

TT REPORTS 2020-21

updated on 13/07/21

TT No.83: Brian Buck - Saturday 3rd July 2021; **Mangrove** v Much Hadham; Hertford & District ORC Sports League Division 2 Cup Semi Final; Venue: played at Much Hadham; Result: 3-6; Attendance: 35 approx.

If Westmill is perhaps the most scenic ground in Hertfordshire, then maybe Much Hadham can claim that their ground is in the prettiest village in Hertfordshire. Indeed, a sign actually mentioned '*Best Village in Hertfordshire*' and there were also a number of signs in people's gardens to come and view them next day.

My only other visit here occurred on Tuesday 30th March 2010, when I saw Much Hadham get thrashed 7-0 by Warewolves in a KB Tyres & Mercury Hertford & District League Division 1 match (att: 7). After that match had finished, we then raced off to see Harlow Town lose 2-1 to Maldon Town in a Ryman League Division 1 North Match (att: 93).

Since then, the cricket element of the club has disappeared and Hadham have turned what was a sloping pitch, round by 90 degrees. Today it was also good to see my friend and ex-Spurs reserve and youth team player, Bobby Scarth, running one of the lines.

The game was keenly contested, for all the right reasons and they gave Ed Byrne (the comedian!) lookalike ref, no serious problems at all. The only thing he did which mystified us a bit, was to instigate water breaks during each half, on a not particularly warm day. Sometimes I think that the refs have them for their own benefit rather than for the players.

As for the game, Mangrove were leading 2-1 at the break, despite playing a lot of the half with ten men due to an injury. The injured player returned for the restart. By the 55th minute Much Hadham were winning 3-2 and then another injury on 63 minutes saw Mangrove go down to ten men for the remainder of the game. No more goals came until added on time when firstly Hadham got their fourth goal before Mangrove pulled a goal back. But there was still time for two more Hadham goals before the final whistle, to bring to a close, a decent afternoon out, surrounded by nice people.

contributed on 07/07/21

TT No.82: Brian Buck - Saturday 26th June 2021; **Sheering** v Waltham Abbey 'A'; Hertford & District ORC Sports League Charlie Smith Challenge Cup Semi Final; Result: 1-3; Attendance: 35 approx.

After my need to try and be unsociable on the previous Saturday, as I was trying (not very well) to self-isolate in readiness for my long-awaited operation to remove my gallbladder two days later, I was far more sociable today as I was able to drive

to this game after my operation, a walk in, hobble out one on the same day was deemed to be a success.

I arrived here some 45 minutes before kick-off and it was lucky that I had done my homework using *Google Maps*, as the ground was set back behind some houses. I'd seen a game here once before, on Monday 23rd May 1988, when I saw Sheering lose 5-1 to Hatfield Broad Oak, a decent side in those days, in a Brian Skingle Sports (Bishop's Stortford Stansted & District League Premier Division match with an attendance of 25 approx).

In those days the ground was easy to find as it was right behind the Queens Head pub. But that has sadly closed and has either been converted into housing or replaced by housing, all of which makes it hard to park, although I was able to snap up one of the two remaining spaces in the layby opposite the entrance to the ground.

The pitch was surprisingly railed off for the most part, but I headed over to the far side of the pitch and watched the game from one of the unused dugouts, generally with an unobstructed view and out of the sun as well. But I had to sit there a long while before proceedings started, as apparently a road closure on the way from Harlow, which saw the ref arrive late, even though his two lino's arrived at about the same time as I did. The upshot was that we kicked off just over 15 minutes later. Had we started on time then we might have had a problem, as Waltham Abbey's kit didn't arrive until close to the proper kick off time.

This was never really going to be the host's day. They looked tired and exhausted after winning Division 1 of this league unbeaten and their number 9 missed some good chances early on for them. It was hard to criticize him though as in other games he's scored 27 goals during the season. On 24 minutes top of Division 2 Abbey took the lead from the spot following a foul, given by the ref 40 yards away. I thought he was right, but others thought differently and the lino on that side never reacted. Then two quick goals, on 34 & 35 minutes made it in-effect game over. The hosts replaced their keeper at the break and played marginally better in the second half, pulling a goal back on 58 minutes, but it was never going to be enough to disturb Abbey and their enthusiastic bunch of supporters. For the record this was my 121st game of the season and match number 13,381 overall.

contributed on 02/07/21

TT No.81: Craig Dabbs - Saturday 26th June 2021; READING YMCA v Wargrave; Thames Valley League Division One; Venue: The Cauldron, Padworth Village Hall Recreation Ground; Result 1-0; Goal Log: 1-0(23); Admission: None; Programme: 12pp, £2; Attendance: 179.

Well, here we are at the end of another Covid affected season and right at the end of June which is something new in Football terms for me.

The Thames Valley Premier League has really kept me going in recent weeks and today, like last week, was another title decider but this time in Division One.

Reading YMCA have the lease at Padworth Village Hall Recreation Ground and have renamed it The Cauldron presumably to strike fear into the opposition? If that is the reason, well winning today and winning the league suggests it works!

The ground is situated quite close to a busy railway line and the caravans you see in the pictures are I'm told that of workers on the line. The Village Hall website does have the site marked as a camping site with all the necessary facilities along with the Football ground also used for Archery.

The ground whilst basic is nicely enclosed with a wooden fence running down the campsite side and the far end. The village hall end and the side opposite to the campsite was roped on this occasion presumably due to a higher than normal, expected crowd, which did indeed materialise with plenty of hoppers no doubt lured by a programme being printed as was I.

The match was a fairly tight affair as expected with the YMCA the better side throughout, Wargrave gave a good account of themselves but in truth never looked like they had goals in them.

So that's that, I'm hoping for a much more normal season that for me could commence next week but in all reality will commence the week after hopefully.

contributed on 26/06/21

TT No.80: Keith Aslan - Saturday 26th June 2021; READING YMCA v Wargrave; Thames Valley (nee Reading) League Division 1; Kick Off: 14.01; Result 1-0; Admission: Free; Programme: £2; Attendance: 179 (70 home, 20 away & 89 neutral).

This is the big one, a title decider, winner takes all with Reading only needing the draw and it attracted the great and the bad of the groundhopping fraternity. They came from all corners of the universe, and Stockport. YMCA play at 'The Cauldron' (no idea where the name comes from) and is a glorious 20-minute canal-side walk from Aldermaston Station. A little tip for you, if you're doing Aldermaston FC this isn't the station for you, that ground is 5 miles away. The Kennet Canal has a pub, a tea shop and a visitors' centre and was buzzing with barging folk and people out for a stroll in the summer sunshine. A beautiful part of the world.

The ground is out in the country, a wooden rail along three sides, the other being roped off. A hatch sold drinkies and nibbles with a barbecue offering more substantial fayre. Its proximity to the railway line enabled sad people such as me to indulge in a bit of train spotting. With the game's importance, Reading decided to issue a one-off programme, a print run of 100 which I believe was a sell-out. That's a couple of hundred quid to bolster club funds, and what with the refreshments, this match must have been a real money spinner.

YMCA have been around since 1896 and their rich history is detailed in the programme. They joined the forerunner of the Thames Valley league in 1911 which in those days was called the Reading Temperance League, a title which I shouldn't think attracted many players! Nothing wrong with the game but it didn't have the

intensity I was expecting. Both sides had lost just one game all season, with Reading's only defeat coming against this afternoon's opponents. But having won all their home games to date, that record was never in danger of coming to an end today. Although only 1-0 Wargrave never looked like getting a result from the match in spite of having a fair dollop of possession. Chairs were available throughout the ground for the elderly to enjoy the game without the stress of having to stand up. Much celebration from the homesters at the end, as you would expect. A diversion was watching a Stoat who having just murdered a rabbit spent the afternoon tucking into its entrails. All very disgusting, but not sufficiently so to spoil my burger.

contributed on 25/06/21

TT No.79: Brian Buck - Saturday 19th June 2021; **Notley** v Harold Wood Athletic 'A'; County Motor Works Vauxhall Mid-Essex League Division 1; Venue: played at Four Releet Sports Ground, Church Street, Bocking Churchstreet; Result: 1-3; Attendance: 15 approx. (which initially included one fox!)

I picked out this match, because not only did it have something on it, but also in the hope that it wouldn't be infested by Groundhoppers, purely for personal COVID reasons, I might add.

The ground can be found in a small village, just north of Braintree, on the Halstead Road. After a long spell of hot weather ended by a couple of days of wet weather, especially on the previous day, it was back on with the coats today for most of those not playing or reffing.

Notley would finish second if they won today, with the visitors having already won the league. In this busy Sport Centre, there was also hockey taking place, but I didn't care much for the garish blue artificial surface on which their game was played, or that of their ref, who's whistle blowing sometimes interrupted that of the ref in 'our' game.

As for the match, Wood certainly didn't treat it as an end of the season encounter and I wondered if their side contained first team players, given how well they played. Their number 9 certainly raised my eyebrows after he scored their opening two goals, on 16 and 24 minutes. His first touch was sublime as he latched on the through balls before slotting home from the edge of the area on both occasions. For a side going for second spot, Notley were poor in the first half, when they mustered just one shot and didn't get into the match at all. But at the break they may have been given a quiet Bow Locking and they played much better in the second half and the goal they pulled back on 49 minutes was deserved. This goal seemed to gee up Wood, and the encounter became more physical, leading to some bookings. Gradually Notley waned a little, but this was not the only reason their quest for an equaliser faded. Late in the game it seemed that a tackle was worthy of a spot kick for them. But the ref played on. Then on 86 minutes the ref gave Wood a dodgy spot kick instead and our friend, the number 9, stepped up to oblige. Overall a decent game, in which both sides worked hard.

contributed on 25/06/21

TT No.78: *Keith Aslan* - Saturday 19th June 2021; **ROCHESTER UNITED** v Punjab United; Gravesham-Medway-Swale post-lockdown tournament; Kick Off: 15.00; Result: 2-0; Admission: £1 for old people; Programme: £1.50p; Attendance: 142 (124 home, 10 away & 8 neutral).

This post-lockdown tournament for the cream of Medway football has proved to be a big success with crowds of over 600 at Chatham and Sheppey but not quite so many at today's match. Well organised, some competitive football was much appreciated by the participants although this match was very much a deceased rubber with the final being played on Tuesday and neither of these teams will be participating. Prices were fixed at a fiver for all games everywhere and a paltry £1 for people, such as myself. While Sheppey, Chatham and Punjab aren't issuing, and Lordswood producing a very good tournament brochure, the only team doing a programme for every game is Rochester so it would be churlish not to reward them with a re-visit.

Long time ago since I was here, back then they went by the wonderful name of Bly Spartans (they actually play in a place called Bly). A disappointingly prosaic title these days but they still call themselves 'The Spartans'. My recollection of the journey was no buses and a long walk up a hill to get to the ground. Same today except the hill is now much steeper. Did get the opportunity to tick off the new Rochester Station which is about 100 yards up the line from the old one. A few noticeable improvements inside the ground most eye catching of which is the new stand. No 'Atcost' stuff here, this one is held up with scaffolding giving spectators the added excitement on a windy day of wondering if the roof is going to fall off.

As for providing a footballing 'experience' Rochester can't be faulted. Good programme, good grub, friendly people, and unlike York last week, nobody persecuting you to wear a face mask. No stupid 'respect' fist pumps or 'taking the knee' just an hour and 35 minutes of honest endeavour on the field. Sitting in the stand with a chilly wind blowing in your face and intermittent drizzle is what summer football is all about. And the admission? £1! What can you get for that these days? This was a special price for the elderly. Senility has it's plus points, cheap admission to football and a free bus pass (although in my case six years after everybody else). In fact. the only downside to getting old is that my body is falling to pieces.

You would expect Punjab United to be a team of Punjabi's and you'd be wrong. Whilst most of their support was, likewise their manager, the team contained just two. Their manager got somewhat more excited about proceedings than the occasion warranted and was happily slagging off his own players as they went off at the break, somewhat harshly in my opinion as they weren't that bad. Incidentally half-time only lasted 13 minutes, a rarity at this level. The programme was 28 pages of glossy goodness containing a staggering 58 colour photographs. You got a free hot drink with every single one purchased. As the programme cost £1.50p. and a coffee was £2.00, this was never going to be much of a money spinner. I've been to other clubs that have done similar promotions but I'm pretty

sure it doesn't increase programme sales. Just charge more to get in and give it away free. Simple.

I was debating whether to have a Saturday off or go to this game. I'm glad I chose the latter.

contributed on 20/06/21

TT No.77: Craig Dabbs - 19th June 2021; **Henley Town** v Goring United; Thames Valley Premier League Division Two; Venue: The Triangle Ground; Result: 1-1; Goal Log: 1-0(23) & 1-1(37); Admission: None; Programme: 8pp, £1; Attendance: 157.

Deep into June and still going after a week's break last week. A re-visit to Henley-on-Thames was yesterday's match and I think the first visit to a proper enclosed ground with all the various fixtures and fittings since December too.

I last visited The Triangle Ground back in 2002 for a Hellenic League Premier Division game against Shortwood United. Henley have since suffered a large fall down the pyramid and now play at nominal step nine although the draw they gained against Goring United sealed the title and promotion. So the climb back up continues after starting back out in 18/19 in Division Three following their resignation from the Hellenic League in 2017.

