ground was, although I did miss the first few minutes of the game as KO had been brought forward to 2.00pm instead of the advertised 2.30pm.

The North Northumberland League is struggling again this year. Now down to just one division of eleven clubs there is still a great deal of travelling involved for teams like Wooler in the north and FC Bedlington in the south. The standard of play is pretty low still, and I wasn't surprised that the first half was terrible, with Wooler deserving their 1-0 lead, scored on ten minutes. After a stiff talking to from their Manager, Craster & Embleton started much more positively in the second half and very quickly found an equaliser. The game then seemed to be meandering towards a 1-1 draw, until with just 4 minutes left, Wooler broke away to score a rather fortuitous winner.

Absolutely no spectator facilities at the ground, as you would expect from a league at step ten in the non-league pyramid. The last time I saw Wooler they were playing in the Northern Alliance, but the huge amount of travelling involved, soon saw them drop back to the familiarity of the North Northumberland League again.

Craster is a lovely little village to visit, and, in the end, this turned out to be a top afternoon out.

contributed on 09/09/18

TT No.022: Brian Buck - Wednesday 5th September 2018; Wilstead v Marston Shelton Rovers; Bedfordshire County League Premier Division; Venue: played at Bedford International Athletics Stadium - Outside pitch; Result: 3-0; Attendance: 25 approx.

Because the pitch at Wilstead hadn't recovered sufficiently from the summer's drought, this match was switched here the day before. We found the pitch alright.

It was behind the athletics track and the rugby pitch next to it, so it was a bit of a walk to get there. Once we reached the pitch we realised, as everyone else present did, that there was one important component of the evening missing, namely the ref. When he finally arrived, he told us that he had got stuck in a traffic jam on the way to the game. Fair enough but some of my Groundhopping friends had come from further afield and wanted to see some football before it got dark. So eventually we started at 6.36pm and the game became a 40-minutes each way affair. This could have been the first time that football had ever been played on this pitch, as the rugby posts behind both goals suggested. The first half yielded no goals but Wilstead looked slightly the better side in what was a close encounter. The only noteworthy incident was when two Rovers players incurred the wrath of the ref at the same time and were booked. Perhaps they should have realised that in being annoyed at himself for being late for the match, he was going to be in no mood to tolerate their indiscretions when he had continued to make the effort to come for their benefit. In the second half it got dark quickly, although the setting sun had made a brief appearance during the break. But now we had goals. On 48 minutes the ball was helped into the net with the outside of the scorer's foot, from a cross from the left, for Wilstead's opener. Meanwhile behind us it seemed that the phantom vegetable nicker had arrived as he climbed over a locked gate to the allotments by standing on his getaway bike. But just as we were about to dial 999, or even 101, because we really weren't that interested, he returned with some keys and unlocked the said gate. We then averted our eyes because Wilstead were just about to score their second goal on 57 minutes. Then as the light seriously faded Wilstead deservedly claimed their third goal five minutes from the end. By now the light was so bad it took some time to see the scorer's number. Overall an enjoyable but unusual evening.

contributed on 06/09/18

TT No.021: Brian Buck - Monday 3rd September 2018; Unite MK Reserves v Kempston Athletic; Bedfordshire County League Division 2; Venue: played at Brooklands Community Sports Pavilion, Milton Keynes; Result: Match abandoned after 71 minutes - serious injury with score at 0-6; Attendance: 25 approx.

It's probably fair to say that Unite MK Reserves life in the Bedfordshire County League hasn't got off to the greatest of starts. On the previously Saturday they not only failed to raise a team, but their first team were busy losing 10-0 away to Leverstock Green in the FA Vase. But tonight, initially promised to be better, having since signed on eight or nine new players over the weekend. The venue was quite an intriguing place, in that it formed part of the ever-expanding Milton Keynes, a settlement which is still being built, but nonetheless already possesses two schools, plus this Community Sports Pavilion. Obviously, its creator likes football as the pitch is landscaped and thus offers a little banking on one side. Apparently, there is a big pond behind one goal and along the far side the pitch slopes down dramatically once it departs from the footpath which runs parallel with the pitch. Although there are some good country walks to be taken close by, your eyes are also directed to some giant warehouses in the distant, which have

been painted in cloud colours to try and mask their presence. So overall this wasn't an unpleasant place to watch football. Unite had their own club lino and although he was kitted out in refs gear and gave an impressive display, he says that he has no intention of becoming an actual ref! Then the match started and within four minutes the hosts were a goal down, with a shot which went in off the keeper's boot, or at least one of them! Then on 19 minutes last year's Division 3 champions doubled their lead. This became 0-3 on 25 minutes when the keeper just failed to push a 40-yard shot over the bar. By half time it was 0-4 and the fifth one went in on 50 minutes. On 68 minutes the final goal of the evening was scored from the spot and then three minutes later the game came to an abrupt halt when a Unite player accidentally seriously damaged his hip as he fell to the ground. An ambulance was required and so the game had to be abandoned. My best wishes for a full recovery go to the player concerned.

contributed on 06/09/18

TT No.020: *Brian Buck* - Saturday 1st September 2018; **Old Southendian** v Bishop's Stortford Swifts; Prokit UK Essex Olympian League Premier Division; Kick-Off: 2.30pm; Venue: played at Garon Park; Result: 1-2; Attendance: 70 approx.

