

TT REPORTS 2019-20

updated on 16/09/19

TT No.031: Keith Aslan - Saturday 15th September 2019; **DUCKLINGTON** v Wootton Sports; Witney & District League Division 2; Kick-Off: 16.31; Result: 2-3; Admission: £4; Programme: £1; Attendance: 178 (24 home, 4 away & 150 neutral)

We're in the middle of the 'hop season' and on a joyfully warm day there can't be any better way of spending a Saturday than riding round the Cotswolds watching football matches. Three cracking games and the football didn't appear to be of a lower standard than a lot of the stuff I watch each week. The first two games were at the deliciously named Milton-under-Wychwood and Minster Lovell with the final stop being Ducklington which as everybody knows is a village just south of Witney. I was travelling around in the back seat of a well-known Stockport hopper's car cuddling up to Lucy who spent much of the journey licking my face. Not as erotic as it sounds (well I suppose it depends on which websites you look at!) as Lucy is a canine who is actually older than me in dog years so she's the median age for groundhopping.

A nice clubhouse here but while normal people were trying to watch the football scores one dick kept changing the channel to the tedious sport of cricket, although any game that lasts five days would find favour with today's referee. I bet you can guess what's coming up shortly. As with these events plenty of food and drink was available and it's nice to spend a sociable afternoon with my friends. Perhaps the word friends is putting it a bit strongly, let's say acquaintances. Perhaps acquaintances is also putting it a bit strongly as well, let's just say these are people who don't run away when they see me, at least not all of them do. Obviously if you attended Ducklington for a normal match you won't pay to get in, won't get a programme, won't have a variety of face filling options and you certainly won't be surrounded by 177 like-minded souls.

Let's talk about Alan Stanley, the referee. Now this is a job I would never do, I can't understand why anybody would want to, but there are a couple of bits of it I reckon I could handle without any problem. Starting a match punctually is one of them and timing two periods of 45 minutes is another, the latter being totally beyond today's man in black. First half, 50 minutes, nobody knew why, but he excelled himself in the second, playing 16 (sixteen) added minutes for no apparent reason. The Wotton bench were going as berserk as was I. What was he doing? He kept looking at his watch so he hadn't forgotten the time, there was no possible reason he could have thought there were 16 minutes of stoppages that needed to be added on. The rules need changing, the line about 'time may be added on at the referee's discretion' needs to be changed as they don't seem to have any. I missed a train I should have easily caught and thanks to this man I spent 55 minutes wandering aimlessly around Kings Cross. How am I supposed to fill the time? I could have availed myself of a woman of easy virtue but that would only have taken up 30 seconds so I opted to spend the time in *McDonalds*, a dismal place on a

Saturday night. The referee was probably sitting at home with a cup of tea and a cigarette watching TV or phoning up his mates telling them how he messed everybody about by taking 1 hour 51 minutes to play 90 minutes football.

Notwithstanding Mr. Stanley this was a wonderful day out in a lovely part of the country, superbly organised as all these things are, by *Groundhop UK*. And I like to think Lucy's day was enhanced by my presence as well.

contributed on 15/09/19

TT No.030: Steve Hardy - Saturday 14th September 2019; **Wythenshawe Amateurs** v Selby Town; FA Vase 2nd Qualifying Round; Kick-Off: 3.00pm; Result: 1-3; Admission: £2 OAP; Programme: £2; Attendance: 205.

Match two today was just a short nine-mile bus journey from Stockport to Wythenshawe, and a chance to visit the new ground of Wythenshawe Amateurs. The ground has been built at the northern end of Hollyhedge Park with the entrance being off Altrincham Road and conveniently right in front of the 11A bus stop that I was travelling to.

I really liked the set up, and the behind the scenes staff were really friendly. As I walked in to the club house, one of the officials said 'He looks like one' to his friend. I look like one what? 'A groundhopper' he replied. Oh, the shame of it...and not a corned beef sandwich to be seen.

My match featured 2 Step-6 clubs from different leagues, which was just what I always want to see. Visitors Selby, of the Northern Counties East League, brought a good few fans with them and pre-match they huddled around the telly supporting Newcastle in their noon kick-off at Liverpool. That was to be their only disappointing result of the day though as they thoroughly deserved their win in this Vase tie and never looked like losing, despite going behind.

Amateurs took the lead on 37 minutes following a breakaway from a Selby corner, but Selby soon equalised on 42 minutes with a well worked goal of their own. 1-1 at half time then, with the second half following much the same pattern with all-out attack from both sides. Selby scored their second on 62 minutes before wrapping things up with a penalty on 83 minutes.

The official attendance today was 205, which was over a hundred more than my head count made it. Hmm. I also asked the home officials why they don't refer to themselves as 'Amateurs' any more on the club signage or programme. They told me that whilst they are still officially Amateurs, as they are a Step-6 semi-professional club now, they are not really Amateur anymore, so have hidden the name in becoming Wythenshawe AFC.

contributed on 15/09/19

TT No.029: Steve Hardy - Saturday 14th September 2019; **Hazel Grove** v Brownley Albion; Manchester Saturday Morning League Division One; Kick-Off: 10.15am; Result: 5-0; Admission charge: No; Programme: No; Attendance: 1 h/c

I let public transport take the strain today, starting with a silly-o'clock bus to Stafford, and then a train to Stockport. First match was some four miles out of Stockport in the suburb of Offerton, which is where Hazel Grove FC have decamped to this season after many years at Torkington Park in the middle of Hazel Grove itself. The new venue is at Offerton Parish Park on Half Moon Lane. This is just a public Park really, with a kiddie's play area, a dilapidated changing room block and a football pitch at the bottom of a suicidally-steep hill at the far end of the park.

My match today featured two Champions. Current Division One champions Hazel Grove v last year's Division Two champions Brownley Albion. The Brownley pre-match team talk was very positive, and ended with the Manager telling his team that whilst Hazel Grove are the current champions, man for man his boys were far better than them. And then the match kicked-off!

Brownley tried really hard, but were eventually overwhelmed. Grove took the lead on 6 minutes with an un-marked header at the far post, and then doubled the lead just before the break when the Albion keeper handled the ball outside the area with the resultant free-kick sailing past him as he stood motionless.

The second half was one-way traffic really with the 3rd (miles offside) goal coming on 63 minutes, followed by two more on 74 and 84 minutes. The last one was a penalty and was no more than Grove deserved.

So, a quick dash to the bus stop and back into Stockport for another bus to match two.

contributed on 15/09/19

TT No.028: Brian Buck - Saturday 7th September 2019; **Bush Hill** v Fleetlands; Hampshire Premier League Senior Division; Result: 0-2; Attendance: 80 approx.

Today I let the train take the strain and it certainly did. The 11.22am from Waterloo crawled its way as far as Woking and then after a few minutes of nothing an announcement came across to the effect that there was a body on the line at Hook. We were told by the guard, who seemed to know a lot about these things, that we would be here for at least 45 minutes.

But as I started to flick through *The Football Traveller* magazine for possible other fixtures, I noticed that a train to Portsmouth Harbour was due in on an adjacent platform. Noting that it stopped at Havant on its way I decided to get on that train, as I knew that I could get a connection to Southampton from there. I did this and while I was waiting for my connecting train at Havant, I visited the water closet. When I re-emerged, there was another train on the platform and although it wasn't advertised on the board, I found out that it was going to Southampton direct. When I alighted at my destination and asked, I discovered that this was actually the same 11.22am train I was on earlier! Anyway, from here I immediately caught a bus to the ground which stopped literally by it.

After confirming that the match was definitely on, I adjourned to the nearby The Saints pub which was about a goal kick away. On my return I ordered some food and as the provider found out that I was a Groundhopper, he kindly put a bit extra in for me. He told those in earshot that all products he uses are sourced locally, namely *Tesco's*, *Lidl* and *Aldi*! This fully railed off ground is actually in a public park, but with a mixture of trees, a tarmacked footpath, a block of flats and the main road surrounding it, the venue felt more enclosed than it is. There is one club building, painted brightly in the club colours of red and black, but it houses the dressing rooms and the tea bar only. The ground is a few hundred yards away from that of Solent University (formerly Team Solent) of the Wessex League. No chance of floodlights here though, although someone from Fleetlands told me that they had recently been given permission to erect theirs.