The club have played at the Triangle Ground since the mid-seventies, situated between the railway line and the river it's reached by a narrow lane over a weak bridge that only one car is allowed over at a time, and you can't see it until your right on top of it. However once there and parked up in the only free car park in town it's a pleasant enough place to watch a game.

The pitch is fully railed with a white plastic fence, cover is provided at the car park end behind the one goal with a kit stand and a small, seated kit stand is situated on the railway side of the ground which is also where you find a good-sized clubhouse.

The club advertised the game earlier in the week as a big six pointer that could decide the title and also had a fund raiser for the Thames Air Ambulance. So with all that in mind I contacted the club and talked them into doing a programme which in turn attracted a few extra and it was pleasing to see they were flying out of the box yesterday making the club a few quid for the charity.

All in all, a good day out and a nice catch up with so many people I haven't seen for a good while. One more to go for this season then no break at all and straight into the pre-season friendlies.

contributed on 20/06/21

TT No.76: Brian Buck - Saturday 12th June 2021; **Marlow United** v Berks County; Thames Valley Premier League Premier Division; Venue: played at Gossmore Lane Playing Fields, Marlow; Result: 1-3; Attendance: 45 approx.

Today I had two matches lined up, fairly close together, just in case one was off when I got there. But I needn't have worried, because my first-choice match went ahead at the stated 2pm kick off time, without any hitches. Indeed, I received a text back from the home secretary confirming the game while I was about to ask the visiting secretary the same question.

I travelled to the game by car, mainly via the M25 and M40 and although both were busy, I was not unduly delayed. I arrived at the ground early enough to have a look at the surroundings and got one of the few remaining spaces in the car park. The locals don't like you parking near their houses around here and I heard that one lady complained that a loose ball had gone into her garden. I suspected that she reacted as though it was a World War 2 mine! A similar fate fell upon me when I last visit Marlow for a game on 12th September 1985 when a message came over the tannoy to move my car, even though I had legally parked it, although I think that the 'Hyacinth Bucket complainer' might not have liked my old rust heap parked outside her house!

Anyway, on this increasingly warm day, despite the occasional respite of some cloud, I stayed in the car until just before kick-off, not realising that this ground was adjacent to the River Thames, which was a pity as had I known this then I would have gone and had a look. But this was a haven for people who liked canoeing and they could be seen carting them down to the river at times throughout the afternoon.

I did walk round the pitch before the start though and here I saw two people entering into the spirit of the afternoon as well. They were canoodling in some long grass! The game had something on it as Berks County needed to win it to continue their chances of winning the league. We had three match officials, which is standard for this division and with his black headscarf the ref looked a bit like a cross between a gypsy and Bill Bailey.

The match was fairly even for a while, but then on 22 minutes Marlow took the lead when the ball was clipped over the keeper's head from a narrow angle. Then on 34 minutes a header from a corner saw County increase their lead. Soon we had a brief handbags moment and then Marlow quickly faded for the rest of the half. The second period saw County ease off a bit, despite scoring again on 56 minutes and Marlow have more ball time, which led to them pulling a goal back on 64 minutes. Then ten minutes later a Marlow player was lucky not to be sent off as he hacked down a player bearing down on goal, but he was just booked. Not so lucky though was his keeper who had kicked a loose ball at a County' player while this was going on and he was sent off instead. Then, despite being a man down, Marlow played well for the remainder of the game as County conserved their energy for another day. Overall, not a bad game, but the heat got to me a bit!

contributed on 17/06/21

TT No.75: Keith Aslan - Saturday 12th June 2021; F1 RACING v YORK LEAGUE SELECT @ The LNER Community Stadium - York City FC; Representative match; Kick Off: 12.02; Result 1-3; Admission: £7.50p; Programme: £2; Attendance:

around 200 (a couple of dozen F1 fans and the rest were people waiting for the next match and groundhoppers).

The LNER Community Stadium is a piece of the proverbial to get to. Non-stop trains from London to York and a door-to-door bus service (no. 9) every 10 minutes from the station. The buses were electric which should please Greta when she comes to tick the ground off. First port of call on arrival was the nearby 'York against Cancer' tent to pick up my programme and match ticket. As befits my status, my ticket was top of the pile, although having a surname beginning with 'A' might have had something to do with it. I got talking to internet sensation Nicola whose been getting lots of rave reviews due to her helpfulness. She seemed a bit embarrassed by it all. This was York League Finals Day in aid of York Against Cancer and the whole thing was superbly organized. The 32-page colour programme deserves to win awards, and everything was set fair for an excellent afternoon of sport until I came up against the Yorkshire Branch of the Gestapo who were masquerading as stewards.

Not having eaten, the plan was to watch a bit of the first game, go and stuff my face in the surrounding retail park then come back and watch all of the second match. Once inside the ground I was gleefully told by one of the 'black-shirts' that under no circumstances would I be allowed to leave to get some food, well I could but I wouldn't be allowed back into the ground. When I said I hadn't eaten that day I was told the refreshment kiosk was open which indeed it was, serving poor quality fayre at prices that would only find favour with a lottery winner. Can't let you out, Covid regulations. Of course, it is. Masks - must wear them. No, you mustn't. These things wind me up and to try and insist a couple of hundred people in the open air dotted about the 8,500-capacity stadium need to cover their face with a piece of cloth for safety reasons is just ludicrous. A large number of us refused point blank and eventually the Gestapo realised they were on to a loser and stopped threatening people. Not so 'Tannoy Man' who broadcast a warning every 15 minutes of the dire consequences of non-compliance including one threat that the game would be abandoned if people didn't put on facemasks. Was this person on drugs? Quite correctly we ignored him. Anybody thinking of going to North Korea, just save your money because you can get the full Kim Jong-Un experience with a visit to York City.

As I was now imprisoned in the ground, I settled back to watch the first match which was not my original intention. A fair game, but too many substitutions and breaks in play for drinks for my liking. 0-0 at half time. F1 weren't at the races in the second half. Can't suss why they are called F1 Racing as they began life in 1993 as a railway works team and there is a picture of a train on their badge. The ground was just what you'd expect from an eight and a half thousand capacity all-seater stadium. Don't expect York City FC will be testing the capacity any time soon. One complaint is the random painting of the seats in red, blue, yellow and white. There is no discernible pattern to this, and it all looks a bit of a mess. Otherwise, the grounds' o.k.

At the end of the game, I had a straight choice of watching the second game and starving or missing it and eating. I chose the latter. As I was reminded by the

Gestapo when I left, they weren't going to let me back. As I still had my ticket I could probably have got in if I'd put a facemask on as they wouldn't recognise me, but I'd spent enough of my day confronting idiots, so I got the bus into York for some welcome face filling. On a final point, the seat I'd been allocated and was supposed to sit in, was next to a complete stranger who had a ticket for the adjacent seat. Hot on facemasks but not so good on social distancing eh!

Can't complain about the trains today. It was a real pleasure to travel and it just shows how good the railways can be when they behave themselves.

contributed on 13/06/21

TT No.74: Brian Buck - Wednesday 9th June 2021; **Shelford & Stapleford Strikers** v Over Sports Colts; Cambridge & District Colts League Division U16A; Venue played at Cambridge Football Stadium, Trumpington Road, Cambridge; Result: 3-3; Attendance: 90 approx.

For the benefit of people who have never been to this delightful ground let me tell you that in addition to the wooden changing rooms on one side of the pitch, complete with veranda, on the other side of the pitch are two wooden stands, separated by wooden dugouts. After a similar venture in Kings Hedges Road, Cambridge seemed to flounder, the current ground was originally built, some years ago now, by three of the local leagues, including the Cambridge & District Colts League, mainly so they could play their cup finals here, rather than keep paying exorbitant ground hire fees to the local senior clubs.

Tonight, the league title was at stake in that if Over Sports Colts FC won this match then they would win the league. Any other result meant that with their games in hand, Shelford could still win it. In a good old-fashioned game, where generally the players just got on with it. Over took the lead when their bearded player (at U16 Level!) lifted the ball over the keeper from a narrow angle. On 19 minutes it seemed that Shelford had equalised, but the Over lino insisted it was offside and so the goal was not given. But on 29 minutes a well hit 35-yarder did see Shelford level. Then on 40 minutes a hit and hope unstoppable effort saw Over regain the lead. However, on 46 minutes (in this 40-minutes each way game), the ball was slid home to make it 2-2. On 50 minutes the same powerfully built player fought off some challenges to make it 3-2 to Shelford. Cue for the parents, one in particular, to step in. "*Slow the game down.*" he shouted out, amongst other things and the players did what he told them and suddenly the real manager's position, on the other side of the pitch, was superfluous. Clearly the hosts wanted to go for the jugular, but instead the change in tactics saw Over equalise on 68 minutes. So, Shelford could have won this game had it not been for an un-divine intervention. Still, by the end and despite this, the league title remained Shelford's to lose!

contributed on 10/06/21

TT No.73: Brian Buck - Saturday 5th June 2021; **Coventrians** v Knowle; Post COVID Lockdown Coventry Charity Cup Semi Final; Result: 0-0 (Coventrians won 5-3 on penalties); Attendance: 125 approx.

With Potton United having to make a few UCL trips to the Coventry area in the forthcoming season, I was keen to find out how long it would take me to get there. Well, after joining the A14 from the Godmanchester turning, I did it in about 100 minutes from my home. On my arrival at the ground, parking was initially limited, as rather like with what is going on at Arlesey Town, new houses are in the process of being built on what was part of the car park, but parking was allowed on the grass behind the clubhouse here today.

I soon found that I knew just two people here. One was a groundhopper and the other was the lively secretary of Coventrians, whom I'd previously met at a Coventry & District Churches League match back in September 2018. She and I agree exactly on how football clubs should be run, and her enthusiasm is almost overwhelming. 'Her' club caters for all players of various abilities, and she was delighted to tell me that they will have a disability side in the forthcoming season. Today I thought that two of her brothers were playing, but they turned out to be her sons.

Before the start I was able to purchase a can of cider and a cheese roll and it was while I was devouring them, a pleasant surprise came when a four-page programme, prepared by a third party, suddenly arrived. But you had to be in the right place at the right time to get one, or even know about it. Then I moved to the pitch, railed off on two and a half sides, and found a box to sit on, which gave me a largely uninterrupted view of proceedings. In the first half of the match Knowle started off well, but the hosts gradually got into the game and in patches they became the better side. But in truth goal scoring chances were virtually non-existent and the possibility of a nil-nil draw was already playing on my mind. The second half of what had become a quite watchable game, was fairly even. But Coventrians missed two good chances to win it. Firstly, when the keeper palmed a powerful shot onto an upright and secondly, a few minutes later when a close-range cross just evaded an unmarked striker who was just a few yards from goal. No extra time and onto spot kicks where the hosts prevailed. I left the ground, happy that on this warm and sunny afternoon I had ticked off a new, for me, Midland League venue, once known as Coventry Colliery.

contributed on 10/06/21

TT No.72: Jon T Green - Saturday 29th May 2021; **WATLINGTON SPORTS AND SOCIAL CLUB** v. Docking Rangers; Norfolk Primary Cup - Quarter-Final; Venue: Recreation Ground; Result: 4-2; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 41.

After a couple of weeks of being out and about around the country, it was back to domestic Norfolk County Cup action on Saturday as Watlington Sports and Social took on Docking Rangers for a place in the Primary Cup semi-final. The previous round had seen the home side destroy AFC Lynn Napier Reserves 14-0 whilst

Rangers had won 7-6 on pens after a goalless 90 minutes against Horning. When the sides had met in September, Watlington had run out 3-2 winners and they had occupied the top two positions in Division Two of the North-West Norfolk League when the season was abandoned.

Watlington lies on the King's Lynn to King's Cross rail route and, with the line also passing through Ely and Cambridge, there is great access from both the South-East and the Midlands. It's an easy walk from the station through the village past The Angel pub. There is a narrow footpath (look for the old water pump) which has a secret entrance feel to the sports club - two pitches here; the one being used today behind the Village Hall and, across the car park, a training one with the impressive backdrop of St. Peter and St. Paul's church.

Not to be confused with the Oxfordshire town of Watlington, the weather today certainly made this afternoon. A real rural middle-of-nowhere quietness; if you are after an 'away from it all' time with the addition of gentle lanes to wander along, here fits the bill.

What had looked a competitive game on paper didn't really turn out that way as Watlington dominated from the off. The skilful Jake Fenn and Lewis Hewitt were creating plenty of chances with the latter having two good attempts before he beat Rangers' 'keeper James Havers with an absolute peach of a left foot curler after 20 minutes. Just as well that Hewitt was having a good game because wearing one black and one silver boot is asking for ridicule. Docking were struggling to make any forward advances but almost drew level when Matt Skene struck a hopeful shot from the half-way line after a poor clearance from James Dougal had left him way out of his goal. Despite their dominance, Hewitt had struck the bar from a full twenty yards, Watlington's defence at set pieces looked a little suspect and, in first half added time, Daniel Cook was left unmarked at the back post only to steer his header wide.

The first ten minutes after the re-start ended the game as a contest as Joe Causton crashed in another long-range effort via the bar before that man Hewitt found a bit of space and netted from an acute angle. Rangers did pull a goal back as Ricky Ramshaw was left with the easiest of headers after a right-wing corner. Any thoughts of a comeback on an energy sapping hot afternoon were soon dismissed though as Jack Thompson slide home a low centre from Dan Harpley. With time about to expire, Docking scored again and once more it was a free header as captain Skene finished off Tom Hawkins' cross.