After the previous match had finished I was soon at my second game, staged in this large complex. I don't know how much of it belongs to Old Southendian, but in addition to having a leisure centre, from where I purchased my pre-match food, they also have a golf course, rugby pitches, a massive purpose-built cricket arena, where Essex Cricket Club have played from time to time and a dog training section, which was on the go when I arrived. Obviously, they play football here as well and on my arrival a youth match was taking place. They are intending to lay a 3G pitch here soon as well. Later I was told that it costs about £45,000 a year to have a groundsman here, but when pushed I was told that not all of it goes into his pocket as some of this goes on the equipment he needs as well! I watched some cricket whilst I ate my food. No hot dogs of course though. Then it was into the bar, shared between the football and cricket, but with separate entrances. Here I encountered a 'Budleigh Salterton' type barmaid, which meant that it was very difficult to look her in the eye, as I found out when I visited the aforementioned club some years back, leading to some difficulty in watching the match that evening. Today I was much more sensible, as I was driving!

The match was a very physical one. It was well attended and from what I gathered it was because some of the 'true' Old Southendians had been having a pre-match meal in a large marquee before the game and they came out to watch with their drinks. It seems that in their 119-year existence today was the highest level they'd ever staged a home league match at. Both teams gave the ref a hard time, the visitors more so. They had the greater experience, whereas the newly promoted hosts struggled a bit in the first half. They were architects of their own down fall in this period. An intercepted clearance from the keeper saw the ball put back behind him for the first goal on 17 minutes and despite cries of "Leave it" by the keeper a defender managed to head the ball over him for 0-2, 6 minutes later. The hosts played better after the break and pulled a goal back from the spot on 54

minutes. On 70 and 78 minutes there were 'comings together' which saw a player from each side dismissed in each incident. There should have been more red cards shown here. The hosts tried hard for the equaliser and although they eventually played well they weren't quite good enough to beat the visitors.

contributed on 06/09/18

TT No.019: *Brian Buck* - Saturday 1st September 2018; **Southend United U18** v Stevenage U18; EFL Youth Alliance U18 South East Division; Kick-Off: 10.30am; Venue: played at Southend United (Boots & Laces) Training Ground; Result: 2-3; Attendance: 50 approx.

I was originally going to just 'do' the game at Old Southendian, as detailed above, but then I saw that Southend United Youth were at home as well and the two grounds are about ten minutes-walk apart. But today I drove because I didn't fancy getting up at silly o'clock to get here by train. Nor did I fancy making the return journey home in the company of those nice Southend United and Charlton Athletic fans, who were playing each other at Roots Hall. Anyway, I arrived here with just under half an hour before kick-off. Luckily, I'd found the entrance on *Google Street View* the previous night as it's very easy to miss. I got what I thought was the last parking space here, but for heaven's sake, I was in Essex and when I returned to my car at the end of the game I found that there were loads of spaces! I then managed to have a cup of coffee before setting out to watch the match. I kept wondering what all this metal scaffolding was stacked up all over the place. Then Peter Miles, (he of *Groundtastic* Magazine) and a life-long Southend United fan, turned up and he explained to me that all this was part of what was the David Beckham Academy in London, where I once saw an indoor game. It's parked here because if Southend's plans come to fruition then not only will the Academy be recreated here but also the new Southend United ground will be built here too. There is plenty of land available for it, but things seemed to have stalled at present. I'd been here once before for a game, on 29 July 1995 when I saw a goalless draw in a friendly between Southend United U18 v Spurs U17 (or Juniors as they were then known) with an attendance of 40 approx. Since then this training ground has been extended, apparently courtesy of the fee Southend received from Nottingham Forest for the signature of Stan Colleymore!

Today we weren't allowed to watch this match from the side-lines. It seems that halfway through last season someone got hit by a ball and now everyone has to watch from behind the goals, which to most people eyes is even more dangerous! As for the match, it was a good one and against their slightly younger looking opponents Stevenage had a good first half, to the point where the Southend photographer gave up and moved towards to the end Stevenage were attacking. Stevenage took the lead on 19 minutes with a shot which went in off the crossbar and doubled it on 34 minutes with a curled shot into the top right-hand corner, which no keeper would stop. The game was seemingly won, but within 41 seconds of the restart Southend pulled a goal back. On 60 minutes Stevenage missed a penalty, saved, following a push and to make matters worse for them they conceded a headed own goal for the equaliser on 70 minutes. Were Stevenage

going to buckle? Well no, because as I saw from them on the previous Tuesday they now have that determination to work harder when things go wrong and the winner came on 78 minutes. The ball was won deep right and passed. The receiver hit a hard five yard cross into the area, which was met with a close- range header.

contributed on 06/09/18

TT No.018: *Keith Aslan* - Saturday September 1st 2018; **SKEGNESS TOWN** v Clay Cross (nee Parkhouse); FA Vase First Round Qualifying; Kick-Off: 15.00; Result: 4-1; Admission: £3 for the senile, £5 for everybody else; Programme: £1; Attendance: 195 (142 home, 34 away & 19 neutral)

So many grounds so few trains, with Railtrack closing much of the railway network and strikes infecting many of the lines still open. I'm a staunch trade unionist, but striking on a Saturday and messing up the football is taking things too far. Skegness was the best option today and I had plenty of company on the train from like-minded hoppers.