This was a match between first and third and Bush Hill were not only the reigning champions, but they had won the league two out of the past three years. You got the impression that they are not too keen on losing and they gave the young ref a hard time. He was being observed by someone who looked almost as young as him and I thought that he stood up well to the pressures. After an even first half of few chances from either side things hotted up after the break. On 61 minutes Fleetlands took the lead. The home lino had his flag up for offside, but the ref rightly or wrongly refused to consult him. For me the goal wasn't offside. This caused temperatures to rise on the home front as soon they had a player 'sin-binned', quickly followed by one of the management team getting a straight red. Then on 76 minutes Fleetlands doubled their lead and a minute later Bush Hill had another player 'sin-binned'. Fleetlands would have got a third goal right at the end, but again the lino's flag was raised and this time the ref did consult him and he disallowed the goal. Immediately the game finished I dived on to a bus waiting outside the ground and once back at the station I decided to abandon *South West* trains and return home via Reading instead. An eventful day out!

contributed on 11/09/19

TT No.027: Steve Hardy - Thursday 29th August 2019; **University North Carolina Women v Coastal Carolina**; Colonial Athletics League; Kick-Off: 7.00pm; Result: 3-1; Admission \$7; Programme: Free; Attendance: 564

A family wedding in Wilmington, North Carolina, and by an amazing coincidence, I spotted this match at the University of North Carolina grounds was taking place, close to our hotel.

Just like every other school, college and University we passed whilst we were in the States, the UNCW set up is vast. A full baseball ground, athletics track, American football stadium as well as the 'Soccer' stadium which were all floodlit and played on a 4G pitch. Admission was a flat \$7 for everyone, and an unexpected free double-sided single sheet was issued from a stall which was also giving all children those awful clapper boards to try and create an atmosphere!

In fairness, they didn't need artificial help creating an atmosphere. The home crowd (there were no supporters from Conway in South Carolina which is where

the Chanticleers come from) managed to make quite a lot of noise, although it did seem to me that they began getting excited when nothing seemed to be happening on the pitch.

The match itself was very good I thought. The Seahawks took the lead just before half time, only for Coastal to be awarded a dubious penalty a minute later. This was brilliantly tipped round the post by the home keeper leaving us with a 1-0 half time score. UNCW doubled their lead on 53 minutes and should have had several more until Coastal shocked everyone with an 86th minute goal of their own. No sign of last-minute nerves from the home team though who rounded off the game with their 3rd of the night, two minutes from the end.

So, an unexpected bonus game for me, and very good it was too. Just a shame about the heat. When this game finished at 9.00pm, it was still 88 degrees as we dripped our way back to the sanctuary of our air-conditioned hotel.

contributed on 10/09/19

TT No.026: Keith Aslan - Saturday 7th September 2019; **BROMLEY HEATH UNITED** v Frampton United; Les James Cup; Result: 2-3; Kick-Off: 14.58; Admission: Free; Programme: £1; Official attendance: 93 but whoever came up with that figure must have been on drugs! Actual attendance: 40 (33 home, 6 away & 1 neutral)

1966 was a great year for English football, Bromley Heath United were formed and now 53 years later they have issued their first ever programme and at 16 glossy pages a mighty fine effort it was. New into the Gloucester County League the club play in the village of Mangotsfield which today was a sporting hub. First you pass Mangotsfield's ground, home today in a rather forlorn FA cup tie, next door is the rugby club, also at home with a somewhat larger attendance than their footballing neighbours, and then it's Pomphrey Park the delightful setting for today's entertainment. A large cultivated open space with the football ground near the entrance it's a popular spot for the locals to exercise. Set on top of a hill behind the goal is the clubhouse selling food and drink and the lunchtime football showing was Koz v Cze. Even when I'd worked out who they both were this one didn't set the juices flowing. I can recommend the made to measure cheese salad rolls at a bargain £1. You get a superb view of the match from the clubhouse, handy if it's raining but of course you wouldn't be able to count the game.

With Craig Britton the manager, Ross Britton his assistant and Phil Britton the secretary the club is very much a family affair, Bromley has been a youth team for most of its existence, with Gary Mabbutt being its most famous old boy. Only in 2014 did they start a grown-up's section and they very quickly rose through the leagues. The ground is fully railed in a glorious rustic setting in complete contrast to the enervating bus journey out from Bristol City Centre. The match was a cracker, Bromley had played 3, lost 3 while Frampton had played 3, won 3, but league form means nothing in the cup except it did and Frampton won. The home side gave as good as they got and I was at a loss to understand when they made it 2-2 midway through the second half why they started time wasting and playing for

penalties. Maybe they've got some fantastic penalty takers but I'll never know with Frampton getting the winner on 90 minutes.

An enjoyable day out enhanced by the bus fares in Bristol having some semblance to reality unlike their Hertfordshire counterparts!

contributed on 08/09/19

TT No.025: Brian Buck - Friday 6th September 2019; **Eynesbury United** v Cherry Hinton; Kershaw Premier League; Venue: played at Eynesbury Rovers FC; Result: 0-4; Attendance: 70 approx.

Today it was my wife's birthday, so I made sure that she had plenty of time to enjoy it in peace as I went off to see another match.

Since the end of last season, the fencing on the side you come in has been completed and thus the club now have an enlarged car park. Eynesbury United are in effect a new club, playing at Eynesbury Rovers FC. They have their own committee and bank account and to doubly make sure that they have no connection with Rovers they play in pink shirts! Having said that, the players making up their side is in effect the Rovers reserve side from last season. Rovers Reserves still exist though and they now play in Beds County League Division 1. The club also issued a well set out 16-page programme for this game.

Tonight, they were up against their top of the table opponents, even though they'd played just five matches so far this season. Meanwhile tonight was only United's third game and they had won one and lost one before tonight. They were never really going to win this one either, try as they did. Cherry Hinton had bags full of confidence and it was going to take something special to beat them and United didn't have it. The opening goal came on 12 minutes when a blocked shot was followed up from close range. The second goal, scored by the same player, arrived on 40 minutes when after a bit of ping pong in the six-yard box the ball was headed home from close range. It was soon time for our half time cuppa and near the tea bar inside the clubhouse we noticed a list of forthcoming events. If you are into maths and science then their 'Physic evening' on 3rd October is to be recommend! The second half started off in a dramatic start when on 49 minutes United had a player sin binned. This was to cost them dearly as while they were down to ten men Cherry Hinton scored twice, with one of the goals giving their earlier scorer his hatrick. This was effectively game over now, so it was a bit silly for a Cherry Hinton player to get sin binned as well on 77 minutes. A further United player suffered the same fate right at the end. Overall a decent relaxed evening out.

contributed on 06/09/19

TT No.024: Brian Buck - Saturday 31st August 2019; **Stonewall** v Larkspur Rovers; Cherry Red Books Middlesex County League Premier Division; Venue: played at Barn Elms Sports Trust (Stadium Pitch), Barnes; Result: 2-1; Attendance: 9.

With *South West Trains* apparently on strike, I elected to get here by using the North London Overground line from Highbury & Islington to Richmond. From here I was prepared to get a bus the rest of the way, but some *South West Trains* were running so there was no need. I caught a train to Barnes and walked the half mile or so to the ground from there. Then once I confirmed that the game was definitely on, I continued my walk, shorter this time, to the nearby Red Lion pub, where I holed out until near kick off time. Here I forsook my usual cider and returned to the locally brewed (since 1958) London Pride, shared with some dried roasted peanuts. In this upmarket area I know how to mix in with the locals!

I was back at the ground in time for kick off. In their Club History I was informed that Stonewall were the first ever LGBT side to be formed in the UK and that 'the club was originally established in 1991 as a safe environment for gay players to play football'. On the next page of the programme I noted that Larkspur Rovers didn't have a Club History as such, but instead had an Historic Timeline, which in effect amounted to the same thing.