In the draw for the semi-final Watlington have been paired against North Walsham Town Reserves where, despite their obvious attacking prowess they will need to be a little more vigilant at the back if they are to make it all the way to the Final.

contributed on 09/06/21

TT No.71: Craig Dabbs - Saturday 5th June 2021; **Newbury** v Westwood Wanderers; Thames Valley Premier League Premier Division; Venue: Ecchinswell Village Hall; Result: 2-2; Goal Log: 0-1(53pen); 1-1(71); 2-1(77pen) & 2-2(85); Admission: None; Programme: N/A; Attendance: 23.

Sadly, non-league football is littered with clubs who are or have had problems and Newbury fits into that category.

Newbury Town was the original version of the club who played for a number of years in the Hellenic League and prior to folding in 1995 the Isthmian League. The following year AFC Newbury was set up as a replacement ensuring football continued at Faraday Road. The new club was an amalgamation of three clubs, Shaw Boys & Belles juniors, the Wickham U17 Youth Team and a certain Ecchinswell who were playing in the Hampshire League at the time and essentially it was Ecchinswell who became the new Newbury's first team with AFC Newbury starting life in the Hampshire League and then quickly moving onto the Wessex League. AFC Newbury suffered the same fate as Newbury Town folding in 2006/07 during the course of that season.

2007/08 saw a new Newbury emerge when local side OLA Newbury changed their name, after one season in the Reading Senior League they gained promotion to the Hellenic League and for once it looked like things might settle down then in June 2018 West Berkshire Council kicked the football club out of Faraday Road after 55 years of playing there and the club stepped down from the Hellenic League to join the Thames Valley Premier League playing out of Henwick Worthy Sports Ground in nearby Thatcham.

So, on to today then. It emerged yesterday there were problems surrounding pitch availability and late yesterday evening it was decided to relocate today's game to the club's former home in the village of Ecchinswell which is no longer used on a Saturday.

So, I found myself navigating through some narrow lanes in Hampshire wondering where on earth I was going until I found myself at a charming little venue at the back of the village hall that has two pitches running aside one another and a hall which has a viewing balcony that kept me in the shade and offered an excellent vantage point for the game.

The game was in truth pretty awful in the first half, Newbury were the better side but couldn't finish. The second half was much more entertaining, Westwood got a penalty, made good of it and this livened proceedings up no end, I always fancied Newbury would respond and go on to win it however Westwood had other ideas and fought hard for the point in this dead rubber match.

Newbury are at home again next week. I do hope they are back at Henwick Worthy so I can catch them there before they move on again to the Rugby ground.

contributed on 06/06/21

TT No.70: Keith Aslan - Saturday 5th June 2021; **MAIDENHEAD TOWN** v Berks County; Thames Valley League Premier; Kick Off: 14.17; Result: 3 -1; Admission & Pirate Programme: Free; Attendance: 41 (30 home, 4 away & 7 neutral)

Bisham Abbey is a half hour(ish) walk from Marlow station. It's a part of the country that oozes money, the houses that line the Thames are for the very rich and on a hot day like today look idyllic, probably not quite so idyllic when they flood after heavy rain. Today's influx of groundhoppers must have brought the average wealth index down a bit. Bisham Abbey is where the England football team used to train before the St. George complex was built. I've not been there myself but those who have are very impressed. My gripe with it is it cost a lot of money that could be better spent elsewhere. I doubt the facilities are any better than Bisham Abbey's, there's just more of them. And it's in the north of England! Rugby, tennis, athletics and hockey's national teams still use Bisham as their base and today it was filled with fit young men pursuing their sport at the highest level. Such sporting endeavours were of little interest to the gaggle of senescent groundhoppers, but the building that welcomed you in with the sign 'Eat, drink and relax' was. All three activities are right up my street.

Maidenhead Town have somehow managed to bag this as their home ground, I can't imagine it's cheap to hire. There are two grass pitches and one plastic. There was a game going on the middle pitch with the players for the main event warming up on the adjacent one. Come kick off time nothing happened. It transpired that the match was to take place on the pitch which was already occupied, and we all had to wait for it to become available. Nobody could quite work out why, as the other pitch remained empty all afternoon and was identical. Still, what's a 17 minute late kick off these days? You could stand alongside the pitch, but I chose a vantage point behind the wooden fence that offered shade from the remorseless sun. Remorseless it might have been, but the game managed to take place without any 'water breaks'. Don't know how they did it, but nobody suffered any thirst related incapacities in spite of not tipping water down their throats every few minutes. Berks County were the dominant team throughout with Maidenhead's consolation goal late doors being of no consequence. The County's stand out player was, putting it kindly, a bit of a porker. A centre half, he took all their free kicks and corners, and scored one out of the two penalties he took. He buzzed about all over the field when to look at him you wouldn't think he could move very much at all. Looks can be deceptive, although not necessarily in my case. Berks County are still in with a chance of the league which is soldiering on until the end of the month although some teams have long given up the ghost.

Summer football, I love it.

contributed on 06/06/21

TT No.69: Brian Buck - Saturday 29th May 2021. Fitzwilliam College v Homerton College; **Cambridge University Cuppers Cup Final**; Kick-Off: 6pm; Result: 2-1; Attendance: 350 approx.

The previous game finished just after 4.25pm, even with spot kicks. My car sat nav indicated that I could get to my second game with some fifteen minutes in hand and so I went for it, not sparing the horses. The only problem I really had was when I got into Cambridge, where I encountered a series of roads closed for roadworks, but I still got there well before kick-off. Having said that, when I walked into the Fitzwilliam College Sports Ground, all I could see initially was a

cricket match in progress. But once inside I saw the players warming up on the smaller side pitch.

In the past these finals have always been played at the Cambridge University Rugby Club in Grange Road and I suspect that this one was shifted here for COVID reasons, although spectators seemed to bring their own drink with them. Soon I bumped into a couple of people who report for the Universities *Varsity Magazine* and soon they provided me with the line ups, for which I was very grateful.

Meanwhile the crowd was continually arriving during the game, with the noisy Fitzwilliam fans occupying the slightly raised banking on the far side of the ground. I walked around the ground, trying to find a space somewhere away from the fans and out of the sun and as I did so a loose dipping ball came towards me from the game, which I nearly managed to trap perfectly, in front of the approving Fitzwilliam subs, sitting nearby. I told them "Let me know if you can do this at the age of 69!"

The game was played out on a near perfect pitch and like the previous match it was keenly contested, with the only difference being that here the quality was much better, and the young ref had little trouble in controlling the players. But goals were hard to come by and we had to wait until the 70th minute when a thunderbolt from the edge of the area saw Homerton take the lead. But within a minute Fitzwilliam were level. These goals saw both sides now going the extra mile, as both had been tiring. But five minutes later it was Fitzwilliam who grabbed the winner when the scorer ran on to finish well. There were scenes of mass jubilation at the final whistle as the victors were mobbed by their adoring fans.

But my weekend wasn't quite over as on the following night Talking Pictures showed *Bachelor of Hearts*, a 1958 comedy film showing what University life was like then. As I lived in Cambridge at the time, memories of my life as a kid came flooding back as I recalled many of the outdoor locations as they were then. I also discovered that University life is much the same today as it was then, only a bit different!

contributed on 31/05/21

TT No.68: *Brian Buck* - Saturday 29th May 2021; **Yaxham** v Upwell Town; Norfolk Primary Cup Quarter Final; Kick-Off: 2.30pm; Result: 1-1 (Upwell Town won 4-1 on penalties); Attendance: 75 approx.

Yaxham can be found a mile or so to the south of East Dereham and according to one chap I spoke to it is served by a bus directly from Norwich. Because there was a traffic jam on the A14, I elected to take the Ely, Downham Market, Swaffham route, rather than attacking it via Thetford & Watton, which seemed to work quite well, even if it took me a few minutes longer to get there.

I arrived at the village hall, opened in 1980, about 40 minutes before kick-off and I passed most of the time waiting for the game to start by either staying in the car

or talking to the John Bond lookalike ref. On a normal day I could have sat in the bar, but due to COVID restrictions, all drinks had to be ordered and sipped outdoors. There was plenty of support here for both sides on this pleasant, mainly sunny afternoon. The pitch took up most of the recreation ground and a decent game ensued.

Both sides were well up for it and in the early stages it seemed like it was going to be just one loose tackle from a punch up. But the experienced ref kept a lid on things and in the end only booked one player and that was near the end of the match. The other thing that helped take the sting out of things was that the teams kept complaining about the state of the ball, seemingly being uncertain as to if it was too hard or too soft.

Yaxham were generally the better side in the first period, especially after they took the lead on 37 minutes when the scorer benefitted from intercepting a loose ball before running on to score. Then in the early stages of the second half they created and missed chances to finish off the game. They didn't take advantage of the injured Upwell keeper who insisted that he played on. Gradually Upwell worked their way back into it, but without dominating as Yaxham seemed to run out of ideas. Then, on 64 minutes they equalised, by way of a header from a corner. As we neared the end both teams seemed to tire. I blame this on the number of daisies on the pitch, as in seven daisies make one weak! No extra time, so onto spot kicks and here Upwell easily prevailed with their injured keeper having the defining shot.

contributed on 31/05/21

TT No.67: Craig Dabbs - Saturday 29th May 2021; **Epping Town** v Corinthians; Essex Olympian League Division Two; Venue: Upland Road; Result: 7-0; Goal Log: 1-0(37); 2-0(40); 3-0(56); 4-0(73); 5-0(78); 6-0(81) & 7-0(87). Programme: 10pp, £1.00; Admission: £0.00; Attendance: 59.

Back in Essex this week for another match in the Essex Olympian League. This time around it was to visit Epping Town's new home at Upland Road home of Epping & Upper Clapton Rugby Club.

Epping Town were formed in 1948 as Coopersale, playing in the village moving to Stonards Hill in Epping in 1972. There was a club called Epping Town at that time playing on the main pitch at Stonards Hill and upon their demise in 1985 the club took over the main pitch and eventually changed their name to Epping in 1999 to identify more with the town adding Town to the name as recently as 2018.

Stonards Hill is council owned and Epping Town were this season evicted owing to a dispute between the two parties. Subsequently the club needed a home fast and the Rugby club just outside the town in the village of Thornwood came to the rescue.

Epping Town now have the third pitch furthest away from the pavilion at Upland Road, it currently runs very close to the touchline of the second Rugby pitch so the

plans are to move it a bit further away for next season which isn't a big job at all just remarking as currently it's just that, a pitch although having said that they do take the time to fully rope it which is something they don't need to do at nominal step 9 of the pyramid.

What the clubs long term future is who knows, will they return to Stonards Hill? Will they stay and perhaps develop what the Rugby club have given them to play on? What I do know is they have a bit of support and a very enthusiastic band of volunteers and that's the foundation right there of a club that will rebuild itself over time.

Last week I saw Melbourne at Ripley, the famous Melbourne being the one in Australia of course and this week it's Corinthians of Essex not Brazil who were the visitors. The 7-0 score-line pointed very much to the Essex version and not the Brazilian one also. To be fair though despite the hammering inflicted on Corinthians they weren't as bad as the score suggests. Early exchanges were very even, I would say Corinthians were actually the better side then on 13 minutes it all stopped for around one hour after a challenge on the Epping player manager Stuart Hoskins left him prone and waiting for an ambulance which arrived after about 30 minutes, it took nearly as long for the player to be transported to the ambulance and the pitch to be cleared before we resumed and after the restart Corinthians started to struggle a little and Epping got the upper hand and scored at will or at least in the second half they did with the visitors tiring.

So that was that. A very enjoyable day out in the sunshine (can't remember the last time I typed that word) a little late home but, hey ho, I just hope the manager is up and around soon.

contributed on 30/05/21

TT No.66: Keith Aslan - Saturday 29th May 2021; **Arthur Dunn Cup Final** - Old Foresters v Old Salopians @ Merchant Taylors School; Kick Off: 14.42; Result: 4-2 to Old Foresters. Admission: Free; Programme: £5; Attendance: 104 (45 OF, 20 OS & 39 neutral).

The Arthur Dunn Cup has a rich history and in its hey-day was second only to the Amateur Cup. Arthur was an FA cup winner with Old Etonians in 1882 and in 1902 he was among a group of dignitaries making plans for a new knockout competition for AFA clubs. When he died suddenly at the age of 42 the cup was named after him and in 1903 one of today's teams, Old Salopians, became the first winners. The finals have been played at some cracking venues from a ground hoppers point of view. Not being as old as I look, I missed out on Hurlingham Park and Queens Club, but saw a final around 15 years back at Teddington, the only football match to be played at the ground, while the last four finals have taken place at Merchant Taylors School. The Cup is a wonderful footballing anachronism, substitutions weren't allowed until 1997, and most bizarrely the players call the referee 'sir'. But its most amazing feature is that in its entire 119 year history the cup has only ever been presented by three people. Arthur Dunn's wife, his daughter and, these days, his grand-daughter. Doing the maths as to when he died, I would suggest that his grand-daughter must be on the same stuff as Cliff Richard.