Skegness is a proper seaside resort and those visiting the town for the first time were unanimous in their praise for the place. As one hopper put it, 'everybody seems to be enjoying themselves' (not something you would say about Margate!). The glorious weather helped. You won't go hungry here and a massive roast pork dinner set me up for the afternoon. The new ground is like, well a new ground, actually. Railed, enclosed, floodlights and two stands courtesy of 'Atcost' At the back is another fully railed pitch where the reserves were playing. The clubhouse didn't have any beer which I would have thought obviated its purpose. There was a dramatic underprint on the programme front, a not particularly large crowd saw the paper run out 45 minutes before kick-off causing much consternation. And some people ask me why I get to grounds so early. The Vertigo stadium is named after their sponsors, but it does seem a somewhat inappropriate name for a scaffold company.

Strangely this was the third Saturday from four that my chosen game was 1-1 at the break before one team runs away with it, with Skeggy's three second half goals being supplemented by two crossbar strikes. This game illustrated the differing standards between two leagues with Skegness, having lost 5 of their first 6 North East Counties games comfortably beating Clay Cross, 4 wins out of 4 scoring 28 goals, from the Central Midlands League.

Let's hear it for 'Hull Trains' whose magnificent run from Grantham to Kings Cross enabled me to catch a train that was booked to leave 2 minutes before my train was due to arrive. I made it from platform 1 at Kings Cross to platform 13 at St. Pancras in a breath taking (quite literally), sub 4 minutes. On the downside I was throwing up for most of the journey back to the Kentish Gold Coast, a small price to pay to get back to my country dacha an hour earlier.

contributed on 02/09/18

TT No.017: *Brian Buck* - Wednesday 29th August 2018; **Gamlingay United** v Orwell; Kershaw League Senior 'A' Division; Result: 2-2; Attendance: 55 approx.

Even though this ground is close to home I only come here infrequently. Since my last visit, a couple of years ago, not only has the car park been tartered up, meaning that more cars can now park in it, but they have turned the pitch round 90 degrees, meaning that if I was a 'pitch Groundhopper, then I would be seeing a match being played on a third different pitch, albeit tonight's pitch overlapping with the other two. But I prefer to keep things simple, so I've counted just one pitch, although I did count another pitch here when they played over the fence in the Village College for a while!

Gamlingay were originally down to play in the Beds County League this season, but being a Cambridgeshire based side and having played in the Cambs League for many years, they rejected this idea and renounced their Step 7 status, thus meaning that they were relegated from the Kershaw Premier League and put into the Kershaw Senior 'A' Division. This doesn't seem to have upset the club too much and a goodly number of locals turned up to watch tonight. We were also 'entertained' by three 'Red Arrows' type planes regularly passing overhead, except that they weren't actually red! But if they were doing impressions then it all looked pretty dangerous to me. Trouble was that they were a bit noisy.

As for the match, played out on a pitch still recovering all of its grass following the recent drought, it was a good one. But there was a problem. Gamlingay were playing in predominantly dark red shirts with black stripes on their fronts. Orwell were playing in cherry red shirts. After five minutes had elapsed the ref had had enough. Gamlingay found some fluorescent green and yellow bibs, which Orwell had to put on because, as the away side, they had brought the wrong kit with them! But it did them no harm and they took the lead on 25 minutes. It was the first goal I'd seen scored in the Kershaw Leagues this season with the previous two finishing as 0-0 draws! Gamlingay then stepped up a gear, equalising on 32 minutes and taking the lead on 53 minutes. They then looked comfortable in the lead. But Orwell kept nagging away and they equalised on 86 minutes. Gamlingay will feel that they dropped two points here, but for the neutral it was probably the right result.

contributed on 30/08/18

TT No.016: Brian Buck - Tuesday 28th August 2018; **Great Shelford** v Cambridge City Reserves; Kershaw Premier League; Kick-Off: 6.15pm; Result: 0-0; Attendance: 65 approx.

This is getting beyond a joke! Last week I went to see a match at Needingworth United because I hadn't been there for a few years and I got a nil-nil draw. Tonight, not having been to Shelford for six years, I did the same and it was another nil-nil draw. I don't think I'll bother anymore! Since my previous visit Shelford have built, or completed, building an impressive looking sports pavilion, which has a generous overhang so you can keep dry, if you want to, when it rains. They also served refreshments and hot food at half time. In fact, as recreation grounds go in this area, it's one of the better ones. I wasn't sure if I was watching Cambridge City Reserves or Cambridge City Development, as it says 'Reserves' on

the league table and 'Development' on the fixtures list! So being an old traditionalist, I've gone with the former.

I thought that this match might turn out to be a challenging one for the ref as on 16 minutes a City player put in a very hard challenge for the ball. The ref deemed, rightly in my opinion, that the tackler got the ball. This opinion wasn't shared by the Shelford people and everyone bundled in. Ultimately only City centre half was booked, for bundling in from a distance. The ref from my Monday match would have surely got his red card out for this! He showed 12 yellows in the match I saw at Royston Town! The remainder of the match passed without any further problems. Shelford, sometimes referred to locally as the Manchester United of this league, weren't at their best. City looked as good as them, which was more than I was expecting, given that their first team had played on the previous day. So, a draw was about the right result. It was also a good night for dogs and I stroked several!

contributed on 30/08/18

TT No.015: Brian Buck - Saturday 25th August 2018; Paulsgrove v QK
Southampton; Hampshire Premier League Senior Division; Result: 3-1; Attendance: 35 approx.