I'd been to a game here before, on Saturday 26th February 2011, but it was a wet day and a 'game off' pitch inspection had just been completed as I arrived. So, Sutton United got my custom that day instead, a 5-1 win against Maidstone United. Today's match was played on the Stadium Pitch, which is in the middle of a six-lane running track, but viewing was not so distant as you might think. Also, it had a covered stand, no seats, but I reckon you could get 50 or so in there at a push. This was partially tested when we had a very heavy rain shower late in the match. I sat on the glossy covered top step, next to two other spectators and we seemed to be the only three people there not directly involved with either club. The only fly in the ointment today was the presence of three young brats who got on the t**s of just about everyone, seemingly apart from their 'owner'.

As for the match, it was fairly entertaining, although I suspect that both sides will finish up in the lower reaches of the league. Stonewall took the lead on 15 minutes, perhaps undeservedly, with a shot which went in off the post. But a header from a left side cross saw the visitors equalise on 24 minutes. But five minutes later Stonewall got what would prove to be the winner with a header from a deep free kick. Thereafter the game was even for the most part, except for the last ten minutes or so when Rovers piled on the pressure in a vain search for the equalizer.

Afterwards it seems that the teams went off to the Red Lion pub, rather than use the relatively newish Barn Elm Sports Trust building, which not only housed the dressing rooms but it also had an unopen bar when I looked inside it, maybe today for later use by the cricket people playing outside it. Stonewall's dressing rooms at the time of my previous visit are still there, but are now in an extremely dilapidated and can no longer be used.

contributed on 04/09/19

TT No.023: Keith Aslan - Saturday 31st August 2019; **ORACLE COMPONENTS** v St. Margaretsbury Reserves; Herts County League Division 1; Kick Off: 14.59; Result: 2-1; Admission: Free; Programme: £1; Attendance: 15 (6 home, 0 away & 9 neutral)

They'll be dancing in the streets of Oracle tonight after their third victory on the trot even if one of them has been expunged due to Bedmond's untimely departure from the league. For the hopping contingent though a lot of the magic went from the game with the non-appearance through injury of Lee Hattersley, son of Harlow Dave.

Goffs Academy is a 40-minute walk from Cheshunt Station. There are no direct buses but a regular service covers the middle part of the walk. Got this back as the 12 minutes it saved translated into an hour earlier arrival back at my country dacha. Not that I'm bitter about being the only person in the universe who pays bus fares but £2.70p for a one-mile journey. Come on that's just plain silly. The pitch is plastic and guess what, it's surrounded by a green fence, surprise, surprise. There is a covered area with seats just outside the enclosure which at a pinch would give you sight of the match and keep you dry. The secretary tantalized the crowd with tales of hot drinks and snacks being available at future games but not yet on-line. A couple of us went next door to the Broxbourne Borough clubhouse, who were at home in the vase, but sustenance was only available from inside the ground so a bit of a downer for the greedy hopper (that's all of us then!).

Standing between the two managers, the pair of them who came across as thoroughly nice blokes before the game, spent the whole match slagging off the referee. All very sad especially as he didn't do much wrong except mis-time the length of the game, the one thing he wasn't criticized for. The players certainly didn't make it easy for him and if I had been the referee (no chance) there wouldn't have been 22 players left on at the end. But like nearly all of his colleagues Panos Fellas (what a fab. name) is unable to time a football match. 45 minutes gone in the first half, lets add on another sixty seconds for no reason. It was in that spurious minute St. Margrethsbury took an undeserved lead. Plenty of action in part two, not all of it legal, with a couple of goals winning Components the points. We had seven minutes tacked on to the end of the second half, it started off as five before more added time was added to added time for time wasting. Clive Thomas, we miss you.

Oracle have started issuing this season and are very pleased with sell outs at their first three games. I hope they appreciate that with two thirds of today's crowd being hoppers who are attending specifically for the paper accompaniment, programme sales will be pretty perky. It's when the hoppers start evaporating that you won't shift so many. A little tip, if the best question you can come up with for the player profile is 'What is the best biscuit for dunking?' maybe you should think of something else to fill the programme. According to centre forward Paul Stevens it's *McVities* caramel digestives in case you were wondering.

Thanks to my £2.70p bus journey I was home in time to see '*Britain's Got Talent: The Champions*'. The fun never stops.

contributed on 01/09/19

TT No.022: Brian Buck - Wednesday 28th August 2019; **Towcester Town** v City Colts; North Bucks & District League; Result: 5-1; Attendance: 60 approx.

This match was played at The Recreation Ground, Islington Road in Towcester and as recreation grounds go, this was not an unattractive venue. It was well used in addition to the football match taking place and most of the bench seating around the ground was taken up by people either watching the match or just socialising. There was activity in the kiddies play area as well. This was the third venue I've seen the hosts play at. I first saw them at their original London Road ground, now demolished I think and on my visit, they beat Olney Town 2-1 in a Nene Group United Counties League Division 1 match on 1 January 1987 (attendance 50 approx.). More recently, on 12 April 2016 I saw them beat Brackley Sports 4-2 (attendance 20 approx.), also in the North Bucks League and this game was played at Pattishall Parish Hall, Astcote.

Now they are back in the town and in the centre of it at that and although they will never be able to develop this recreation ground and move up the pyramid ladder once more, this venue seems to suit their needs for the time being and tonight there was some enthusiasm about the place. Indeed, a Theresa May lookalike turned up to watch the game. At least I assume that it was just a lookalike! It seems that they change in some rooms between the Peacock pub and the playing area.

As for the match, it was eventually rather one-sided. Towcester took the lead on 9 minutes, Then, after City Colts had a player sin-binned on 22 minutes Towcester doubled their lead a minute later, which came by way of an own goal with the defender only succeeding in kicking the ball into the net as he tried in vain to keep it out. Then the ref got a bit card happy, booking a player from each side when a stern word would have done the trick. After the break Towcester completed their scoring for the evening with further goals on 50, 60 and 85 minutes and they were all 30 to 40-yard efforts. However, on 83 minutes City Colts also scored with a long-range effort to bring to a close an enjoyable evening, even though it rained a bit towards the end, causing most spectators to head for the adjacent trees!

contributed on 28/08/19

TT No.021: Brian Buck - Saturday 24th August 2019; **Dereham Taverners** v Watton United Reserves; Barnes Print Central & South Norfolk League Division 1; Venue: played at Scarning Playing Field; Result: 5-2; Attendance: 15 approx.

Although there were no trains today from London to Peterborough and Cambridge, there were trains from Cambridge to King's Lynn and I joined one at Cambridge North. Then from the bus stop right outside King's Lynn station I picked up one of the half hourly Peterborough to Norwich buses. But it ran late and was almost half an hour late by the time I got off at Dereham. The bus actually passed through nearby Scarning on the way, but there are no pubs in Scarning. So, I got my fix in

Dereham and then returned. But because I thought that the return buses might run late as well, I took no chances and I got there much earlier than I needed to.

As there was nothing to do at the ground, I nipped into the church across the road, which was not only cooler, but I could sit down there as well. After having some prolonged words with God, I was back at the ground well before kick. One of the questions I asked him was how come a side with Taverners in their name play at a place where there's no pubs? I'm still waiting for an answer! With temperatures into the thirties today I was fortunate that there was some shade to stand in here under some trees.

Bearing in mind the conditions and with questions over both teams' match fitness they did well to put on something of a show here. The first half wasn't great, despite someone from Dereham claiming that just about every pass his side made was "Quality!" They did take the lead on 19 minutes though when the scorer chased a lost cause and scored from close range. They also seemed to have the ball over the line again on 43 minutes. But the local VAR expert here, the ref, decided from his inconclusive positioning that it hadn't crossed the line. The second half was much better. Dereham doubled their lead on 47 minutes, but Watton, playing better now, pulled a goal back on 62 minutes, only for Dereham to score again two minutes later. A second Watton goal on 74 minutes made the closing minutes interesting, especially as the Dereham keeper made a meal of playing on with an injury. But two goals in added on time secured Dereham the points.