Merchant Taylors is a school, but not as most people would recognise one. Four cricket pitches, including one where Middlesex sometimes play, five football pitches (today's game took place on the one surrounded by the athletics track), a rugby pitch with a small stand, tennis courts and a number of 5 a side football/hockey pitches, one of which had covered spectator accommodation. There was also a signpost that enigmatically pointed to the 'Watersports area' but I was disappointed to discover it didn't mean what I thought it did. A large clubhouse was doing a roaring trade with the play off final on a big screen. I'd have loved to go to a school like this as long as they didn't expect me to do any studying.

Moor Park tube station is an 11-minute walk away, on paper an easy trip for me, but being a bank holiday there was more chance of Martin Bashir doing a rendition of 'Candle in the Wind' than there was of a stress-free journey. The fast line to London was shut for starters, who would possibly want to visit the seaside on a bank holiday? And when I arrived in the city, the Metropolitan Line was part suspended and the part that was running wasn't running to any sort of timetable with the drivers constantly apologising for the chaos, they seemed as fed up as the 'customers'. How all the football fans on board chuckled when our train sailed through Wembley Park without stopping as it had gone in on the wrong line and the platform wasn't open.

The match kicked off 12 minutes late simply because the referee didn't care. You'd have thought he could have made a bit of an effort as it was a cup final but reading his biography in the programme he used to referee in the Isthmian League, so that explains it. This was a game of the proverbial two halves, Foresters 3-0 up at the break with the opposition hardly getting a look in. Something must have been in the half time oranges and the team from Salopia were unrecognizable in the second 48 minutes. They pulled it back to 3-2 and everybody was expecting at least extra time but with 10 minutes left and completely against the run of play Foresters got a fourth with a dinky lob which ensured they get to hire the open top bus.

Long may this competition continue.

contributed on 26/05/21

TT No.65: Brian Buck - Tuesday 25th May 2021; **Allenburys Sports** v Westmill; Hertford & District ORC Sports League Premier Division; Venue: played at Westmill; Result: 0-2; Attendance: 35 approx.

I assumed that this game was switched to the 'visitors' ground because of cricket, which was good for me as it gave me a chance to revisit possibly the most scenic ground in Hertfordshire. It is tree lined on all four sides and even had the crystal-clear River Rib running the length of the pitch. With there not being a house in sight, just a few bleating sheep, there was an unusual echo around the ground as the evening unfolded. My only other visit here occurred on Thursday 22nd April 1999 when, in a powerful match, the hosts lost the game 4-0 and the league title

to visitors Bengo Trinity in a McMullen Hertford & District League Premier Division match (att. 130 approx).

Tonight, victory for Westmill would see them win the league. Looking at the league table an easy win for them was forecast, especially as Allenburys had not been able to get a team out for a couple of games and had been soundly beaten in some of them they did play. But tonight, you wouldn't have known this as Allenburys did their best to thwart Westmill.

After they made a good start Westmill came into it and dominated, taking the lead on 14 minutes with a shot from about 15 yards which went under the keeper. The second half was far more even and for a while there was every chance that Allenburys might equalise. By now I had started chatting up two sisters who had been following the club for over 50 years. Even at my age I can still pull! They accused the Allenburys' keeper of being a "bloomin' nuisance" because he was pulling off so many good saves. Then my new-found relationship cooled when I discovered that the ladies have also been Woolwich Nomads season ticket holders for 50 years! By now the game was getting a bit niggly and after another foul a Westmill fan told the ref that he hadn't seen the perpetrator kick the ball all evening! Eventually and with a modicum of late pressure Westmill got the defining goal they needed to win the league on 85 minutes and Allenburys accepted the outcome graciously.

contributed on 26/05/21

TT No.64: Brian Buck - Saturday 22nd May 2021; **Albury v Sheering**; Hertford & District ORC Sports League Division 1; Result: 4-4; Attendance: 15 approx.

With the remnants of the overnight rain still in my mind, I decided to stay fairly local today, but it was only while I was out with my wife on the morning of the game, I realised that I might have a problem. This arose when I came to check out the match and was told that the kick-off had been brought forward by an hour to 2pm. My good lady was pretty good about this and, after taking her home first, I then set off for the game with the sat nav telling me that I should get there on time.

But what it didn't know was that the A120 was due to be closed today for roadworks and so I would have to find my way round the narrow, often single-track roads, with passing places, via Buntingford and Furneux Pelham, to get there. Some of these roads were partially flooded and when at one point a car came towards me, I don't know how we didn't collide on this very narrow section of the road. But the driver of that car tried to pass me and succeeded after I just managed to squeeze slowly out of his way.

Eventually I arrived at the ground, just as they were supposed to be kicking off, but the sides were still warming up. The entrance was a bit difficult to find. Then another car appeared, and it was the ref. He told me that he'd been given the wrong postcode for the ground, which was lucky for me, if not for him.

Eventually the game started about ten minutes later. Albury are playing back here now after spending some time at the aforementioned Furneux Pelham, while their changing rooms were rebuilt, after either a fire or vandalism, perhaps both. The ground has seen better days but still has character. The pitch is railed off down one side with some broken brick dugouts halfway along. Behind this is what was once the cricket ground, but it's no longer used and has the appearance of an overgrown field at present. However, the club hope to move on to it in due course as it drains better.

The game was a good one although at one point the ref had to speak to the visitors' bench about their language. But I came to the conclusion that this was how they spoke normally and that they didn't realise that they were doing this. Also, there were no home fans to show them how to speak proper! For a long while it seemed that no goals would be scored, but on 42 minutes Albury did open the scoring, before unbeaten in the league Sheering equalised on the stroke of half time. On 48 minutes Albury regained the lead through Branston. He was to score all their goals today and often had the already won the league Sheering in a pickle! On 50 minutes Sheering equalised but with goals on 61 and 68 minutes, Albury went into what seemed to be an uncatchable lead against a tiring Sheering side. Then I found out why this ground is called the Labour-in-Vain ground as on 86 and 90(+3) minutes Albury threw it away, thus allowing Sheering to save their unbeaten record by snatching a draw. Then to cap a decent day out I was told that the roadworks on the A120 this weekend had been cancelled due to expected bad weather, so my getting home journey was easier.

contributed on 26/05/21

TT No.63: Jon T Green - Saturday 22nd May 2021; **BRERETON SOCIAL** v. Wolstanton United; Staffordshire County Senior League - Premier Division; Venue: The Red Lion Ground, Armitage Lane; Result: 1-2; Admission: £2; Programme: No; Attendance: 40 approx.

When I was a small boy, my Dad took me to Carrow Road. On the way to the ground, we would walk past the railway station and its web of busy sidings - the river flowing on our right and the engineering yards of Boulton and Paul on our left. There were gantry cranes, old locomotives and a cavernous black shed from inside of which you could just make out the flicker of welding torches. For me, football and industry have always been interwoven so, discovering Brereton Social play in the shadow of Rugeley Power Station, a trip to Staffordshire was always going to be firmly on the cards.

There was a hitch - the power station's cooling towers are due for demolition (dramatic) or slow dismantling (less so) in early June and with The Red Lion Ground being private property, therefore off limits for the past few weeks, it all came down to Saturday's last home match of the season.

Luckily everything lined up so by 11:30am breakfast had been served in a great little café nearby. After nearly six months of waiting, you can only imagine just how marvellous a very Full English tasted washed down with a big steaming hot mug of tea. Surely this is how every match day should start, pure bliss.

Brereton's home is well developed for a team at this level - a covered stand on the halfway line with six rows of orange seats. The rake is fairly shallow with a floodlight pylon and dugouts rather awkwardly positioned so the view isn't brilliant but, with a bit of judicious manoeuvring, you can see both goals, just. The clubhouse has a covered veranda, although set back a little way, it's not a bad place to watch the game from. There is a raised grass bank at one end (mercifully without one of those "Don't stand here" signs) and behind a hedge on the far touchline another pitch used by the club's junior teams.

Maybe because it was, this game had a real end of season feel to it. Wolstanton sat well above the home side in the table but for large parts of the game there was little to choose between the two teams. Social opened the scoring just past the fifteen-minute mark when the lively Jay Ford beat United's 'keeper Cameron Morris with what appeared to be a slightly deflected left foot shot. Brereton were dominating proceedings with Ollie Bird, busily impressive in midfield, only being foiled by a smart tip over by Morris. As is often the case when a team fails to press home their advantage, the opposition scored and so it proved here; 31 minutes had elapsed when Archie Ellams, looking uncannily like a 1950's footballer (baggy shorts with shirt firmly tucked in) found space down the right wing before unleashing an unstoppable swerving shot into the top corner. Harvey Deebank with a header, Ben Elcock and Ford all went near with early second half chances for Social but once again they fell victim to a counter-attack. A long ball forward was misjudged by the centre-half who only succeeded in back-heading it into the path of Ellams who showed a good deal of composure in lifting it over the on-rushing 'keeper. Bird almost fashioned an equalizer in the last minutes, but Morris proved equal to it diving away to his right to earn Wolstanton all three points.

The following morning saw a return to Brereton and a visit to the nearby Ravenhill Park where the industrial backdrop was even more spectacular. The Stafford and District Sunday League game here a real cracker with Cross Keys Penkridge beating the table-topping home team by the odd goal in five.

contributed on 25/05/21

TT No.62: Keith Aslan - Saturday 22nd May 2021; **GOLCAR UNITED** v Nostell Miners Welfare; Yorkshire Trophy; Kick Off: 15.00; Result: 5-2; Admission: Old person's ticket: £3 (booking fee: 40p, postage: £1.80. Total £5.20p); Programme: £2; Attendance: 418 (398 home, 12 away & 8 neutral).

Not happy trying to buy match tickets over the internet but the simple booking procedure for this one was idiot proof so I just about managed it, a big plus being that Golcar offered to send the tickets out by post should you desire. Not having anywhere to print them off I very much desired the Royal Mail's input and it all went smoothly. Last season this match would have been postponed due to a waterlogged pitch but improvements made to the drainage meant there were no problems this afternoon. Travelled up and back with some fellow hoppers who were going to AFC Wakefield on trains that reservations were compulsory but which very few 'customers' actually had and nobody checked. They're very big on

pointless social distancing on this line and East Coast Trains are going to feel a very great sense of loss and deprivation when things allegedly get back to normal next month. Don't worry boys, lockdown 4 is just around the corner so don't throw all those reservation labels away just yet.

Golcar is three miles outside Huddersfield, plenty of buses from the bus station which has improved beyond all recognition since my last visit. It has retained its most important feature, the cafe, (Roast Beef dinner, £5.50, yum yum), but the makeover has added a brand-new Greggs to the ensemble. The bus fares round here are astronomical, chauffeur driven limousines would be a cheaper travel option, but at least I've got my old folks bus pass now (6 years after everybody else, not that I've made a big deal about it). Outside the railway station is a statue of Huddersfield's most famous son, Harold Wilson. I've met him, and his wife, lovely people. Can't imagine I'd say the same about many of his successors. Didn't see Felix the Huddersfield station cat whose *Facebook* page has over 900,000 followers which says something about social media but I don't quite know what.

Golcar United have risen through the ranks in the past few seasons and are now firmly established in the North West Counties League. A stand along the side, covered terracing behind the goal, floodlights, all the usual stuff describes the ground layout. The refreshments looked pretty good but I just hadn't got room for a seductive looking pie after my mega dinner. They were advertising season tickets at just £30 for oldies, £60 for normal people. You can't complain about the prices up here. The first 47 minutes was a scintillating example of what football at this level can be like with the home side going in at the break 3-2 up, but the second half deteriorated as a spectacle as Golcar ran away with things. The Yorkshire Trophy is pretty big beans in this part of the world as the attendances would suggest. The semi-finals are midweek with the final on the bank holiday weekend. Golcar are already in the semi's but it's all to play for on Monday night between Liversedge and Nostell as to who joins them. Exciting times east of the Pennines.

Arrived home too late to watch the Eurovision Song Contest so a good day all round.

contributed on 23/05/21

TT No.61: Brian Buck - Wednesday 19th May 2021; **Cambridge University Eagles** v Cambridge City Ladies & Girls 3rds; Cambs Women's & Girls County League Women's Premiership Division; Venue: played at Peter Boizot Sports Ground, St Catherine's College, Granchester Road, Cambridge; Result: 2-2; Attendance: 9.

This is a relatively new ground, just next to that of the sports ground of Pembroke College and on the opposite side of the road to where Cambridge Rugby Club is. In addition to the one immaculately prepared football pitch there is a 3G hockey pitch here as well. Parking was easy as most of those present tonight had turned up on their bikes! The hosts pre-match training included playing a combination of netball and basketball.

It wasn't until I got home after the match, that I realised the Eagles are top of this division, a fact which surprised me a bit because the visitors gave them a good run for their money. Indeed, it was they who took the lead on 9 minutes when their burly centre half managed to get a head to a long-range free kick which bounced once before she was able to nod the ball home. Although the hosts gradually worked their way back into the game, in truth, neither side created any goalscoring chances. That was until the 39th minute though when a defensive mix up allowed the hosts to equalise. They then managed a shot and a header before the break. At half time I eyed a dark and threatening rain bearing cloud in the distance, but although there were a couple of claps of thunder, it eventually bypassed us. In this period there was now much more goalmouth activity with most of it coming from the Eagles. But it was City who scored next, via a powerful header from a corner, which seemed harsh on the hosts. But on 87 minutes Eagles did equalise, from about 12 yards out, after being played in. This was the scorer's second goal. The Eagles lino was reluctant to give me her name, mainly because she couldn't spell it. I could see her point. When I got home and looked on the website, I found that she had an eleven-letter surname!

contributed on 20/05/21

TT No.60: *Brian Buck* - Saturday 15th May 2021; **APBS** v AFC Lions Golds; Aylesbury & District League Premier Division; Venue: played at St John's Sports & Social Club, Stone; Result: 1-1; Attendance: 40 approx.