I travelled to this game by trains and for once they behaved themselves, both ways. Eventually I alighted at Cosham and then walked the half hour or so it took me to get to the ground. Based on what others had told me about this place, I wasn't particularly looking forward to coming here, in particular about the lack of spectator facilities. However perhaps no one had told them about the thriving social club they have here. But then again, they may not have spotted it as although it's right next to the ground, it's hidden by some trees.

Anyway, my pre-match needs were satisfied here and then I set about watching the match. Paulsgrove won this league last season but couldn't go up, because their ground isn't suitable for Wessex League football. Although the pitch is fully railed off there is very little space to stand on three sides of the ground, the exception being behind one goal where the players enter the pitch and where there seems to be another shortcut to the clubhouse. There is no cover here either, but there were enough trees to stand under if it had rained, which unfortunately isn't one of the criteria for entry into the Wessex League! I stood on the 'school' side of the pitch, which sloped downwards and so during the match I could watch the trains pass by right next to the pitch. The first half was without goals. Bottom of the table QK (formerly Queens Keep) defended quite well but never looked like scoring. Paulsgrove did though, but only after they grew into the game. It was they who deservedly took the lead on 54 minutes. However, the hosts were stunned when QK equalised ten minutes later, against the run of play. This galvanised Paulsgrove to up their game and further goals on 69 and 84 minutes sewed up the match for them. Then after a slow post-match pint it was time to go home. I was going to walk, but a half hourly bus number 18 was due and so I caught it back to Cosham.

contributed on 30/08/18

TT No.014: Steve Hardy - Saturday 25th August 2018; Cheadle Heath Nomads v New Mills; North West Counties League First Division South; Kick-Off: 3.00pm; Result: 2-3; Admission: £3 for an OAP; Programme: £1.50; Attendance: 76

Cheadle Heath Nomads are one of a number of new clubs in the expanded North West Counties League this season, and they are based about 4 miles from Stockport. I arrived at 2.15pm and was immediately spotted as being a groundhopper by the gateman, who told me they are really enjoying their new challenge this season. Strangely, nobody could tell me what had happened to the other half of their now demerged club, Linotype FC, though.

The visitors today were New Mills, who brought a fair few supporters with them, resplendent in their yellow and black tops and scarves. According to the CHN twitter account, this was the proverbial game of two halves, and I have to agree. The first half was all CHN and they thoroughly deserved their 1-0 lead. After the break it was a complete turnaround with league leaders New Mills dominant from start to finish. They equalised on 50 minutes and then scored the two further goals in the last 10 minutes that their play had thoroughly deserved. An injury time penalty for the homesters made the score look a lot closer than it had been in reality.

The official attendance was announced as 76. Yeh, right! My headcount at kick off was 12, and whilst a few more turned up as the game went on, it didn't reach 50 by any stretch of the imagination.

So, overall another splendid day out. When the only thing you can find to criticise is that the coffee at Stalybridge Celtic in the morning was too expensive and tasted like dish water, then you know you have had a really good day!

contributed on 26/08/18

TT No.013: Steve Hardy - Saturday 25th August 2018; Rochdale U18 v Fleetwood Town U18; EFL Youth Alliance Northern Cup Group 4; Kick-Off: 11.00am; No admission charge or team-sheet; Attendance: 51 h/c

Up at silly-o'clock again for today's long planned trip to Manchester and, for once, all the public transport worked perfectly. Three buses and a train journey later I finally arrived at Stalybridge Celtic, which is where Rochdale U18s have been playing for the past couple of years now. I really liked Stalybridge's ground, I must say. The whole ground was open for the 51 punters who attended, which meant I could wander round taking photos from every angle I wanted.

Observant readers of my drivel will have noticed that I quite like watching U18 football on a Saturday morning. I find that the better academies haven't drummed any cynicism into the young lads in their charge, so there is none of this diving, cheating or snide fouling that is such a feature of the modern game. Both these teams just wanted to play football today, and both were technically very skilful, but with just a lack of finishing ability holding them back.

The first half ended 0-0, but that wasn't for the want of trying by both teams. We desperately needed a goal, and it duly came just after the break when Rochdale finally scored a beautifully worked opener. I thought things might open up a bit after this, but they didn't, although Fleetwood had a chance to equalise right at the death, but blazed a simple looking chance over the bar.

After the game it was back on the buses again for the hour-long trip to my second game at Cheadle Heath Nomads.

contributed on 26/08/18

TT No.012: Brian Buck - Wednesday 22nd August 2018; Needingworth United v Great Chishill; Kershaw League Senior B Division; Result: 0-0; Attendance: 45 approx.

This game wasn't great! No changes whatsoever have been made to anything here since my last visit a few years back. So, you still park in what looks like a Crematorium car park and then that feeling continues as you then walk 50 yards or so down a tarmacked path until you reach the ground, which suddenly opens up in front of you. You soon see the clubhouse and within it is the tea bar. The pitch is still railed-off on two sides and the floodlights were all working, six lights on each side, which illuminated the pitch quite well.

It was a warm night tonight with no wind, but with no covered accommodation, save perhaps the overhang of the clubhouse if the wind is blowing in the right direction, it would be no fun here on a wet and windy night! The match was a curious one in that initially it seemed it would be a good one. The teams were evenly matched, ultimately too evenly matched and in the first half possession was roughly even. The visitors build up play was just slightly better, but they were rebuffed by the hosts who had a more physical presence about them. The only real noteworthy happening was on 36 minutes when the ref seemed to get hit in the face by the ball. He was on the floor for a few minutes but eventually got up and was able to complete the match. Don't know what happened to his whistle but every time he farted it was a free kick!