Then I caught the bus back to King's Lynn, which ran precisely to time, as had the others I watched while the game was in progress. This is a useful bus to know about if you want to also visit, Narborough, Necton, Hockering and Easton by public transport. Overall an enjoyable day out although I was a bit sapped by the heat when I reached home.

contributed on 28/08/19

TT No.020: Steve Hardy - Saturday 24th August 2019; **Llanymynech** v Newtown Wanderers; Montgomeryshire League Division Two; Kick-Off: 2.30pm; Result: 0-2; Admission: Free, Programme: No; Attendance: 8 H/C

Match two today was a 20-mile drive from Shrewsbury into Wales, and the beautiful village of Llanymynech. It was a close-run thing though as the village is only 'dwy fodfedd' across the border and only just in Wales.

The club plays on Station Road in Llanymynech and behind the village hall. No spectator facilities at all of course, just an un-roped pitch in the local park. I suspect the railway has long gone too as there is nothing shown on the local map in front of the village hall.

The Montgomeryshire League is not part of the Welsh Pyramid and consists mainly of Reserve teams. My match was in Division two of the league and featured two first teams, both of whom had made a decent start to this fledgling season. After my goalless draw this morning, I was delighted when the visitors scored after less

than a minute and sat back to await the expected deluge of goals. Fat chance! I must have caught the home team on a bad day, as they were shocking. Passes went astray, shots on goal headed across the English border, and they seemed to play the whole game in a state of lethargy which they seemed unable to break. Newtown, on the other hand, couldn't believe their luck. They stuck to their limited game plan and scored a second before the end to round off a very easy 2-0 win.

As with just about everywhere else in the country, it was absolutely roasting today, and I spent the game watching from any available shady spot to avoid melting. I don't 'do' heat so found all the shady trees an absolute bonus.

A perfect day was rounded off when Sarah Satnav and I discovered the A5 was closed in Shrewsbury, and we had to follow diversion signs that seemed to take us in totally the wrong direction. Still, Sarah has always wanted to visit Carlisle.

contributed on 25/08/19

TT No.019: Steve Hardy - Saturday 24th August 2019; **Shrewsbury Town Supporters** v Bury Supporters; Internet Football League; Kick-Off: 10.30am; Result: 0-0; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 10 H/C

The IFL is a national league for supporters' clubs to play each other on a home and away basis. There are two leagues, one for Scotland and one for England, with all clubs taking part in the National Supporters Club cup during the season.

Shrewsbury have recently returned to the IFL, after a few years out. They claimed their match was being played on the Bayston Hill Playing Fields in Bayston Hill. It turned out, after much driving around looking for it, that the venue hasn't been known as this for some time, and is actually called the Lythwood Sports Complex, and which consists of a bowling green and two football pitches.

The troubles at Bury FC are well documented and despite the encouraging news on Saturday morning the Bury Supporters team weren't getting their hopes up from what they told me. As a gesture of support, the Shrewsbury team had arranged for every member of the travelling Bury team to be given a free ticket for the afternoon's Shrews v Burton game. A wonderful gesture in my opinion and I really hope there is a future for Bury FC.

The match itself provided a first for me. Goalless draws in this league are as rare as hen's teeth, but as the Bury twitter account said, it was a case of two excellent defences cancelling each other out. Most 0-0 draws are really boring, but there was always plenty going on in this game to keep the ten spectators interested.

contributed on 25/08/19

TT No.018: Steve Hardy - Thursday 22nd August 2019; **Stone Outlanes** v Canal Tavern; Pre-Season Friendly; Result: 3-1; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 6 H/C

Here is a starter question for you. What is the most difficult to find ground you have ever visited? My answer is this one! The match featured Uttoxeter & District Sunday League side Stone Outlanes against Coors Sunday League Stoke outfit Canal Tavern, and the venue was the Outlanes Sports Ground on Old Road in Stone, Staffordshire. A postcode was helpfully provided on the club's *Facebook* page, so Sarah Satnav and I set off anticipating a very easy trip to north Stone. Trouble was, when we reached the said post-code, we were in the middle of nowhere on a narrow country lane with no room to turn around and a large tractor in front of us! Turns out that the area is so remote it doesn't have its own postcode, so the one given had taken us to the general vicinity and we were on our own from there.

Once we found the ground by following the equally lost match Referee, it turned out to be rather good. Two teams play there, with Stone Town being the other Sunday side using it, and it consists of a single pitch with an excellent changing room/clubhouse building in one corner. The pitch resembled a farmer's field and meant any passing along the ground was doomed to failure, so every pass was hoofed up in the air as the ball just stopped dead when it fell.

The match itself was very enjoyable, if a bit low on skill. Outlanes led 3-0 at half time with three almost identical free kicks beating the immobile Tavern keeper easily. The Tavern half time team talk suggested a move to a 4-5-1 formation would be better, and so it proved as they pulled a goal back on 53 minutes. With both teams tiring on the heavy pitch the game eventually fizzled out, but not before I had seen my first sin-binning. The geriatric ref let the game flow for most things, but he wouldn't tolerate back chat. After sin-binning a Canal player for swearing at him, the player just didn't stop, so after he told the Ref to F*** O**, the Ref told him he was now red carded and wasn't to come back on. Quite right too.

I am writing this article in my car, as Sarah and I still haven't found out how to get out of Stone, and had to spend the night in the club car park, until help in the shape of a dog with a barrel of brandy around its neck turns up to help us.

contributed on 23/08/19

TT No.017: Brian Buck - Saturday 17th August 2019; **Bottesford** v St Andrews Reserves; Everards Brewery Leicestershire Senior League Division 2; Result: 3-1; Attendance: 35 approx.

I was going to travel to this game by train, changing at Grantham and then walking the mile or so to the ground from there, but when I checked out the train times for my return journey I not only figured that I might struggle to catch the 5.14pm train, but I also noted that the next two trains, hourly, were already cancelled due to a strike. So, I decided to drive to the game instead, although later I realised that I could have got there and back by a long bus journey bus from Melton Mowbray. Anyway, since my only other visit to Bottesford, on 15 May 2004, when I saw them lose 4-0 to DH FC in a Notts Alliance Division 1 match, at their old Belvoir Road ground (att. 35 approx.), they have moved to their newish

Nottingham Road ground, which is outside the western boundary of the village and completely in the countryside.

It's a rather large complex and there were at least four or five full sized pitches in it. However, the one today's game took place on was fully railed off, just ten days prior to this game, as a surprised home official told me. They also have a decent sized refreshment area here with tables and chairs. They had a 'well stocked' tea bar here as well, serving hot food. No bar though, so I had to nip back to the village centre to get my fix. The Bull was recommended, and rightly so, as it was the only pub with live TV football. I was back at the ground in good time for the start. Today was a largely sunny day with a warm wind blowing when the sun was out, but a bit chilly otherwise. I wouldn't recommend anyone to come here on a wet day, as there is no cover whatsoever, save perhaps for the overhang of the clubhouse if the wind is blowing in the right direction. But overall this venue is a vast improvement from the recreation ground they played on in the village and they should be able to develop it without objection if and when they move up the pyramid ladder. The pitch was immaculate.

As for the game and early on it looked like the visitors might win it. But by the time Bottesford, which is actually in Leicestershire, just, took the lead on 36 minutes they were just coming into the game. An in-swinging direct free kick on 59 minutes, saw them double their lead. Then on 65 minutes St Andrews pulled a goal back. Then on 90(+1) minutes the hosts got the winner from the spot. Their keeper was taken out and needed about five minutes of treatment before he could resume. So was it really worth a St Andrews player arguing about it and getting sin-binned. The match finished almost at 5pm, so my decision to drive here was the right one. Overall an enjoyable day out, because everything was better than I expected it was going to be.

contributed on 21/08/19

TT No.016: Steve Hardy - Saturday 17th August 2019; **Madeley White Star** v Cheadle Town Reserves; Staffordshire County Senior League Division 2; Result: 5-1; Admission: Free; Programme: 4pp; Attendance: 37 h/c

Madeley White Star are making their debut in the Staffs League this season, and to celebrate their first home game they issued a fairly basic four-page programme. News of this programme spread throughout the groundhopping community like wildfire, and I would guess that at least 30 of the 37 spectators were hoppers. 37 was my head count, incidentally, but other headcounts are available.