There are two grounds in Stone, both hosting teams in this league, which is one of the few leagues which have decided to complete their full programme this year. Rivets play at the War Memorial Recreation Ground and as I passed it on the way to St John's I noted that their game had already started, despite the stated kick off on the *FA Full Time* being the same as my 'first choice' match. The entrance to the 'Hospital' ground is sign posted, but it is very narrow. However once inside you could park on the grass and there was plenty of space here. St John's Hospital used to play here and they were founder members of the Chiltonian League in the 1984/5 season and played in it until the end of the 1990/91 season when they finished bottom of the league and then folded. The ground used to form part of St John's Mental Hospital, but these days although the sports ground remains, the rest of the site is now covered by housing, save for a church or chapel, which is still there, but it's redundant and boarded up.

Today's match was played on the nearest full-size pitch to the Social Club, which meant that the brick dugouts on the furthest pitch away, weren't used. Overall, there was a pleasant ambiance to the place, with much of the surrounds being tree lined. This was a 2nd v 3rd match and the visitors needed to win it to stay in the title race. A home victory would send the hosts to the top of the table and the league would then be theirs to lose. The visitors were a ball playing, skilful bunch and I admired their style of play a lot. But they couldn't defend to save their lives and they found themselves 2-0 down after 6 minutes. However, on 10 minutes the ref gave them a spot kick for handball, which the hosts did not like one bit and he was fortunate that generally they agreed with most of his other decisions during

the afternoon, or else things could have got quite nasty! As it was though, a defensive slip up saw the APBS (Aylesbury Premier Building Services) go in (stayed out) 3-1 at the break. At this point I visited the outdoor bar to see if I could get a cup of tea, but they were only selling alcohol, so I declined. What was wrong with me? I must be ill! The second half saw the visitors attack almost continually but APBS packed their penalty area each time they did. The score became 4-1 and then 5-1 from the spot after a foul, which saw the visiting captain (I think) sent off. Overall although APBS were well organised and deserved their win, I enjoyed the visitor's style of football more.

contributed on 20/05/21

TT No.59: Jon T Green - Saturday 15th May 2021; **SUTTON ROVERS** v Marsh Rovers; East Lincs Football Combination Division Two; Venue: King George's Playing Field; Result: 3-2; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 40 approx.

Sutton-on-Sea is a modest little town just a few miles south of Mablethorpe on the Lincolnshire coast. It has a few shops, a chippy and a nice little café on the promenade. The beach is fantastic, wide and sandy with nice easy walks nearby.

The town's football club is situated a few minutes' walk from the centre occupying a site just behind a row of high dunes with plenty of parking nearby. In winter everyone is glad of the protection from the worst of the weather but, on a fairly pleasant day, it was a shame not to be able to see the sea.

The clubhouse and changing rooms sit parallel to the touchline but this is soon to change as the pitch will be turned 90 degrees now the cricket club no longer play there. This switch seems a bit of a shame as there are a row of benches along the club house wall where fans are able to enjoy a pint whilst getting a great view of the game; watching from behind a goal simply isn't going to work as well. That's all for the future though as today Sutton, who lost a staggering £5,000 during the various lockdown periods, are just grateful to have the bar open, even if you can't go inside.

If this game had been on *Sky TV*, we would have been watching re-runs for the next month with Jeff Stelling and his cohorts waxing lyrical about it for even longer. Some context - Marsh Rovers playing their last match of the season sat top of the league and three points clear of Sutton with a considerably superior goal difference. A win for Sutton meant they would only need a point from their remaining two fixtures, which are against the bottom two clubs. A draw and they'll need four points from those games. Back in November (doesn't that seem a lifetime ago?), Marsh won 7-1 but Sutton's manager assured me he put out a well below strength team that day.

Sutton are wearing a superb blue and white checked kit and line-up against Marsh in their black and white stripes. The first real action of the game is on the near touchline as a Sutton player, eyes firmly on the ball, spectacularly wipes out Marsh's lino! Despite being launched into the air by the force of the challenge, he

recovers remarkably well aided, no doubt, by the cigarette still hanging from his mouth and the can of cider in his non-flag waving hand.

The home side start the livelier with Jack Knight only being denied by a great defensive challenge as he looked to convert a low cross. Marsh soon found their feet though and a deflected shot on fifteen minutes was only narrowly wide of the target. The visitor's centre-forward was next to go close as he rifled a 25 yarder just over before an equally long-range effort from Levi Betteridge opened the scoring as the ball found the bottom of the net via the left hand upright. Marsh's speed up front was giving the home defence plenty of cause for concern but, despite dominating the half, the interval was reached without any further goals.

Sutton began the second period on the offensive but, as is often the case, then found themselves further behind as Thomas Wray, Marsh's tall centre-half, rose to head home from close range. The hosts looked a beaten team with one of their players muttering they had simply run out of ideas - it's a sentiment which is difficult to argue with. Delivery from set pieces has been desperately poor from Sutton but unbelievably they pull a goal back with 19 minutes remaining as Andrew Wyre nods in a corner kick. Wyre repeats the trick seven minutes later as he somehow gets on the end of a long free-kick and loops his header back across goal and into the far corner. If a crowd of 40 can erupt then that's exactly what happened as Wyre's team mates pile on top of him amid wild celebrations. Things got even crazier moments later as Jordan Turner sprinted clear before calmly lifting the ball over the advancing 'keeper, it's a superbly calm finish before he too was mobbed. Recovering his composure, he acknowledges the fans with a sweeping bow. At full time Marsh's players looked stunned whilst someone found a Queen CD and "We are the Champions" blared out against the playing fields. Technically they still need a point but everyone connected with the club knows it's going to happen safe for two freak results later in the week. Football is a funny old game but it's not that strange; premature or not congratulations to Sutton on their title win.

contributed on 19/05/21

TT No.58: Keith Aslan - Saturday 15th May 2021; **PENSHURST PARK** v Pembury; Sevenoaks & District League Division 2; Kick Off: 11.02; Result: 2-1; Admission: Free; Programme: Bumper colour souvenir issue then I stepped out of the shower and it was all a dream; Attendance: 32 (9 home, 3 away & 20 neutral)

Penshurst's morning kick off fitted the bill nicely to allow me to get home in time to see Chelsea get robbed of the FA Cup by VAR. Not very great minds think alike with a large groundhopping quotient at this one, although I was unique in not going on to another match in the afternoon. South East trains kindly gave me a free journey, with nowhere to buy a ticket at Broadstairs and non-existent checks on trains. They're far more interested these days in making sure everybody wears a facemask than in revenue protection. The delightful Penshurst station has one major drawback, it isn't very close to Penshurst. I will never understand why so many villages are built so far away from the station. I was lucky to catch a very

infrequent bus on the outward journey but it was a forty-minute-walkies coming back. The roads were all footpath-less and I couldn't fully appreciate the beautiful countryside with my mind concentrating on the ever-present danger of being wiped out, by passing cars.

This one is well up in my top ten of scenic locations, situated in the grounds of Penshurst Place with the sprawling mansion in the foreground. This is the go-to location for historical dramas and as everyone knows (whose looked it up on *Wikipedia*) it is the most complete example of medieval architecture in the country. It's looking good for a 1341 build and I would have liked to explore it further had time permitted. Apart from the house, the football ground is mostly surrounded by sheep and a cricket pitch. The cricket has a small pavilion, and with a few committee men there preparing things for the afternoons bore-fest they could have made a few bob flogging hot drinks and nibbles to the groundhoppers, but they would only sell them to cricket related spectators. We went through the full gamut of May weather ranging from light drizzle to heavy drizzle with the heavy stuff at least having the decency to only fall while I was on the train.

A hard-fought match which became a bit fractious in the latter stages resulting in Pembury having a player sent off. With Penshurst 14 points clear at the top and two games to play I think it's safe to say they've won the league and can look forward to playing in the first division next season, lockdowns permitting. A day out in fabulous countryside and another place I would never have visited if not for this wonderful hobby.

contributed on 16/05/21

TT No.57: Brian Buck - Thursday 13th May 2021; **Sawston Phoenix** v Clare Town Reserves; Cambridgeshire County League Kershaw Junior Cup Quarter Final; Venue: played at Lynton Way Recreation Ground, Sawston Result: 2-2 (Clare Town Reserves won 6-5 on penalties); Attendance: 50 approx.

My only other visit to this ground came on 4th April 1995 when I saw Sawston White Lion draw 0-0 with Ashdon Villa in a Sunfun Holidays League Division 4A match (attendance 35 approx). I can't remember too much about the match itself, but do recall meeting up with the late Mick North, who was then the league secretary, I think. He was there to watch his goalkeeper son play. Tonight, which was a wet one, the attendance was swelled by a goodly number of groundhoppers, who seemed to be quite impressed with what they saw.

Sawston turned out to be the architects of their own downfall in this game, but perhaps overall Clare were the more composed side throughout. It was they who took the lead on 12 minutes by way of an own goal. The defender, not under that much pressure, had time to boot a cross from the left almost anywhere, but he considered that putting the ball into his own goal to be the best option. The lead was doubled five minutes later when an exceptionally hard hit shot from about twenty yards out hit the back stanchion, giving side on viewers, like myself, the false impression that the ball had hit the post spun up and down, not crossing the line. By now Clare were in control, but Sawston were at the same time creating

and missing good chances. However, at the break the hosts sent on a lively young sub and on 55 minutes he pulled a goal back for Sawston. They were now up for it, but too much so as a minute later they were reduced to ten men after they had a player sent off for a dreadful tackle. But despite this though, Sawston kept plugging away as Clare seemed to run out of ideas late on. So it was that the young sub managed to score again on 79 minutes, thus taking the game into penalties. We needed 14 of these to resolve matters. Clare missed their 6th spot kick and had the Sawston scorer converted their own 6th kick then they would have won. But he shot straight at the keeper. Then Clare scored with their next shot and Sawston missed theirs and that was it.

contributed on 14/05/21

TT No.56: Brian Buck - Wednesday 12th May 2021; **Felsted Rovers** v Gosfield United Reserves; Essex & Suffolk Border League COVID Plate last 16; Result: 3-0; Attendance: 20 approx.

Had I not done my pre-match preparation, using Google Street View, then this ground may have been a bit difficult to find and it may have involved knocking on the door of 3 Braintree Road, where the ground was purported to be. But it is actually close to the Memorial Hall, from where you can walk to the ground via a narrow footpath I believe. But for car drivers it is best to carry on eastwards and take the first turning on the right. Go down what is a small close of luxury houses and at the end of it is a sign to the recreation ground, where the car park is now. But on Google Street View it is shown as a muddy track, non-negotiable by car. Anyway, after grabbing the last official parking space I was ready for the start.

Both sides seemed an amiable bunch, but the smiling experienced ref trumped them both and I wonder if his day time job was doing TV adverts for toothpaste! The pitch was a tad bumpy but much appreciated by the local midfield trio, namely buttercups, dandelions and daisies. This was in sharp contrast to the rest of the village, which seemed to consist of Felsted School and a few houses. The school has many sports pitches, all of which were kept in pristine condition. It seems that some of the rich and famous live around her as well. Apparently, someone called Olivia, a reality 'star' on a TV programme called 'The only way is Essex', or something similar, lives here and through her former footballer, Jimmy Bullard, is the club's hero. I was told that this was because their manager once said "Hello" to him!

The game was easily won by Felsted. Gosfield struggled to get a full team out, having only one sub at the start and he was soon required following an injury! But some phone calls eventually yielded a few more players. Felsted played a bit like Spurs. In all the home games I saw them play, they rarely encountered a side they couldn't actually beat if they tried hard enough. Against the poorer sides they used to get bored, especially after they'd taken the lead and so they would switch off. This is what happened tonight. Felsted are a good side but, on the night, they needed a greater challenge. Goals on 21 and 42 minutes put them in cruise control and another one right at the end did the trick. Meanwhile the smiling ref must

have forgotten his cards because there were at least three occasions when he needed them, all for dangerous tackles. But none were brandished. Overall an enjoyable evening out amongst some reasonably sensible people!

contributed on 14/05/21

TT No.55: Jon T Green - Saturday 8th May 2021; **HUTTON** v. Catholic United; Essex Olympian League - Premier Division; Venue: Polo Fields; Result: 2-2; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 30 approx.

One of the many joys of groundhopping is you never know what you're going to get - this weekend was a prime example. Realising I might be entirely out of kilter here but when someone talks to me about that area of Essex in the vicinity of the M25 I don't immediately think of a green and pleasant land - Hutton FC, located just a few miles outside of Brentwood, shows just how little I know.