At the break I got myself some coffee and chocolate. This was surprisingly cheap. The chap serving me, the club secretary I think, said that he only deals in multiples of 50p. Therefore, my two items cost £1! The second half panned much the same way as the first half, although I think that there was a bit more urgency about both sides play now. But ultimately, they tired and moaned at the ref a lot. This led to lots of mistakes being made, by the players and the ref. Most of it though was the normal stuff we regrettably see too much of these days and I don't think that the ref took it personally. So, a poor game, but there was enough going on to hold my attention, just!

contributed on 23/08/18

TT No.011: Brian Buck - Saturday 18th August 2018; Barnet v Milton Keynes Dons; EFL Youth Alliance U18 South East Division; Venue: played at Barnet Training Ground, The Hive; Result: 2-0; Kick-Off: 10.30am; Attendance: 60 approx.

I stopped off here on the way to watch Spurs play at Wembley afterwards and managed to park quite close to the ground. Barnet first team played Ebbsfleet United later on here and I was surprised that there were no street parking restrictions. Since my last visit here, during last season, the club have erected a 250-seater stand on the side of their 'Showcase' pitch. It wasn't an 'Atcost' one either and I counted ten rows of seats. There was a tarpaulin cover for the roof. This is the first time I have encountered a club at this level doing this for spectators, made even more surprising that some clubs won't even let you in to watch their youth games! That is except for FA Youth Cup ties where they can extract some money from you.

Anyway, I watched the game from the new stand and at this stage of the day it was a bit on the chilly side. From here I could see 'Flagman' going about his business. I've seen him here before when Barnet first team are at home. For reasons unknown he attaches flags from loads of nations along a fence, his idea of bringing people from different countries together I suppose. Anyway, as for the game, it was watchable, but it never reached any great heights. Barnet took the lead on 34 minutes with a long, low shot which the keeper saw late. Prior to that the Dons had just shaded it as being the better side, but in truth there wasn't much in it. But the goal spurred Barnet on and they became the better side for the remainder of the half. After the break the Dons gave it a real go, but Barnet, aided by their irritating timewasting keeper, held firm. The visitors' real problem though was that they seemed to be in too much of a rush and it got them nowhere. A second Barnet goal on 76 minutes, a far post header, finished them off and by the end Barnet had picked up their first win of the season with the Dons yet to break their duck.

contributed on 23/08/18

TT No.010: Brian Buck - Thursday 16th August 2018; **Watford Ladies** v Stevenage Ladies; Friendly Match; Venue: played at Kings Langley FC; Result: 3-1; Attendance: 243.

The first time I saw a Kings Langley home match it was at their old Buncefield Road ground in Hemel Hempstead. They are now at Gaywood Park, Hempstead Road and my only other visit here occurred on 19 August 1997 when I watched Kings Langley lose 3-2 to Chipperfield Corinthians in a Herts Senior County League Premier Division match (att- 65 approx). Since then the club have moved through the ranks and in recent years they have been promoted several times and now play Step 3 football in the Southern League. Unsurprisingly the ground has changed a lot since then, although I later found some older pictures on the internet which jogged my memory a bit.

The attendance here was surprisingly big and I was unable to park in the club car park, despite arriving very early for the game. However, it seems that a lot of the spaces were taken up by the Kings Langley men's side who were here training. So, I decamped to a nearby layby instead. We sat in the sizeable main stand and just before kick-off what seemed to be the club's academy side turned up with

notepads and their mentor/coach. For one moment I thought we were going to get a running commentary on the match. But although Watford and Stevenage for that matter, were decent sides, they didn't do that much worth trying to imitate!

On a lush pitch there was early drama when on about ten minutes the Stevenage keeper suffered an injury, possibly to her hand, which prevented her taking any further part in the game. She was replaced by a sub off the bench, who clearly wasn't a keeper. Within two minutes she had conceded a goal and was beaten again two minutes after that. Then a third one went in four minutes later. At this point double figures seemed likely. But once the new keeper settled she handled the ball well and hers and the team's confidence grew, to the point where Stevenage pulled a goal back on 45(+2) minutes. After the break Stevenage seemed to change their keeper again with their captain taking over. Later during the half, she too was replaced. In this period Stevenage saw as much of the ball as Watford, although I think that the hosts were still just the better side. But we left the game thinking that Watford might not have scored all of those three goals in quick succession had the original keeper been able to stay on the pitch! Overall a good night out and with all the inter changing of goalkeepers it was also a good even for connoisseurs of sports bras!

contributed on 23/08/18

TT No.009: Keith Aslan - Saturday August 18th 2018; CROWLE COLTS v Welbeck Lions Reserves; Abacus Lighting Central Midlands League Macron Store Stoke Division 1 North; Result: 5-1; Kick-Off: 15.03; Admission: Free; Programme: £1; Attendance: 68 (67 home, 0 away & 1 neutral)

The death of football programmes has been somewhat exaggerated. Having won the Scunthorpe & District League last season Crowle have started to issue in the Central Midlands even though it isn't, or ever has been, compulsory in this division. A superb effort, 16 pages in colour and a worthy addition to any collection. Welbeck Reserves, also new to the league, took a different path to promotion which didn't involve the tiresome aggravation of actually having to win games of football. They finished last season 12th of 15 in the Notts League Division 2 but they do have a good ground which in the FA's exciting vision for non-league football is far more important than sporting excellence.