Madeley is a lovely village between Crewe and Stoke. A few years ago I went to watch the football team on their old ground in the village, but I was told that this old pitch didn't have the required facilities for the Staffs League, so they have moved to Madeley High School and use the grass pitch at the rear of the school. This one is roped off before each match, and the club also left a table with tea and coffee on it for spectators to buy using an honesty box. The programme was given away for free and several hoppers suggested to them that by charging a £1 each they could have helped towards the official's fees. They hope to issue for

every game this season, but I can't help thinking they missed a trick today, as they are unlikely to get crowds of 37 for the rest of the season I would have thought.

On the pitch this was the Kieran Brown show. The Madeley number 4 was head and shoulders above anyone else on the park, scored four of the five goals himself, and general ran the show. He scored his hat trick on 12, 43 and 72 minutes before letting someone else have a go for a 4-0 lead on 86 minutes. Amazingly, Cheadle managed a consolation goal from a penalty on 88 minutes, but normal service was resumed when Brown scored his fourth with the last kick of the game.

When I arrived at the ground, I was under the impression that this was my final ground to recomplete the league. When I left, I had discovered it wasn't, so I still have one more to visit in this wonderful league.

contributed on 18/08/19

TT No.015: Keith Aslan - Saturday 10th August 2019; **SOUTH LIVERPOOL** v Maghull; West Cheshire League Division1; Kick-Off: 15.02; Result: 2-1; Admission: £2; Programme: £1; Attendance: 44 (42 home, 0 away & 2 neutral).

Wednesday 24th April 1985 South Liverpool v Marine in the Lancs. Floodlight Trophy. An important game in the history of South Liverpool football club, this was the last competitive first team match they didn't issue a programme for. Impressive or what. As their excellent website recounts, it was their 5th match out of eight played over 10 days, 5 of which were at home and programmes were issued for the other four. I'm willing to forgive them so long as it doesn't happen again! So, having taken a programme as read, my pre-match enquiries centred around whether I'd actually be able to get in, with the Liverpool Sports Hub, like Stoneham's new ground, originally requiring all sorts of computer work filling in forms to ensure I'm a fit and proper person to enter a council run sports complex (although I could be a serial killer and still be able to get in as long as I applied for a magic code). Anyhow, they've scrapped this in Liverpool because, and I could have told them this, it doesn't work. Hopefully the nonsense at Stoneham will soon go the same way.

A bit windy in the morning so all *Southern Trains* were slowed to a maximum of 50 miles an hour causing chaos. This is becoming a regular event down our way (always at weekends!) public safety apparently although there is something very wrong with our railway if a gentle zephyr blowing across the hop fields is dangerous to trains. Can't quite see how having pootled along to Ashford at sub 50, the rest of the journey along the high-speed track to London was done at 140 mph. Does it have magical wind resistant properties, or would *South East Trains* get sued if they held up the Eurostar's for non-existent health and safety reasons? Arrival in Liverpool and the weather really was awful, gale force winds and incessant rain, in fact much the same as it was the last time when I was here four months ago. Either I'm unlucky or they have a very dodgy climate round these parts. Good news is they've returned the statue of Ken Dodd to its rightful place on Lime Street station. Aigburth is the station you want, three stops on the metro. South

Liverpool's new home is just a couple of hundred yards from their old ground, and the 15-minute walk alongside the River Mersey was today, somewhat bracing.

You can get a picture of what the ground is like, plastic of course, so it has to be surrounded by a green mesh fence. Plenty of spectator room on three sides with a stand due to be erected when finances permit. Could have done with it being there today though. There are two other full-size pitches in the complex, so I'll have to come back to do them. Ha! ha! The on-site café was most welcome, a place to dry out and watch the lunchtime football. According to the programme this was the first game since May 1991 they've charged admission with all money raised going towards paying for a stand. The proggy was a mine of information and a quite wonderful production. The reserves are here next week, and they'll be issuing for them as well.

Both teams deserve credit for a cracking game of football in appalling conditions which kept the crowd down. Maghull spent most of the second half going for an equalizer but just falling short. We only had a 10-minute half time. Everybody went back to the changing rooms so no idea why it was so short, but most welcome all the same. Match still didn't finish till 10 to 5 though. South Liverpool have a long-standing enthusiastic committee who have done sterling work keeping the club not just alive but prospering after they lost Hollybush Park, the iconic ground they used to play at in the Northern Premier League. The future is always going to be bright with this crew running things.

Having got a good soaking, I had plenty of time to dry out on the journey home thanks to my mate Richard. *Virgin Train* 1 hour 17 minutes late back into London, signal failure at Lichfield wouldn't you just know?

contributed on 11/08/19

TT No.014: Steve Hardy - Saturday 10th August 2019; **Charnock Richard v Lower Breck**; FA Cup Extra Preliminary Round; Kick-Off: 3.00pm; Result: 2-1; Admission: £3 OAP; Programme: £1; Attendance: 185

Match two today involved a simple 9-mile drive through a torrential downpour to the town of Charnock Richard. It was absolutely belting it down when I arrived at 1.30pm, but the friendly parking steward told me they rarely have games called off here, and it was game on.

The same chap told me they have big plans here at Mossie Park. At present they have a decent sized stand along one side of the pitch, with a covered standing area behind the goal nearest the entrance. They are looking to put another stand down the other side of the ground, and another area of cover behind the far goal too, which will make it a really impressive venue if they do.

Today's cup tie involved two teams from the NWCL. I normally try for games between teams from different leagues, but as I have a soft spot for Lower Breck this match was too inviting to miss. And what a cracker it turned out to be, as well. Breck started off really well, hitting the bar early on as they dominated. Charnock gradually started to take over though and their pressure told exactly on

half-time as they took the lead. After the break Charnock doubled their lead on 62 minutes and it looked like game over, but credit to Breck who pulled one back on 81 minutes and then pressed for an equaliser in the last ten minutes, sadly to no avail.

So, another excellent day out in Lancashire despite the dreadful weather. For once even Sarah the *Satnav* girl behaved herself, and we managed to avoid drowning on the M6 into the bargain!

contributed on 11/08/19

TT No. 013: Steve Hardy - Saturday 10th August 2019; **Bolton Wanderers U16 FC** v **Watford U18**; U18 Professional Development League - North; Kick-Off: 11.00am; Result: 1-4; Admission and Team-sheet: Free; Attendance: 36 H/C

I know what you are thinking. The silly old buffer has put the wrong age group for the Bolton team, hasn't he? Well, no actually, he hasn't. The problems at Bolton are well documented, and it turns out that the Bolton U18 team were drafted in to play for the first team v Coventry today, as they have so few senior players signed on. This left the U16s to step up to play Watford U18s, and whilst they tried very hard, the 2-year age gap at this level left the result never in doubt.

Just like the main stadium, the Bolton Academy set up is also in Horwich and, indeed, the floodlights can be seen in the distance. Or at least they could have been if it hadn't been raining heavily throughout. No problem getting in here, although with the car park flooded, parking was an issue. Luckily the terrible weather kept the attendance down, and those that did seemed mostly from Watford.

I was really impressed by this Academy. Loads of pitches available, including a floodlit 3G pitch next to lake car park. I saw people coming back from the office area with cups of tea, although getting back to the pitch would have turned the tea into rainwater, so I didn't bother.

Despite the rain, the grass pitch was immaculate. Visitors Watford took the lead on 16 minutes with an unmarked header from a corner, and it was one-way traffic after that as they scored three more by the 63rd minute for a comfortable 4-0 lead. Credit due to Bolton though as they intercepted a cross-field pass for a one on one run through on goal which the lad scored with aplomb on 80 minutes.