With the weather on Saturday looking pretty bleak across swathes of the country, I balked at making a long trip and instead selected a modest two-hour drive down from Norfolk. Not tending to do much background research on a ground before I visit (otherwise it's like feeling your Christmas presents) the Polo Fields turned out to be an absolute delight. The approach is down a fairly narrow road before you turn off and go a hundred yards or so through the woods to a modest sized car park (which by kick-off time was over-flowing). Ahead is a dark painted club house and beyond a roped off pitch. After a number of weeks of "park" pitches this really does feel like a step up in class. Away to the right are two cricket pitches and a pavilion. Rather splendidly the cricket club have their own car park and entrance, surely the height of one-upmanship. Mature trees surround the other two sides and for a split second I considered watching the game from the woods - slightly voyeuristic and probably not a great view.

Catholic United, resplendent in a Sporting Lisbon green, white and black look-a-like kit, sit two places and two points ahead of the home side who turn out in all red with their captain and 'keeper wearing what can be best described as day-glow yellow. He's a big chap with a deep booming Irish voice and keeps up a running commentary throughout the game - drawing further attention to himself in something so garish is surely not necessary...

With the morning deluge having thankfully passed, the game begins in even fashion. The visitors' high line is allowing Hutton's nippy strikers plenty of space and only a sharp sprint from United's number one denies them a good early goal scoring opportunity. Exasperated at one of the referee's decisions, a Catholic player exclaims "Jesus Christ", followed by much school-boy smirking on the touchline as people make the religious connection. There is less smirking after 17 minutes as United break down the left and whilst Hutton's goalkeeper does well to parry the initial shot, he is powerless to stop Brad Rowland turning in the rebound. The hosts nearly draw level from a corner but an un-marked header is narrowly over the bar. Three minutes remain until the break when Hutton do draw level, Joshua Seal turns smartly in the box to finish with a low right-footer.

The second period is largely dominated by United who re-take the lead as Alex O'Leary strikes a 20-yard free kick into the top corner. They are then left with the age-old footballing dilemma of going in for the kill or sitting deep and trying to hold what they've got. In the end they achieve neither as Alfie Cerulli, on as sub, speeds down the left leaving his marker for dead before cutting inside and sliding a low shot into the bottom corner. It's a quality finish from a player who looks destined for more time in the starting line-up. A draw is perhaps a fair result but Catholic will be disappointed to have twice been pegged back.

With news being announced that Hutton have been given planning permission to move to a new facility on Chelmsford Road the Polo Fields may not be a football venue for many more seasons. Get this ground on your to do list, visit in the Autumn and see the trees provide a spectacular natural background as rural meets suburban in this Essex delight.

contributed on 11/05/21

TT No.54: Craig Dabbs - Saturday 8th May 2021; **Kiveton Park** v Wombwell Main; Sheffield & Hallamshire County Senior League - League Cup Group D; Venue: Wales High School; Score: 2-2; Admission: Free; Programme: £1.00, 12pp; Attendance: 26.

Today provided a couple of lessons, the first in Geography and the second in perception. First up Geography, think of Wales and you automatically think of what is quite frankly a beautiful country set in the west of the British Isles however there is another and that is a small village in South Yorkshire. Now I haven't seen a match in Wales this season and with Kiveton Park playing at Wales High School perhaps I was about to in a strange way, however myself and Chris passed the Kiveton Park sign on the way in which prevented that happening!

Now then, perception, Wales High School, doesn't conjure up fantastic images prior to your visit but in many ways, it reminded me of a trip to the "Secondary School" ground that Bodedern once played at many moons ago, I arrived in that particular corner of Anglesey very surprised to see three small stands interlinked with a tea bar attached, no stands here, yet, however it's no basic school pitch either.

Kiveton Park have taken what was something very basic and done something with it to make it very presentable and possibly step seven compliant.

You arrive to a smart sign welcoming you to their home and once inside the main pitch is in front of you and is fully roped off all around. There are permanent dugouts on the opposite side and a collection of containers nearest the entrance that serve as the changing rooms, toilet block and clubhouse which has recently been furnished and quite rightly the club are proud of it. It's here that you can buy hot food and drink along with a limited amount of club merchandise and the all-important programme which itself is clearly a labour of love.

You can see work is underway at the rear of the clubhouse on what looks like a patio area (I may be wrong) and this is the latest of a steady development of

facilities here since leaving what in truth was, and still is, a well-appointed ground in Hard Lane.

The club state the desire to convert the pitch to all weather and whilst this will ensure that games are played and also increase revenue with the hire of the pitch, I really hope a cage isn't the answer, perhaps the club will look at an alternative like Basford United for example with a much lower barrier around the pitch and a more natural football ground look to it.

The match pitted Wombwell Main who were, and still are, unbeaten in the competition and also a division higher against a Kiveton Park side looking to upset the apple cart and get the win. The match started with a goal after just 13 seconds for Park in what was an absorbing encounter played in rain for much of the match but on a well-prepared surface that dealt with the elements well. Main fought their way back into proceedings but that took until the second half to do. Kiveton took control again and Wombwell went down to ten men after their keeper became very vocal about the referee's general ability to manage the game, nevertheless they did gain a penalty to square things up in what I think was a fair result.

So, then a very good day out. Yes it's still a little basic but there are real signs of progress and a real willingness to improve things here.

contributed on 09/05/21

TT No.53: Keith Aslan - Saturday 8th May 2021; **AFC Alsager** v Audley & District; Staffordshire County Premier Division; Kick Off: 14.29; Result: 3-3; Admission: Free; Programme: £2; Attendance: 97 (89 home, 2 away & 6 neutral).

Only got to this one 15 minutes before the start. My own fault, I allowed for just a 27-minute connection at Crewe and with Avanti carrying on the bad work of Virgin Trains, we rolled into the 'jewel of the north' 50 late, power loss south of Rugby. Only 21 minutes behind schedule coming back, waiting traincrew for that one. The rolling stock has all been repainted, when Virgin did the job, it cost £6000 per train, and that was 30 years ago. Good to see the revenue raised from relentless fare rises is being put to good use. With the train to Alsager long gone, I had to get a bus from Crewe and I've got out of the Hampton Court Maze in less time than it took to get out of the station. The detour was to stop people passing each other in the entrance that was about as wide as an average motorway. When will this madness end?

Was sweating on getting a programme, but managed to purchase the paper from a nice young lady without any problem which was just as well otherwise I'd never have known that Sam Steels nickname is 'Steelie'. The print run of 30 was a sell-out, but as I'd got mine everything was good. The ground is in a 'Sports Hub' with Hockey games taking place on the two adjacent plastic pitches. The ground itself is fully railed and, in spite of an earlier deluge, the grass was still a yellowy colour from the recent drought. Inside the main building was a coffee machine which requires a science degree to operate. It took three of us to work out how to

extract the brown liquid. Here also are the changing rooms and given the distance from the pitch I doubt the players would have gone off at half-time even if they had been allowed to.

It's tight at the top of the league with four teams in with a shout of the title. Prior to this match Alsager were in pole position and couldn't be caught if they won all of their games. They must be a bit miffed with the referee for not getting three points from this one with Audley equalizing in the 99th minute. Everyone agreed that the man in black, Anthony Green, had had an excellent game and didn't put a foot wrong until it came to blowing the final whistle. There just weren't anything close to 9 minutes of stoppages, he seemed to be adding on 'Fergie Time' to give Audley the chance to equalize. When they finally did, he blew up a few seconds later. Even the linesman (proper ones today) looked at his watch and raised his eyebrows when it went in. The game itself was a corker, Alsager went 1-0 up, 2-1 down then 3-2 up which was how it would have stayed if the referee could tell the time.

Another good day out if you ignore Avanti's abysmal train service and it was nicely rounded off with a 'Steak bake' from the recently opened Greggs on St. Pancras Station.

contributed on 09/05/21

TT No.52: Brian Buck - Tuesday 4th May 2021; **Cambourne Rovers** v Harston; Cambridgeshire County League Kershaw Intermediate Cup Group C; Result: 1-3; Attendance: 15 approx.

This was a generally sunny night, but it was still freezing cold and quite windy. It could have been worse as a rain bearing cloud in the distance decided not to get involved with us at the last moment. This was a powerful physical game and it was just as well we had an experienced ref in charge, although I, to the best of my knowledge, had not come across him before.

Pre-match Harston tweeted that if they won this match then they would top the group. Cambourne's thoughts on the match were unknown, as they haven't tweeted since 2012! So, what would happen? Well, first of all, the ref dropped his pencil as he set off to the centre circle for the start, but a kind Groundhopper spotted this and gave it back to him. Then, when the game did start, Harston dominated possession for the first fifteen minutes, during which time they unsuccessfully appealed for a handball in the area, which only their side seemed to see, even though an eagle-eyed defender some 50 yards away claimed a Cambourne player had caught the ball! But gradually Cambourne worked their way into the match and although they never got full control of it, possession became roughly even. Harston weren't happy about things though and on 25 minutes, when the ref found out who their manager was, spoke to him.

After the break Harston cranked up the pressure; the home goal was lucky not to be breached on several occasions. On 56 minutes they appealed for another spot kick, this time for a foul. This was again denied and this time the ref threw himself

to the floor to demonstrate what the player concerned had done in trying to win it! But then, on 62 minutes, the inevitable happened and a decent shot from the edge of the area saw Harston go one up. It was 2-0 on 73 minutes after the ref had overruled the lino (player) raising his flag for offside. But on 80 minutes Cambourne pulled a goal back, forcing the visitors to bring on the barrel chested and aging Sean Audley, looking far different to the exciting goal grabber I watched as an 18-year-old many years ago now. But his presence yielded the final goal of an enjoyable game right at the end, by which time they had simply overpowered their older looking hosts, who nonetheless tried very hard.

contributed on 04/05/21

TT No.51: Jon T Green - Saturday 1st May 2021; **BAKEWELL TOWN** v. Woodhouse Colts; Central Midlands Football League - Division One Central; Venue: Recreation Ground, Haddon Road; Result: 4-0; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 35 approx.

When I was at secondary school (a very long time ago) I went on a geography field trip to Derbyshire and stayed a few miles outside Bakewell. I remember standing knee deep in a river measuring current and sediment flow but most of all I remember having a twenty-a-side kick-about on an absurdly steep road outside of the hostel. It was one of those games played with an old tennis ball which went on for a very long time before, in the fading light, someone ballooned their shot over a low wall and we were unable to locate the ball in the dense foliage beyond...

Football has been played in the town since 1883 when Bakewell FC joined the fledging Derbyshire Football Association. Recent history has seen the merger of the original club with Bakewell Wheatsheaf at the end of the 1999/2000 season - the new "Town" team playing in the top division of the Hope Valley League. A league championship was won in 2016/17 before the club moved to the Central Midlands League a year later.

The Recreation Ground is a short walk from the town centre - simply follow the River Wye, past the hordes of fish and chip eating tourists and soon the cricket club pavilion will come into view. Follow the path around the boundary and the football pitch is over to your right as you head towards the main road. Be warned that there is a practically no street parking available so you will need to use of the two large pay and display car parks nearby. Huge credit must go the local groundsman who has produced a beautifully manicured playing surface all the more remarkable it being a public park.

Bakewell retained their lead at the top of the table as they brushed aside the challenge of Mansfield based Woodhouse Colts with a blistering first half performance. The visitors elected to hold a very high defensive line and, as any closet touch line managerial genius could tell you, this was asking for trouble against Town's speedy front two. There was an early warning of things to come as the offside trap was sprung and the move finished with a shot which clipped the inside of the right hand upright before somehow failing to cross the line.

The game only remained goalless for 12 minutes until defender Stuart Baker got on the end of a free kick to head in from close range. Alex Moth added a second soon after as he swept home a right-wing cross. Colts' afternoon was about to get a whole lot worse as in the half hour 10 raced clear only to be scythed down by the on rushing 'keeper. Referee Mr. Beale showed no hesitation in producing a red card despite the possible presence of covering defenders. The dismissal became a double blow as Baker drove in the resulting free kick. Town added a fourth - a long range effort from James Bean which fairly flew into the top corner; whether this was a shot or cross only he will know.

As it often the case with the game being over as a contest the second half rather petered out but Colts showed some great positive attitude and were at times the better side without ever looking likely to threaten a come-back.

The Recreation Ground is a picturesque venue as was borne witness to by the number of hoppers in attendance but seemingly, without the chance of developing any facilities, its days might be numbered if Bakewell look to make progress upwards through the pyramid.

contributed on 04/05/21

TT No.50: Brian Buck - Sunday 2nd May 2021; **North Herts Hatters** v Coach & Horses; Hitchin Sunday League Subsidiary Cup Group D; Result: 2-4; Attendance: 15 approx.

With the plumber kindly ruining my religious intentions this morning by coming to put right some work he got wrong in my wife's flat, I took the opportunity to watch a match at Baldock Town's old ground, known in their day as Baker's Close. These days it's called Buffs, Clothall Road. Buffs play in the Hertford & District League. Apart from the large refurbished clubhouse, complete with bar, not open today, no other furniture remains of the old ground at all, apart from the large pitch of course. Although I live just about 11 miles from this ground, I haven't seen a game here since 27 July 1981 when I saw Bedford Town beat Baldock Town 2-0 in a friendly match.