The station for this one, and no shocks here, is Crowle, but there is a surprise element to the journey in that alighting at the station, a 2-mile walk is then required to actually get to Crowle. A pleasant town/village with most of the population wealthy enough to be able to afford not to live in Scunthorpe. I was very taken with the fish and chip shop which somebody had set up in their front room. I trust their house has good ventilation. Standing at the ground is all down the near side, with new portable dugouts opposite. There was a good vibe to this Central Midlands opener with, I suspect, a far larger crowd than they were getting in the Scunthorpe League. Didn't see any refreshments, but a couple of people had cups of tea in their hands suggesting I didn't look hard enough. The game was almost identical to the match I saw last week, 1-1 at half-time with one side

running away with it in the second period. The 4 goals Crowle (pronounced *Crole*) scored in the second half barely did justice to their total domination in the last 52 minutes. The Colts must be hoping for a bad winter with plenty of postponements, if all their games take place on the allotted dates their final match will be on February 9th which will make for a very long summer break.

Once again, I was indebted to the kindness of strangers with the programme editor giving me a lift back to the station enabling me to get home one and a half hours earlier. Made the 5 o'clock train in spite of the best efforts of the referee. The obligatory late start was compounded when he added 7 minutes onto the second half. What do refs. get out of this non-sense? The rule book clearly states a half of football is to be of 45 minutes duration. Time MAY be added at 'the referee's discretion' Clearly for Paul Vallis, in company with most of his compatriots, discretion is in very short supply. What did he think was going to happen by dragging the game on for another 7 minutes with the score at 5-1? When the trainer was called on to tend to an injured player in the 93rd minute he even added on injury time to injury time.

Crowle is a smashing club with an infectious enthusiasm about the place. Note to the FA: This is what grassroots football should be all about, not floodlights and *Atcost* stands.

contributed on 19/08/18

TT No.008: Steve Hardy - Saturday 18th August 2018; Birmingham Tigers v Inkberrow; Midland Football League Division 3; Result: 0-1; No admission charge or programme; Attendance 25 h/c

When will I ever learn? I am too gullible by half really. Let me explain. At the start of last season, Birmingham Tigers issued programmes for their first three games and then stopped. Naturally I turned up at their 4th game last year to discover they no longer issued, but, never fear, they promised to send an old copy on to me. A year later and I was still waiting for that programme, so when I spotted a copy of yesterday's programme on their twitter account I contacted them straight away and was told that, yes, I would definitely be able to pick up a copy yesterday. You can guess the rest.

Tigers have now moved to an athletics stadium in Smethwick, called the Hadley Stadium. It is just what it says on the tin really. A running track with a large stand down one side and terracing on two other sides. Plenty of room for the crowd of 25 yesterday, who were whipped up to a frenzy by the American style announcer. All rather surreal really, but they are keen to attract more spectators from the local community and seem to think all this razzmatazz will do the trick.

The more observant amongst you will have noticed I haven't mentioned the match itself yet. There is a reason for that. It was absolutely dire. Inkberrow were slightly the better of two really poor teams, and they deserved their winner which came on 38 minutes and was, I think, the only shot on goal from either side.

Once again, the Tigers have promised to send me a copy of yesterday's programme in the post. I am not holding my breath.

contributed on 19/08/18

TT No.007: *Brian Buck* - Saturday 11th August 2018; **Hunslet Club** v Wyke Wanderers; West Yorkshire League Premier Division; Result: 6-0; Attendance: 40 approx.

Apart from the fact that the ticket office at Sandy railway station was closed, this was a very enjoyable day out. I arrived at Leeds station on time and from there it was about a 25-minute walk to the ground, mainly along industrial roads. But before stepping inside the ground I ventured to the nearby café which the secretary had told me was always open. It was closed! I pointed this out to him when I met him inside the ground and lo and behold a free plate of sausage, chips and gravy soon appeared. I didn't think much about it at the time, as I was washing it down with a few pints (not free) but the sausage was cut into chunks and although I was presented with a proper fork, no knife came with it. Perhaps I was deemed to be a security risk!

Anyway, after squirming my way through watching Spurs struggle to beat Newcastle United on the TV, I set about watching the game. After 'washing my hands' I noticed that not only do they play rugby here, the non-league version, but within this social club, they also have a boxing ring and what looked like a badminton court. The match was excellent, if a tad one sided and seemed better than what I had just been watching on the tele. The pitch was well kept and was mainly green. It was fully railed off and I decided to watch the game on the far side, well away from the dugouts. The hosts took the lead on 38 seconds, thus continuing my recent trend of seeing goals scored very early on in matches. On 12 minutes the visitors, competing, but struggling to make an impression, were 2-0 down. Having finished in third place in the division below last season they had been promoted, but today they had difficulty keeping up with a rampant home side, who were leading 4-0 by the break. The second half was more relaxed and after adding a fifth goal on 51 minutes, both sides went through the motions a bit before Hunslet added the last goal close to the end. Afterwards I stayed on for another pint before making the walk back to the station, from where I had a quiet, trouble free journey home. A great day out and one in which the hosts officials were all polite, pleasant and helpful.

contributed on 17/08/18

TT No.006: *Steve Hardy* - Wednesday 15th August 2018; **Ball Haye Green** v Staffordshire Moorlands; Staffordshire County League Division One; Kick-Off: 6.30pm; Result: 3-2; Admission; Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 31 h/c

At the end of last season, Ball Haye Green looked like they were folding. They had just lost the use of the ground they had called home for the past 80 years, all their players had left, and things generally looked bleak. Some of their committee were determined to keep going though, so they scratched around for a new venue to

play at and eventually found one on the other side of Leek at Westwood College. Sadly, they had to take a demotion as the new facilities are not up to the desired standard for the Premier Division of the Staffs County League, but at least they were still playing.