I have never been much of a Bolton fan ever since my partner and I were abused by several drunken Bolton fans in the stand whilst we were watching my beloved Reading winning 3-1 in the Premier League a few years back. The stewards did nothing to help us and it left a very sour taste in our mouths. That said I do hope they can sort this current mess out and not get thrown out to the EFL, as seems increasingly likely, at the moment.

contributed on 11/08/19

TT No.012: *Brian Buck* - Wednesday 7th August 2019; **RAF Regiment** v Thetford Town Reserves; Friendly Match; Venue: played at RAF Honington; Result: 10-1; Attendance: 140 approx.

This was far more than a friendly as in reality, as the colourful 8-page programme revealed, this was a Fund-Raising Match for one of their brethren, who has a brain tumour and he is likely to die within two to five years if it is not removed. His private healthcare insurance company won't pay up, nor will any other insurance company touch him. It seems that the operation he needs can only be done in Canada or the USA and his friends and everyone on the base are trying to help him get there and this match was one of the fundraising events for him.

RAF Honington is roughly between Thetford and Bury St Edmonds and access to the sports ground was straight forward if you could find the right entrance to it, which I did eventually, with grateful thanks to my Groundhopping friend from near Sudbury, who had got there before me. By kick off there were about a dozen of us present, which was good because we had plenty of time to kill before we got under way. I had arrived early, but Thetford hadn't and the kick off was delayed by half an hour. I elected to sit in the away dugout and overhead their players mumbling about how many they might get beaten by here as they warmed up.

Their fear turned out to be justified, contrary to the comments in the programme saying 'we hope that Thetford can give us a competitive game!' Well, they might have had Thetford first team not played a league game on the previous night and in fact it would have probably been very competitive. Because of the reasons I have already explained, there was a good crowd for the game. It was a nice night and many people just walked to the pitch from their houses on the base. But as a contest this was very soon one-way traffic and by half time it was 4-1 to the hosts. Quite how Thetford managed to score was a mystery. Soon after the restart three Thetford players turned up, one of whom (one of the subs alleged) was their manager and when he decided to get changed and play, they groaned! His presence made no difference as the RAF rattled in another six goals in this period, but it was more about the reasons for playing this game tonight than it was about the match itself.

contributed on 08/08/19

TT No.011: *Brian Buck* - Tuesday 6th August 2019; **Badshot Lea** v Frimley Green; Cherry Red Records Combined Counties League Premier Division; Result: 5-0; Attendance: 210 approx.

With the M25 behaving properly we arrived here about an hour before kick-off, thanks once again to my trusty chauffeur. The ground is actually in Wrecclesham, which I'm told is a good half an hour's walk from Farnham railway station. On the way we passed a sign pointing to Badshot Lea, which I later discovered is an actual place. For one horrible moment I thought that the football club was named after a former player who wasn't very good at scoring goals!

Although this is a new football ground, it actually had a bit of a 'lived in' look about it. This is because it was the former home of Farnham Rugby Club and I'm guessing that the major change to make the ground suitable for Step 5 football was the provision of some perimeter fencing. But overall this ground ticks all the required boxes and it is not exactly an unpleasant place to watch football.

Tonight, I sat next to the ref's Observer for the whole match and I found that we got on very well and we agreed on most things. In fact, I find that since they have stopped being called Assessor's I do get on better with most of them. Anyway, the ref did have a good game and at one point I saw him run faster backwards than I can forwards!

As for the match, after a slow start the hosts took the lead on 19 minutes, which they almost deserved. But soon Frimley Green were creating and missing a whole host of chances, which would eventually cost them dearly, even though their manager claimed that the goals would come as they walked off the pitch at the break. The Observer went off for his free cuppa and asked me to look after his seat. "I'll guard it with your life!" I told him. If there had been any doubt as to who was going to win this match in the first half then Badshot soon made sure that it was going to be them in the second half, as on 54 minutes they doubled their lead. Frimley had a couple of efforts either side of this goal, but none thereafter. Badshot got their third goal on 62 minutes, cue some entertaining acrobatics from the scorer and then two further goals in the last fifteen minutes, to bring to a close a great night for them and an enjoyable evening for us.

contributed on 08/08/19

TT No.010: Brian Buck - Saturday 3rd August 2019; Bakewell Town v Pinxton; **Abacus Lighting Central Midlands League Chairman's Cup**; Venue: **played at Burton Rugby Club - Peel Croft**; Result: 1-5; Attendance: 269.

Today I was grateful to get a lift to this game and we arrived here without any major hiccups, which meant we were able to nip into a few local hostelrys before proceedings got under way. Parking was a bit of a problem though. When we arrived, an earlier game was nearing completion and a CML official told us that the parking inside the ground was for players and officials only. So, we parked in the retail park opposite the ground instead, which is free parking for two hours. When we returned after our enjoying refreshments, we now noticed that the gate into the ground was now open and unattended, presumably to allow the folk to depart from an earlier game here. So, we took advantage of this.

Our reason for coming here today is that there are strong rumours that Peel Croft is set for demolition within the next year. Normally, if you haven't been here before then you might be tempted to just let it go. But the reason why a load of 'senior' Groundhoppers turned up for this one is that the ground is of major historical significance, in that it once staged League football.

At present it is the home to Burton RFC and has been since 1910. In fact, Peel Croft opened in 1872 as a Rugby venue, by 1891 codes changed at Peel Croft when

Burton Swifts moved in and the Association game was played there instead. Swifts gained entry in the Second Division of the Football League a year later with their first game at home resulting in a 7-1 win against Crewe Alexandra. Also, in town there was another club, Burton Wanderers who were making their own way forward and they themselves became members of the league in 1894 playing home games at Derby Turn. It wasn't long before the realisation set in that it would be better to pool resources and the two clubs merged to become Burton United and this joint venture lasted from 1901-1907 as a Football League club before folding in 1910 having played six matches in the Southern League thus ending Association football at the ground with the venue returning to its former use with only a few football matches played here since then.

So, today's game had a bit of a nostalgic feel to it. Unfortunately, it was a bit one-sided and after 33 minutes Pinxton were winning 3-0 and deservedly so. With Bakewell seemingly unable to alter the situation I spent much time gazing around the ground, trying to picture men with black moustaches and baggy shorts running around here over 100 years ago! But this was a bit difficult because there was the noise of the passing traffic around three sides of the ground to contend with. Bakewell played better after the break, pulling a goal back on 56 minutes. But although Pinxton eased off a bit they still managed to score twice more before the end. A great day out.

contributed on 08/08/19

TT No.009: Keith Aslan - Saturday 3rd August 2019; **HERNE BAY** v Witham; Pre-Season Friendly; Kick-Off: 15.02; Result: 3-1; Admission: £3 for ancients; Programme: Nope, but begging produced a team sheet; Attendance: 118 (109 home, 8 away & 1 neutral)

The first day of the season and I'm doing a local friendly for a revisit without a programme which will have my fans asking - what's going on? I should have been at Burton for the last chance to do an ex. football league ground but life seldom pans out as planned and a call from Ashford hospital to inform me they had a space on Friday night to perform long awaited surgery on my nose meant I wasn't very perky when they let me out on Saturday morning.

I had strict instructions to go straight home and stay there but I don't ever do what I'm told unless there is no alternative. I was also told that my nose would be bleeding continuously for a few days and they weren't wrong there. Sitting on the bus to go back to the station I was still contemplating zipping up to Burton when I sneezed and the back of the bus turned into a film set from a Quentin Tarantino movie. Blood everywhere, it hasn't stopped since and due to the operation. I can't put anything up my nasal passage to stem the crimson tide. Decided to go home. Still wasn't going to stop me going to football, but of a more local variety, so armed only with an industrial quantity of extra strength *Kleenex* for men I bled my way along the coast to Baywatch! The logic was if I am going die at least I'll snuff it doing something I enjoy.