The game was a decent one and both sides had some good players, especially their central strikers. It was the hosts who took the lead on 9 minutes when the visiting keeper 'air' kicked a sideways pass from the right, leaving the scorer with an open goal. The lead was doubled on 15 minutes by way of a snap shot from the edge of the area. But even at this stage you could see that the visitors had some quality about them, especially after one of their players told me that the colour of their shirts was burgundy and not maroon! So, on 25 minutes they pulled a goal back with a 25-yard direct free kick and were level at the break following a cleanly hit 20 yarder.

If the first half was generally cleanly contested the second half slowly descended into the type of Sunday football, we have become used to. On 63 minutes Coach & Horses took the lead. I didn't see the goal clearly because at the time my eyes were looking elsewhere. But I saw their fourth goal on 71 minutes, which for me

didn't cross the line, but instead was handled on the line by a Hatters player. Then a minute later there was a loose tackle and this generated a massive punch up. I think that the young ref wanted to abandon the game, but the teams persuaded him to carry on. So, after seemingly brandishing one red card, not directly to anyone, the game restarted with both sides down to 10 men and it finished without any further serious trouble and no post final whistle.

contributed on 03/05/21

TT No.49: Brian Buck - Saturday 1st May 2021; **Ashton Folly** v Kidlington 'A'; Oxfordshire Senior League Division 1 Cup Group Stage; Venue: played at Hethe Village Hall; Result: 0-4; Attendance: 25 approx.

With most of my journey to this game on the dual carriageways of the Bedford bypass and through Milton Keynes, the ground, in the middle of nowhere, a few miles off the Buckingham to Bicester road and nearer the latter of the two places, was an easy drive for me. Despite the fact that the Village Hall, off Hardwicke Road, is sign posted, it's easy to miss the tight narrow entrance. Also, there is limited parking here, but today just about everyone squeezed in. The recreation ground is quite attractive, being tree lined along one side and behind one goal. The village hall, not open today of course, was behind the near goal and a pretty hedge adorned the other side. Viewing was best from here, because this part of the undulating pitch was slightly raised. Generally, the pitch sloped up and down and from side to side, but really none of it was flat.

As for the match, an indication of this came just before the start when the visiting manager told his side not to let the opposition bully them. What followed must have created a world record for the number of times "How many more ref?" was used. The hosts were the worst offenders but the visitors weren't far behind. In fact, the aging ref came in for a right bashing as the afternoon progressed. He wasn't the best I've seen, but on the other hand had he booked everyone who transgressed then he would have needed to abandon the game by half time! At the start it looked like the more seasoned hosts would prevail in this match, but it was the visitors who took the lead on 8 minutes with a 25-yard direct free kick. On 15 minutes they doubled their lead following a breakaway from a home corner. The goal looked offside to me though. Another goal on 25 minutes saw Kidlington lead 3-0 at the break and it was clear that they were a decent side. I'd been standing with the Kidlington lot in the first half, but chose to swap sides after the break due to there being a couple of distracting kids. Soon Kidlington scored their fourth and final goal of the afternoon, which also looked offside to me. Then the hosts, both on and off the pitch let their behavioural standards slip just a little and after one of them walked off the pitch after being sin binned, I heard the comment, "What's the f***s a sin bin?" Then a few minutes later a visiting player sustained a nasty ankle injury and the hosts, possibly hoping for an abandonment perhaps, were very keen to call for an ambulance, but after a short while he was carried off the pitch by a player from each side. This was the strange fact about the game. The players seemed to get on reasonably well with each other, it was just the ref they didn't

like. After the match I asked him if he enjoyed the match. He told me that he did and that he always enjoys his games. So, what do I know?

contributed on 03/05/21

TT No.48: Keith Aslan - Saturday 1st May 2021; **LIPHOOK** v Liss; Hampshire Premier League L4 Teamwear Challenge Cup Group Stage; Kick Off: 15.00; Result: 2-1; Admission & Pirate Programme: Free; Attendance: 72 (62 home, 4 away & 6 neutral)

More or less the same journey as last week with Liphook being a couple of stations further down the line. Two major differences and it's a big thankyou to South West Trains for not throwing me out at Guildford today for some Rail Replacement Bus action. Train companies running trains at weekends, radical stuff. Secondly, with the country deserted over the past year, everybody decided today was the day to finally go out and everywhere was packed (although with most things shut there was nowhere for them to go). A bit of a shock to the system, I'd kinda got used to the emptiness.

Liphook is a pleasant enough small town, although lockdown is squeezing the life out of it. Noticed that many of the buses here, like in Hambledon, only run three days a week, people obviously don't get out much round these parts. Last time I was here I got a bus to Headley. On a Sunday! The number of people on it was a fair indicator as to why that option is no longer available. With the town shut down until the politicians decide otherwise, I made straight for the ground, a 17-minute walk from the station, and wow, this was the place to be. The ground itself was neat and tidy, fully railed with a grass bank behind one goal and plenty of seats dotted about. The big selling point is that's it's on public land so you can't catch Coronavirus. But it's the clubhouse that makes the place so special. None of this 'you can't come in but we'll bring your drink out to you so you can enjoy a nice cup of tea while suffering from frostbite.' Here you were welcomed inside with people standing at the bar chatting, a much, missed normality. The snooker was on TV if you like that sort of thing and I was able to stuff my face with bacon rolls, the bacon being incinerated, just like it should be. Boris wouldn't approve, but for me it was my 'makes life worth living' moment. I happen to think walls and ceilings are wonderful inventions and thanks go to Liphook FC for providing me with an unexpectedly joyful hour.

Then of course there was the pirate programme. My relationship with these things goes back a long way. In the sixties and seventies when I went to Chelsea, as well as the kosher copy, I always had to get hold of the pirate programme as well. People used to call me sad at the time, but now I've probably got one of the biggest collections of Chelsea FC pirate programmes in the country. Not so sad now, eh? Back then they were just cheap tat, but today's issues are loving crafted by fellow hoppers, with Wiggins & Son responsible for this one. I've never had children, I can't see the point in them, but in hindsight their computer savvy would be useful to produce football programmes for me.

Rounding the day off was an entertaining football match with the home side just about deserving their narrow victory. With football's media boycott this weekend both of my twitter followers will be pleased to know my pearls of wisdom will still be appearing over the bank holiday.

contributed on 02/05/21

TT No.47: Brian Buck - Wednesday 28th April 2021; **Eaton Park Rangers** v Flitwick Town Reserves; Bedfordshire County League Supplementary Cup 'B' Group A; Venue: played at Priory Park, St Neots; Result: 1-2; Attendance: 15 approx.

I'd seen a game here once before, on 23rd May 1994, when I watched St Neots Town, in their darker days, beat Huntingdon United 3-1 in a Braybrook Racing Hunts League Division 1 match in front of a crowd of 50 (approx.). That game was played deeper into this large, rather pretty park, whereas tonight's match took place (in what is called Priory Hill Park) on the pitch closest to the changing rooms. As expected, in the current climate, they weren't in use this evening.

It was generally a sunny evening, but despite this the game was played out in a bitingly cold wind, which affected players and spectators alike, causing your scribe not only to move sides so that the wind was behind him, but also to put his hood up on his coat. Meanwhile on the pitch the players of both sides didn't seem to know how to adapt to the conditions and there was a lot of misplaced passing and wild shooting going on. As for the game, it turned out to be one of the better ones I'd seen since the restart. Both sides had some quality and physically strong players on show and they both wanted to win the match.

On a bumpy hard pitch, the visitors looked to be the better side in the opening stages and it was they who took the lead with a neat header from a corner on 7 minutes. But gradually the hosts worked their way back into the match and on 45(+2) minutes they equalised when the scorer beat not only the lino's flag, but also the offside trap, if one was even set, to slot home low to the keepers left. As the floodlights came on at St Neots Town's ground behind some trees in the near distance, it looked at this point like Eaton Park might go on and win. They were adventurous in attack but wasteful in their shooting though. But Flitwick stuck to their task, having more possession towards the end, as Eaton Park continued to create but miss chances, many of which were speculative ones. So it was that it was the visitors who won the match on 90 minutes when an attacker and defender both stretched and tussled, to try and get to a through ball first. The defender won out, but he only succeeded in powerfully kicking it into his own net. I assume that he was trying to kick it over the bar. So, although Flitwick worked hard for their win, from a neutral point of view, a draw would have been a fairer result.

contributed on 29/04/21

TT No.46: Brian Buck - Saturday 24th April 2021; **Dreams** v Wisbech Town Reserves; ChromaSport Peterborough & District League Junior Cup Group Stage Group D; Venue: played at Warmington Recreation Ground; Result: 2-1; Attendance: 10 approx.

This was rather an easy ground to get to as it can be found on the A605, off the A1 and just before you get to Oundle. So, to make things a bit more interesting I picked up a couple of friends in Peterborough beforehand. We arrived in this pleasant village, church open but pub closed, a few minutes before kick-off and the game kicked off roughly on time.

In the first half the hosts looked to be more up for it than the visitors who seemed to have a few seasoned players in their side, who knew a few tricks and not the entertaining sort at that! It didn't take long for some controversy to kick in, as on 9 minutes, Wisbech were seemingly incorrectly flagged for offside. Initially, from my poor angle I sided with their opinion, but at the break the ref told me that although the lino on that side was technically a club official, he was also a qualified ref, so he trusted him. Salt was then rubbed into the Wisbech wounds when Dreams took the lead in a move deemed not to be offside, despite protests. But by now there was action above us in the distance as a Kite had a punch up with another bird in mid-air. We need more of this on Sky Sports! Then, just before half time Wisbech were given a penalty kick, even though it looked as though the attacker had leant into the keeper and rolled over in the process. But the resultant spot kick went wide.

At half time I spoke to the ref about this and other things in general and what a genial pleasant man he was. Later I found out what a wonderful character he is, as he is also one of the leading grass roots sports photographers and videographers in the country and has video-taped local and schools cup finals, national finals and international football matches since 1988. From 1992-2019 he has also organised small sided football leagues in Peterborough and surrounding towns. Currently he is also volunteering as a presenter at Fenland Youth Radio. He's been Chairman of Peterborough Referees Association since 2006, is Chairman of Whittlesey Sports Association since its formation in 2018. He's Member of the Peterborough Society of Magicians, Referee Tutor for the FA for 32 years, winner of FA Outstanding contribution to Refereeing in a Development setting 2013, recipient of FA Grassroots Hero Award 2013 (Presented at Buckingham Palace) and finally winner of Peterborough Telegraph Unsung Hero Award 2014. Phew!!

The second half got off to a 'dream' start for the hosts when they doubled their lead on 51 minutes with a wonderful 25 yard, hit first time, effort. But the scorer's good work was soon undone when in trying to dribble the ball out of the area his keeper mis-controlled the ball. He was dispossessed (literally!) and Wisbech pulled a goal back. By now we had some 'live streaming' at the game, but only because the ball often had to be retrieved out of the brook, which ran alongside the pitch. By now Wisbech were more switched on, but they were growing frustrated because on at least two occasions they weren't awarded further spot kicks. But by now I think that the ref was now looking very closely indeed at the legality of them. Furthermore, they had to play for 20 minutes with 10 men, after two of their players were sin binned. So really Dreams won this enjoyable, sometimes spicy, encounter with something to spare.

contributed on 29/04/21

TT No.45: Jon T Green - Saturday 24th April 2021; **SANDON ROYALS** v Brentwood United; Mid Essex League Premier Division; Venue: Sandon Sports Club; Result: 3-5; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 13 approx.

Is there anything more satisfying than waking up on a crisp sunny Saturday morning knowing you're heading off to a new adventure in a different part of the country? Pre-lockdown we were all a little blasé about the sheer joy of our hobby, so if the horrors of Covid has given us one positive I truly hope that it's to live for the day and enjoy every moment of football we see, even if it is goalless and there is no programme!

For the first time in four months, I turned the car south out of Norfolk and headed down the A12 towards Chelmsford. Destination today was Sandon Royals of the Mid Essex League. The club had previously been named Great Baddow British Legion Royals and Great Baddow Royal Engineers before settling on their current title in 1993. Given my penchant for unusual names I was almost disappointed I hadn't visited previously.

Sandon Sports Club is easily found on the main road through the village and, with the junior sides using the adjacent pitches, it was a hive of activity. Tea and coffee were available from a hatch in the club house and I missed a trick by not getting one whilst the youngsters were playing - by the time the first team arrived an hour or so later it was shut. Sandon isn't the biggest of places but it does have a disproportionate amount of electricity pylons, per capita I doubt that there is a greater density in the entire country (although I have no doubt that someone will spend the next week researching this and let me know that Largs or Seaham has slightly more). With time to kill before kick-off I went for a walk across the surrounding fields and came across an absolute gem of a World War Two pill box half submerged in the undergrowth. Scrambling through the narrow gap (which was clearly the lookout position rather than the entrance) there was a fabulous view out across the valley. If the Germans had ever thought about invading it's clear they would have their work cut out in capturing Essex's electricity supply.

With the reserve team having a game later that afternoon kick-off was brought forward to 1pm, although there was a slight delay whilst the referee explained that should the ball hit the over-head power cables the game would be re-started with a drop ball. Sadly, this never happened and I fear I may have missed my one chance on this earth to see such a thing. What did happen however was a cracking game of football broke out. Royals took the lead after barely two minutes as Jack Humphries fired home a cross shot from the right-hand edge of the box. The home team's lead didn't last long though as Brentwood, wearing a garish lime green kit, drew level when their bustling (some might say overly physical) centre-forward Luke Caston out muscled the defence and flicked a surprisingly delicate shot beyond Sandon's 'keeper. Caston found the net again ten minutes later, dummieing his way past defenders and goalkeeper alike before rolling the ball into an unguarded net. The visitors were well on top at this stage so it was something of a surprise when Ollie Clayton drew the home team level turning sharply before delivering a well struck finish.