Today was their first home game at Westwood College and it was fitting that the visitors would be local rivals Staffordshire Moorlands, who, I discovered have left their lovely old ground in Waterhouses and are also playing at Westwood College this season.

I thought the match was excellent, once it got going after a nervous start from both teams. BHG took the lead after just 6 minutes, but SM were much the better team after that, and deservedly equalised through a penalty just before half time. The second half was much better, with BHG again taking the lead after an error by the SM keeper on 61 minutes, before SM equalised again on 83 minutes. A 2-2 draw would have been a fair result in my opinion, but credit to BHG who kept going forward and were awarded a last-minute penalty themselves which was dispatched with some aplomb, for a 3-2 win.

A top evening out in North Staffordshire, and I really hope Ball Haye Green can make a success of their new home and get a bit of stability back, after their traumatic summer.

contributed on 16/08/18

TT No.005: *Keith Aslan* - Saturday 11th August 2018; **CORFE CASTLE** v Hamworthy Recreation; Dorset Premier League; Result: 1-7; Kick-Off: 15.00 on the dot; Admission: £2; Programme: £3; Attendance: 47 (34 home, 6 away & 7 neutral)

It was the Margate Gay Pride Festival today but alas I had to give it a miss this year as it clashed with the opening day of the football season. Well not really, the season started last week but apparently that doesn't count as there were no Premier League fixtures! Those nice people at *South West Trains* were intending to go on strike today but called it off on Friday, news which obviously didn't percolate through to the shunter at Bournemouth who didn't turn up leaving us with a 20-minute wait for someone to come and split our train. There is an hourly service from outside Wareham Station to Corfe Castle (a ludicrous £6 return if you are the other person who pays bus fares). It ran 18 minutes late which a local told me was pretty good for a summer Saturday. Much like '*Stagecoach East Kent*' buses then.

Corfe Castle was bursting at the seams with tourists but the plentiful eateries were well out of my price range. As football grounds go they don't come much more pictures-que than this one with the castle forming a dramatic backdrop. This was one of William the Bastard's (and yes that really was what he was called before the Battle of Hastings, I bet he was pleased he won as the moniker 'Conqueror' has a bit more gravitas). His reign heralded a boom time for castle builders, and even a thousand years later quite a bit of it is still standing. Given the large hill that I would have been required to climb to visit it, and the £11.50p admission charge, I gave it a miss. The football ground is railed on two sides with a newish building

behind the goal containing the changing rooms and tea bar with hot sausage rolls making a welcome appearance at half time.

This was Corfe's debut in the Dorset Premier League and to mark the occasion they issued one of their glossy programmes. They normally issue two or three times a season, but they publicized this one in advance which they don't usually do. It's the first match I can recall going to where I've paid less for admission than for the programme but it was worth the money just for the full-page colour photograph of *Talksport's* Tony Incenzo. Should be a nice little earner on *Ebay* if I can get him to autograph it. Some top of the range groundhoppers at this one with the lift back to Wareham station after the match being much appreciated.

Corfe Castle shouldn't be too despondent at this result, Hamworthy Rec. are far and away the best team in this division and at the interval the score was one all. It all fell to bits in the second half, but from what I saw I don't think the 'Castle' will struggle too much in this league.

contributed on 12/08/18

TT No.004: *Steve Hardy* - Saturday 11th August 2018; **Penistone Church** v Bootle; FA Cup Extra Preliminary Round; Kick-Off: 3pm; Result: 2-1; Admission: £3 (OAP); Programme: £1.50; Team sheet: 20p; Attendance: 165 (official)

The magic of the FA Cup has returned! After my morning match in Barnsley it was an easy 8-mile drive to Penistone Church for this Extra Preliminary round tie. I always try to watch matches between teams from different leagues in cup competitions, so this one, with Northern Counties East v North West Counties leagues was an easy choice.

The Penistone ground is fairly typical of NCEL set ups that I have visited over the years. Superb clubhouse and dressing room block behind the goal nearest to the entrance, a small stand covering half of one side of the pitch, floodlights and, er... that's it. It's all very neat and tidy, and more than adequate for a club at step 5 in the non-league pyramid.

It was good to see an official crowd of 165 turning up for this one, including a good few from Liverpool. Their pithy comments throughout were extremely funny, although a lot of the locals couldn't understand their Scouse accent, so missed out on the humour.

I thought Bootle were the better side for most of the game actually, but they just couldn't score. Church took the lead completely against the run of play on 24 minutes, before Bootle got a deserved equaliser just before half time. The second half followed much the same pattern, with Church re-taking the lead on 75 minutes and managing to hold out for a fairly lucky victory.