Herne Bay has two claims to fame. It had the second longest pier in the country (after Southend). You can see how far it reached with the end out at sea just visible in the distance, alas no longer connected to the rest of it. The other fact to know is that Herne Bay is the only place in England to have a block of flats named after a 1960's Australian female tennis player with Margret Court two minutes from the ground. Winches Field or Altera Stadium as it is now known is a 12-minute walk from the station, plenty of seats and cover on three sides of the ground all built without recourse to the *Atcost* shop. There has recently been talk of the club folding with no money or players but there wasn't anything amiss today apart from the Golden Goal tickets being £2 a throw. You won't be selling many at that price boys. I spent most of the game responding to the question 'Do you know you're bleeding?' and I had many kind offers of cotton wool to stuff up my nose (at least I presume that's where they wanted me to put it). It's good to have the scores back to watch at half-time in the clubhouse and the return of the theme music to *Sports Report* meaning that it's the first day of the season and all is well with the world.

The match was unremarkable, highlight of the first-half was an eighteen-man brawl resulting from the Witham No. 6, a graduate of the Joey Jones charm school, performing a two-footed drop kick on a home player, and when everything had settled down the referee showed undue leniency in only booking two players. It may just be a friendly but the 'tackle' was horrendous. The goals all came in the second half with Witham taking the lead before Herne Bay came back to take the points, or would have done if there'd been any on offer. Best goal came in the 91st of the 90 minutes with a goalkeeping boo-boo that was really very funny.

Most of the afternoon's entertainment came from the Witham Ultra, wearing a replica shirt that really did have 'Ultra' printed across the back, a Witham baseball cap, Witham scarf and armed with six (6) flags which he festooned behind the goal at the 'unpopular end' of the ground. It must have taken him ages to put them all up and take them down again. All on his own he sang, chanted and generally made a noise throughout the game and got far more excited than he really should when Witham scored, totally oblivious to the fact he was being a bit of a dick, albeit a harmless one. Without wishing to be cruel here is a man who would do well to type the words 'Girlfriend' and 'how to find a..' into *Google*. Witham did have a few other supporters but they all gave him a wide berth.

Having drifted in and out of consciousness due to blood loss I just about made it back to my country dacha and I can now spend the rest of the weekend bleeding out in the privacy of my own home. At least if I'm overwhelmed by blood loss I'll die with a smile on my face. In the letters page in today's '*Non-League Paper*' a Brian Thompson from Hendon was complaining about long journeys for away games with the line 'The travelling time is certainly an incontinence' What a load of ____!

contributed on 04/08/19

TT No.008: Steve Hardy - Saturday 27th July 2019; **Wyrley United** v Coven Athletic; Pre-Season Friendly; Result:1-0 (abandoned 75 mins); Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 26

Yet another PSF at a venue that I had never visited before, despite it being only 4 miles from home. The Cheslyn Hay Leisure Centre, on the outskirts of Cheslyn Hay, houses a floodlit 3G pitch in a cage, yet isn't used by any local clubs as I understand it is too short for FA approval. The venue was the only reason I took in this match and I won't be returning any time soon either, as it turned out to be a thoroughly depressing afternoon all round.

For a start, it rained continuously, and as there is no cover of any sort there, we spectators got drenched (apart from the sensible punters who sat in their cars to watch). Then there was the football itself. Two really poor teams struggled to create anything much, with Wyrley scoring the only goal on 24 minutes. After half-time things got out of hand with crunching tackles going in from both sides, several bookings, a Wyrley player taken off after the ref said 'sub him or I send him off', and a mass brawl on 75 minutes which saw a Coven player sent off for assault, before the Referee decided he had seen enough and abandoned the game. This came as an immense relief to most of us spectators who wondered why he had taken so long to do so, but all credit to him for trying to let the football continue despite all the abuse he was getting.

I haven't seen a PSF as depressing as this for a long time, but with proper football starting again next Saturday let's hope there are no more matches like it for the next 8 months.

contributed on 28/07/19

TT No.007: Brian Buck - Saturday 20th July 2019; **Ongar Town** v Buckhurst Hill; Friendly Match; Venue: played at Fyfield Village Hall; Kick-Off: 2.30pm; Result: 1-5; Attendance: 25 approx.

After my previous game had finished it took me about an hour to get to my other match today. Time for some unhurried refreshments in the nearby pub, but no time to sample their tasty looking food, which judging by the menu looked as though it was going to cost me about a pound a mouthful. My fault for having such a big mouth I suppose! Back at the ground the main car park was full so, with permission, I parked in the adjacent Scout Hut car park instead. I'd seen a game on Ongar Town's proper ground, which is a few miles south of Fyfield, but that was so long ago that you could still get a Central Line tube train to and from the ground.

Fyfield's ground is quite a nice venue for football. The modern and spacious looking village hall flanked the football pitch, which was very green and flat. There were no spectator facilities inside the hall, except for toilets and somewhere to sit if you wanted to, but no one did. Most people sat around the various trestle tables, mainly to get out of the sun, which by now was becoming very warm. This was apart from one couple, who arrived late and decided to roam around in front of everyone else, blocking all of our views from time to time. Their very young son even ran onto the pitch twice! Eventually the father blocked my view of one of the goals. I politely asked him to shift his bum, which he did immediately. But within ten minutes the three of them had disappeared. For some strange reason this was a 3 x 35 minutes match. Buckhurst Hill were easily the

better side, but perhaps not quite by the margin they won by. They were also the side that gave the ref the most hassle, causing him to sin bin one of them at one point!

contributed on 24/07/19

TT No.006: Brian Buck - Saturday 20th July 2019; **Weston** v Foxton; Friendly Match; Kick-Off: 11am; Result: 1-4; Attendance: 25 approx.

A revisit here was long overdue as my only other appearance occurred on 4th April 1989 when I saw the then called Weston United lose 8-0 to Peartree in a North Herts League Division 2 match. I recall that the game was played out in dreadful conditions and it snowed throughout the whole match. I was hoping that it would get abandoned but they just played on.

Today I arrived with about fifteen minutes to spare. There's no car park here, so it was street parking and then a long walk down a track by the village hall until I arrived at what was basically a pitch hewn out of a field full of long grass. In one corner there were some newish looking wooden changing rooms, complete with an overhang, to shelter under should there be rain. It nearly did but gradually the dark clouds disappeared and it got warmer. This was a rather one-sided match. Weston were unable to match the abilities of Foxton and they only had a few subs. The fact that they argued with each other from time to time didn't help either. Foxton were 3-0 up at the break. However, Weston did start the second half better and pulled a goal back, despite the mother of one the Foxton players claiming that there was an offside in the build-up. Then two minutes before Foxton got the final goal of the game, on 66 minutes, we witnessed an unusual incident in that when Foxton were awarded a spot kick for handball the player taking it hit the post with his shot. The ball rebounded to him and this time he tucked it away. The ref rightly disallowed the goal because the same player had touched the ball twice. One law of the game which hasn't changed this season!

contributed on 24/07/19

TT No.005: Steve Hardy - Saturday 20th July 2019; **Eastwood Hanley Development** v Leek CSOB Reserves; Pre-Season Friendly; Result: 2-3; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance 11 H/C

Hands up all those of you who remember Stoke based Eastwood Hanley FC? They were a top club back in the 1980s, playing in the Northern Premier League and vying with Leek Town for the title of top club in Staffordshire. It all started to go wrong for them when continual vandalism at their Trentmill Road ground in Stoke forced them to move out in the early 1990s, and after a couple of years ground-sharing with other local clubs they eventually folded in 1997.

The new club started in 2014 when an existing club changed their name to Eastwood Hanley and joined the Staffs County league. The old Trentmill Road ground was still there, but in a very dilapidated state, so the club have spent the last five years getting it back in order, whilst playing all their games at various

other local venues, including the 3G pitch at Northwood Stadium in Stoke, where they are currently based.