The journey home was basically a running battle between Sarah the *SatNav* girl and me. She wanted to send me totally the wrong way several times, and got more and more annoyed as I ignored her. Women eh?

contributed on 12/08/18

TT No.003: *Steve Hardy* - Saturday 11th August 2018; **Barnsley U18** v Watford U18; U18 Professional Development League; Kick-Off: 11.00am; Result: 3-2; Admission charge: No; Team sheet: Free; Attendance: 58 h/c

I was long overdue a return visit to Barnsley's Academy. A couple of years ago I turned up to watch their U18s play Birmingham U18s and found the place deserted. Turned out the game had been played the previous day, and I hadn't spotted it! Doh!

No such problems today though, as I arrived just as a large bus from Watford was spilling its players out by the dressing rooms. The Academy set up is very impressive indeed at Barnsley, and is situated directly behind the Palmer stand at Oakwell. On entering the facility, there is a 3G pitch straight in front of you which has a huge stand along one side. I seem to remember that breakaway club AFC Barnsley played there during their brief spell in the Central Midlands League a few years back. Beyond that is the pitch we used today, where there is a large area of seated terracing behind one goal, and which was the only area we spectators could use.

No admission charge, of course, and a full colour team sheet was widely available from the Academy reception building.

On the pitch, this one turned out to be excellent entertainment. Visitors Watford looked much the better side in the first half, and had taken a deserved 2-0 lead after 25 minutes. Just before the break, though, Barnsley pulled one back, and it was then 'game on'. The second half was all Barnsley and they duly equalised from a corner after 53 minutes, before popping in the winner on 77 minutes. Cue scenes of great excitement from the players, management team and most of the crowd of 58!

So, a great start to my Yorkshire trip, and it was off to the second game.

contributed on 12/08/18

TT No.002: *Brian Buck* - Saturday 4th August 2018; **Welbeck Lions** v Mickleover RBL; Abacus Lighting Central Midlands League Black Dragon South; Result: 1-1; Attendance: 20 approx.

Travel-wise this was a very poor day. I should have arrived at the ground 90 minutes before kick-off, but a series of trains cancelled by East Midland Trains meant that I got there just as they were tossing up. The fact that I had to leave immediately after the final whistle blew, to catch the Number 11 bus back to Mansfield, meant that this was the shortest amount of time I'd spent at a ground on a Saturday since 27th August 1983 when something similar happened when I watched Merthyr Town v Shephed Charterhouse (Southern League Midland Division); result: 0-2; attendance: 400 approx!

I picked out this match because I figured that it would be cooler the further north I went and I also suspected that they'd had a tad more rain up there than they had in the south of the country. This proved to be a good choice and after struggling to

find the entrance to the ground the afternoon was quite pleasant weather-wise. I'd actually been in this vicinity before, on 1 September 1998 when the club were known as Welbeck Colliery Miners Welfare. That evening they beat Radford 3-1 in a Referns International Removers Central Midlands League Premier Division match, attendance 50 approx. But subsequently they lost their facilities when the colliery closed down. So, they moved to the top pitch and nearer the village, effectively next door to the old pitch, which was used by the club's reserve team today for a friendly match, but you can't see one pitch from the other.

The club's new name has something to do with the fact that they go to the Three Lions pub after games. As for the match, the first half was poor, memorable only for the fact that the home keeper started time wasting from the outset and a ref who was too frightened to stand up to him. The visitors were on top but couldn't score. After the break Mickleover missed a good chance to score on 56 minutes when a lob came back off the post and into the keeper's hands, lob to gob! But after this Welbeck gradually got better and on 87 minutes a header from a corner gave them the lead. After having only won four games in the past two years was this to be another one? Well, no as with the last action of the game a cross came in and the ball was headed over the keeper for the equaliser and probably overall the right result. My journey home was equally fraught when my train from Nottingham ran 40 minutes late. A decent but tiring day out.

contributed on 05/08/18

TT No.001: Steve Hardy - Saturday 4th August 2018; Cheltenham Town U18 v Forest Green Rovers U18; Football League Youth Alliance; Kick-Off: 11.00am; Result: 1-1; Admission: Free; Teamsheets: available; Attendance: 55 h/c

Quite what possessed me to use the M5 on a Bank Holiday weekend, I shall never know. The continuing road works at Junctions 1 and 2, plus huge volumes of holiday traffic, meant I screeched in to the car park at Cheltenham Town's training ground with minutes to spare.

The Academy is based to the north of Cheltenham in an area called Swindon Village, on the wonderfully named Quat Goose Lane. Today saw the first round of games in the FLYA for this season, with Forest Green's U18s and U16s the visitors. The games were played on adjoining pitches and spectators were allowed to stand down one side of each pitch.

I thoroughly enjoyed this game, although it did take a while to get going. 0-0 at half time, with both sides having hit the post, the deadlock was eventually broken after 51 minutes when Cheltenham took the lead. FGR had brought a good few parents/supporters over with them, and it looked as if they were going to go home disappointed, until they scored a deserved equaliser after 83 minutes.

A couple of things happened that you really don't expect at youth team level football. Firstly, three Cheltenham players got booked, which is almost unheard of in my experience. Secondly, and far more seriously, play was held up for 10 minutes after a linesman flagged the referee over to say he had been threatened

by an FGR supporter after he had ruled an FGR goal out for offside. Security were called, and the gentleman concerned was escorted away, although I noticed he came straight back in again soon after.

Free admission as usual, with copies of the two team sheets available to anyone who wanted them. An excellent tea bar in the clubhouse building too, selling hot food to the grateful masses. A super start to my season proper.

contributed on 08/08/18