Today their Reserves were entertaining Leek CSOB Stiffs at Trentmill Road in a pre-season friendly, so I decided to see how much progress they have made on renovating the site. I never got to see the old club, and can't actually find any old pictures of the ground anywhere on the inter-web, so have no way of comparing the old with the new. I suspect several bits of terracing are original, as is the small roofless stand down one side, but that is probably it.

The match itself was really rather good. Two VERY young teams (including at least one 15-year-old) gave it everything, and the fun started with an Eastwood penalty on just 10 minutes. Loads more huff and puff produced no more goals in the first half, but after the break CSOB were much the better side. They equalised on 51 minutes and they took the lead 6 minutes later. Back came Hanley to equalise following a very short back-pass interception before CSOB finally won it with a mile's offside 3rd on 74 minutes.

Quite when the club will be able to start playing all their games at Trentmill Road, I don't know. It looks pretty good to me already, with a railed off pitch, a tea bar and a super clubhouse. No floodlights as yet, of course, but the club are only doing what they can afford to do. Quite right too.

contributed on 21/07/19

TT No.004: Keith Aslan - Saturday 20th July 2019; **HORSHAM** v Crawley; Pre-Season Friendly; Kick-Off: 15.02; Result: 3-1; Admission: £6 for old people; Programme: £2; Attendance: 1080 (500 home, 500 away & 80 neutral)

Previously the pre. season games here were all ticket, but changing it to pay on the gate reaped a rich reward for Horsham, a visit from me! Clearly whoever decided to make the match's all ticket in the first place has spent too much time listening to 'Optimism F.M.' with their first two games attracting 328 and 223 spectators. A few more at this one for the 'Official Ground Opener', somewhat of a misnomer with it being the third match played here in the past week.

I liked the ground, a very large clubhouse behind the near goal, two small examples of Atcost architecture along the left-hand side and another one behind the far goal but the piece-de-resistance is the capacious stand straddling the right-hand touchline built without recourse to the Atcost Shop. Surrounded by a wooden fence it is pleasantly situated adjacent to a golf course in the middle of the Sussex countryside, although I'd have preferred it to be situated in the middle of Horsham. Here lies the rub, great on a summer's day like today but how many people will traipse out here on a cold November night. It's two miles to the south of the town, but in fairness there is a regular bus service from outside the station. The Camping World Community Stadium has a plastic pitch with Crawley using it as their training ground, and after eleven years groundsharing you can sense the pride and relief of all Horsham's officials and supporters at their return with the

programme detailing the trials and tribulations of their homecoming. I wish them well.

I travelled cross country to get to this one, it took most of the weekend but was much cheaper than going via London. Must offer my congratulations to the hard working managers on the privatized railway who have actually managed to come up with another name for the Guard with passengers on Southern Trains being greeted over the tannoy by an 'On Board Supervisor' They may be the world's worst railway company but boy do they have inventive titles for their staff. Horsham is a very pleasant well to do town, and home to one of Groundhoppings most eccentric practitioners. Fortified by a scrumptious Steak and Chips in a town centre hostelry I walked out to the ground. Although it took me 45-minutes, it should take anyone with two fully functioning knees a bit less. Inside the stadium there were massive queues for food and drink but fortunately the club house had a drink's and a sweetie machine. If you hear any stories about me stuffing my face with chocolate before the game ignore them, its Flake news.

Crawley had had a match with Brighton the previous evening meaning they didn't exactly field their strongest eleven here, with the ubiquitous A. Trialist appearing at regular intervals on both team-sheets. An average pre. season friendly with Horsham going a goal down before getting better the longer the game went on while Crawley ran out of steam. The programme was a really good read and excellent value, but you can't say the same about the admission prices advertised therein. £11 for adults but £60 for the over sixties. A bit steep, if I go again I shall have to adopt a subterfuge and pretend I'm under 60 and just led a hard life. The programme also referred to Crawley as a former new town, but surely you could say that about everywhere? It did raise a serious point however, how old does a place have to be before it ceases to be a new town? I spent much of the journey home mulling this over in my mind. Note to self, must get a life.

contributed on 21/07/19

TT No.003: Steve Hardy - Tuesday 16th July 2019; **Gornal Athletic v Coven Athletic**; Pre-Season Friendly; Result: 3-1; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 29 (h/c)

The attraction of this game was, once again, an obscure venue that I had never heard of before. This time it was the Hilton Park Community Centre in the Lanesfield area of Wolverhampton. Whilst I had never heard of it, it has obviously been around for some considerable time as a friend who was watching the game as well claimed to have played there as a 16-year-old, some 40 years ago.

It seems Gornal Athletic FC have been playing all their PSFs here this season although when the Referee hadn't turned up by KO time, it looked as though we might all have had a wasted journey. Luckily somebody from the Community centre stepped in and despite not leaving the centre circle he controlled the game really well.

It was actually a fairly evenly contested game. Coven looked the better side in the first half and duly took a deserved lead on 32 minutes, only to be pegged back three minutes later. The second half saw Gornal impose themselves to better effect, and they won the match with goals on 71 and 85 minutes.

Once again, the perfume of several 'herbally refreshed' young lads wafted across the pitch to complete another splendid evening out in the West Midlands sunshine.

contributed on 17/07/19

TT No.002: Brian Buck - Wednesday 3rd July 2019; **Amphill Town U18** v Amphill Town Development; Friendly Match; Venue: played at Amphill Town Youth & Junior Section, Abbey Lane, Amphill; Result: 0-2; Attendance: 15 approx.

This game was a rarity for me in that I was able to pick up a 'new' ground in Bedfordshire. I'm told that it is or was known locally as the 'Tidy Tip' ground, because of its close proximity to the local Tidy Tip and I recall that Amphill Athletic FC used to play here. A 'Google' search reveals that they seemed to go out of existence after about 2012. Of course, I would have preferred not to have seen an inter-club match here, but in truth if you hadn't known who the teams were on arrival then it would have just been a normal match. Furthermore, we had a decent ref in Dean Carney in charge and he oversaw a match in which very few fouls were committed.

This was a 40-minutes each way encounter and as you can see from the score it was a fairly even game. Most of action came in the first half and on 10 minutes the Development side took the lead with a 30 yarder. They then doubled their lead from an effort just inside the area when any number of about five players could have claimed the goal, but I gave it to the chap who had the original shot. The second half was much quieter and few balls ended up in the adjacent field. By the end the two players who impressed me most were the respective keepers, who both pulled off some fine saves, especially the U18 keeper.

contributed on 10/07/19

TT No.001: Steve Hardy - Saturday 6th July 2019; **Birmingham Tigers** v Bolehall Swifts; Pre-Season Friendly; Result: 1-6; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 5 (h/c)

The good thing about early season PSFs, is that they are often played at grounds that don't host regular football matches. This was the case today and I was delighted to find out that Birmingham Tigers are playing all their PSFs at Heartlands Academy in the Heartlands area of Birmingham.

Unfortunately, this turned out to be yet another 3G pitch in a cage, but none the worse for that. The crowd of 5 were able to watch the match from a balcony overlooking the pitch, or, in my case, were allowed to go inside the cage and wander to all four sides to take photos.

I wasn't expecting much of a game, in all honesty, as Tigers had finished bottom of the bottom division in the Midland League last season, with Swifts next to bottom

in Division 2. In that respect I was pleasantly surprised, at least by Bolehall, who have a new management team in place for this season, and an entirely new squad of players as well. They looked pretty sharp I thought, even though this was their first PSF of the season.

Tigers, on the other hand continue to look very poor. They conceded a penalty after just 4 minutes and 3 more goals before the break saw them 4-0 down. After half-time they seemed really fired up and managed to pull a goal back on 49 minutes. Several chances followed and were wasted, before normality was restored when Swifts scored their 5th on 70 minutes and a sixth followed just before the end.

Also present at the game was an elderly hopper from Leicester. He had come by train, and had gone to Tigers normal ground at Hadley Stadium first, being unaware of the switch of ground. A very expensive taxi ride from Smethwick to Heartlands saw him arrive only ten minutes late and we spent the rest of the game putting the non-league world to rights.

contributed on 08/07/19