On the hour mark United regained their advantage as Josh Keeble headed powerfully home at the far post following a right-wing corner. There then followed the only real moment of controversy as Humphries headed his second and Sandon's third goal of the contest. Even from my, less than ideal, position on the half-way line, Humphries looked well offside but referee Mr. John Tyson over-ruled his linesman and allowed the goal to stand. In fairness to the official he had an excellent afternoon showing a rare combination of humour and authority, so on that basis, I am going to say he was probably correct....

With ten minutes remaining Brentwood scored again and this time there was no way back for the home team as, in a repetition of their third goal, a right sided corner was headed home by William Cox. United added a fifth soon after as Kasey Taylor out-paced a tiring defence before neatly lobbing the advancing 'keeper. In the end a fair result with the visitor's physicality being a little too much for the home side.

contributed on 27/04/21

TT No.44: Keith Aslan - Saturday 24th April 2021; **HAMBLEDON** v Chiddingfold; Surrey County West, Premier Division; Kick Off: 14.02; Result: 4 - 1; Admission: Free; Programme: £2; Attendance: 52 (36 home, 4 away & 12 neutral)

At last, I'm back to the old normal and after over a year I got my first ride on a Rail Replacement bus. It will take more than a global pandemic for the railways to start running trains at weekends and I can't describe my excitement at getting turfed off the train at Guildford for a 55-minute bus ride rather than a quarter of an hour train journey, with the 20-minute queue to get onto the A3 being the icing on the cake. Milford is the station for this one with the ground a 40-minute walk away, though probably a bit less for anybody with two fully functioning knees. A rustic ramble, mostly foot pathed but on the bit that wasn't a sign that stated 'No footway for 214 yards.' Much impressed that someone bothered to measure it out with such exactitude! There was a bus stop with a shelter tantalizingly close to the ground but the two buses on a Monday, Wednesday and Friday didn't fit in with a 2 o'clock start. For those that like picturesque grounds they don't come any more scenic than this one. A mile outside the village surrounded by rolling Surrey hills with barely a house in sight. Fully enclosed with two magnificent wooden dugouts and a tea bar. What more could anybody want?

As well as the location, hoppers were attracted here by Hambledon's first ever programme, sourced from the 'JMA' stable which tells you everything you need to know about it. Benches outside the clubhouse offered a good view of the pitch where you could drink your beverages which were on sale for a measly 50p a cup. And the sun shone. This was a local derby with the two villages just a couple of miles apart and in the captain's programme notes, he wrote 'These games are always close encounters and we expect a tough test'. You got that one wrong mate. By half time Hambledon had scored four, had one disallowed, hit the woodwork twice and had the clearest penalty you'll ever see denied them. The second half was a damage limitation exercise for Chiddingfold and, as such, it was

a total success as they upped their game while the home side slacked off. One interesting fact about this league is where there is a colour clash it's the home side who have to change kits. This confused some hoppers but I found Chiddingfold having Chiddingfold plastered across the back of their shirts was a bit of a giveaway when working out which side was which.

Yet again I was breaking the law by watching a game of football on private, not public, land. Is this actually a law or is it just the F.A. being complete prats? It's good to see a number of clubs treating this nonsense with the contempt it deserves. But I suppose the powers that be haven't had time to address the matter, they've been too busy stopping a breakaway European Super League that's just about money. Of course, you'd never get the F.A. running a league motivated by greed!

contributed on 25/04/21

TT No.43: Brian Buck - Saturday 17th April 2021; **Lea Sports PSG v Pines** (Luton); Bedfordshire County League Supplementary Cup 'B' Group B; Venue: played at Pirton Sports & Social Club, Walnut Tree Road, Pirton; Kick-Off: 4.15pm; Result: 3-2; Attendance: 15 approx.

It was a leisurely drive to our other game today, so much so that I was able to find time to sup a pre-match pint for the first time for over a year in a Covid restricted beer garden before kick-off and very welcome it was too. It's always good to come here, if only to watch the antics of the home manager, who kept us entertained with his excellent impressions of Freddie, from Freddie & the Dreamers, when things either went right or wrong during the game. He was made for us!

By the way Lea Sports haven't just added PSG to their name in the hope of being associated with the Paris PSG, to get into the short lived proposed European Super League. It actually stands from Pirton, Shillington & Gravenhurst! Pirton played here in the South Midlands League from 1972/3 to 1992/3, winning it four times in the process.

The game tonight was a good one, although it didn't really come to full life until the closing minutes. It was the hosts who took the lead on 3 minutes and in a generally even encounter throughout Pines equalised on 45(+2) minutes when the ball was clipped home from the edge of the area. The score stayed this way until the 80th minute, although PSG had a player sin binned on 75 minutes. Then after the hosts had a seemingly good goal disallowed for offside, which didn't seem right from where we were standing, things got immediately worse for them when Pines raced down the other end scoring what seemed likely to be a winner. But on 90 minutes PSG did equalise with a header from someone called, according to their manager, James (The spud) Ajughney. Then on 90(+9) minutes, from what seemed to be an erroneously awarded corner, PSG got the winner. There was just time for a Pines player to pick up two yellow cards at once to bring to a close a decent day out.

contributed on 21/04/21

TT No.42: Brian Buck - Saturday 17th April 2021; **Queens Park Crescents v Wilstead**; Bedfordshire County League Supplementary Cup 'A' Group B; Venue: played at Great Denham Country Park; Kick-Off: 1pm; Result: 3-0; Attendance: 40 approx.

This game was switched to here, because the hosts usual venue, Allen Park, Bedford, was required for cricket. We were due to come here on the previous Wednesday, but were alerted to the fact that they were playing this game at Allen Park, an hour before kick-off, by a Groundhopper walking past it on the way there. Apparently, the temporary venue wasn't yet ready.

Judging by what we saw today I reckon that this simply equated to the pitch not being marked out! Great Denham Country Park is easy to find and it can easily be seen if you use the Bedford western ring road. On a bright sunny day but still with a chill in the air, there were plenty of people around, with some out for walks and some involved in a youth match in the distance. Without being enclosed our game was on a single pitch in the complex, located between the changing rooms, which were not in use today and the access road, from where you could watch the match if you wanted to.

I had to lend the ref a coin for the toss up, but only gave him a penny, just in case he didn't give it back to me afterwards! But then he found his own 2p. None of this European Super League stuff here you know! The hard bumpy pitch was kind of roped off on two sides with the 'officials' of each side on opposite sides. The game was keenly contested and both sides looked interested, sometimes too interested! The first half largely belonged mainly to Wilstead, but soon there were tensions building up between some of their players and the home contingent, but it never really looked like boiling over. But despite Wilstead playing well, it was Queens Park who took the lead on 40 minutes when a cross from the left was expertly guided home. Then, on the stroke of half time a diagonal shot from just inside the area made it 2-0, which was a bit harsh on Wilstead. The second half was dominated by Queens Park as Wilstead seemed to fade quickly. On 66 minutes there was a dreadful tackle on a Wilstead player, which only yielded a yellow card. But from our angle the recipient was lucky not to see red. On the strength of this win Queens Park looked likely to win the group and progress to the semi-final, due to be played some time in May, at this venue, possibly with a programme. Then after this game finished it was off to Pirton to watch Lea Sports PSG in the 'tea time' kick off.

contributed on 21/04/21

TT No.41: Jon T Green - Saturday 17th April 2021; **WEETING SAXON vs Rockland United Reserves**; Norfolk Primary Cup Second Round; Venue: Weeting Playing Field; Result: 3-1; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 20 approx.

I do like a club with an unusual name - Anstey Nomads, Graham Street Prims and the wonderfully titled Northampton Old Northamptonian Chenecks are my personal favourites so, after the planned visit further afield was cancelled purely on the

grounds that I could not definitively tell whether they played on public or private land, Weeting Saxon leapt out of the fixture list.

The playing field is adjacent to the main road and opposite what is rumoured to be the longest continuous row (ten) of thatched cottages in the country. It's also next door to the Saxon pub which was proving to be very popular on a gorgeous afternoon. Walking past the village hall, I noticed a long line of ancient gravestones. Upon further investigation, it turns out the playing field is the former site of the All-Saint's church, which became ruined in 1700 when its' tower collapsed; amazing what you learn just by going to a football match isn't it?

Weeting play in the third tier of the North West Norfolk League which is a little confusing as it's only a couple of miles from the Suffolk border. Brandon is the nearest railway station on the Cambridge - Norwich line but, with the bus service pretty much non-existent on a Saturday, you'll be faced with a mile and a half walk to the North.

Rockland started brightly and looked confident going forward but after just seven minutes their back four failed to hold a straight line and Paul Carr exploited the space between centre-half and right back to latch onto a neat through ball and beat the advancing 'keeper. Saxon doubled their lead ten minutes later as Kurt Baker followed up his own shot after the visitors' defence failed to react. Patrolling the dusty touchline (and sometimes quite a way onto the field of play) United's manager glumly commented that he couldn't remember the last time his side had been two down. They did their best to rectify the situation before the break - firstly with an effort ruled out for a very tight offside and then by striking the post. With the game becoming increasingly niggly, referee Mr Vasey (giving away both a number of years and a few inches to most of the players) did well to maintain control and limit the number of bookings. Rockland forced their way back into the game as a left-wing corner was headed in at the far post, so simple was the goal that you felt that they would push on and take the tie to at least penalties. It wasn't to be though as the Rocks never upped their intensity and were finally undone when Carr added a third with a great dipping shot following a fine individual run.

Late on we were treated with the unusual site as one of Rockland's players who, already have been subbed, and changed into his civvies was asked to come back on for the last ten minutes. Grassroots football - got to love it haven't you?

contributed on 19/04/21

TT No.40: Keith Aslan - Saturday 17th April 2021; **METROGAS** v FC Elmstead; London FA Senior Trophy 2nd round; Kick Off: 14.06; Result: 2-3; Admission: Free; Programme: £2; Attendance 94 (80 home, 4 away & 10 neutral)

Metrogas are a team that operate on the fringes of society. With no thought for the consequences, they were advertising that spectators were welcome at this match even though it was being played on private land, in spite of the fact it's only Covid secure to play on a public space. And without a thought for people's safety,

they freely distributed a 28-page programme ignoring the plague spreading potential of paper (at least that's the excuse a lot of clubs give for not issuing these days). And to confirm their maverick credentials the minutes silence for H.R.H. was held just after 2 p.m. and not at the 'compulsory' 3 o'clock. This is my kind of club and with a revisit called for, this was the place to be.

Had hoped I might have got an invitation to the funeral seeing as how me and the Duke had spent a glorious evening together when he came to officially open Frenford Seniors new facilities. For the commemorative match the players had to change pitch-side as he was inspecting the changing rooms at the time. Still with Covid reducing the numbers at his funeral I'll just have to accept I didn't make the cut, all a bit disappointing as the programme looked top draw. So, football it was, with either a revisit and paper or a new ground without. Previously I had seen Stansfield play here so Metrogas was a new team for me, and a heavy duty saddo would have had this one down as a bracketed tick. Not me. A 12-minute walk from New Eltham Station (none of it looked very new) there were football games going on all over the place, both within the club and across the road. The sun shone, the bar was doing a roaring trade serving beer for alfresco consumption, there was a barbecue, and in the middle of all this was a very good game of football. Elmstead were two divisions higher than the home team and at 2-0 up after 10 minutes, they looked it. But the 'gas fought back to equalize and gave as good as they got. 15 minutes from the end Elmstead hit what proved to be the winner and had the chance to seal victory shortly afterwards with a penalty. One of the worst ones I've ever seen which would have caused serious danger to any low flying aircraft. Just as well Metrogas didn't equalize, if it had gone to spot kicks, I wouldn't have held out much hope for Elmstead if this bloke was their best penalty taker.

Let's talk paper, 28 glossy full colour pages, you won't see a better programme at any level. A detailed history of both clubs I found it very interesting on why Elmstead play in light pink shirts. They used to be claret but somebody accidentally boil-washed the kit and the colour faded, so they decided to stick with the result. Player profile of course, you could have knocked me down with a feather when Lamarl Hubbard revealed his favourite football team was - Manchester United! Packed full of photographs, statistics, reading material and only two pages of adverts the editor should be very proud of himself.

Days such as this will live long in the memory. When I got back to my country dacha, I had the option of watching the funeral or the cup semi-final. I think I chose the right one.

contributed on 18/04/21

TT No.39: Jon T Green - Saturday 10th April 2021; **Snettisham v Long Stratton Res;** Norfolk Junior Cup Round Two; Venue: Snettisham Memorial Playing Field; Result: 0-0 (4-1 on pens); Kick-Off: 2.30pm; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 10 approx.

Despite having lived in Norfolk all my life, I had never been to a County Cup match - other than a Final (back in the dim and distant past when they were held at

Carrow Road). Shocking I know but it's out there now and I feel much better for sharing that with you.

With football finally back on the agenda, a trip to West Norfolk seemed just the tonic especially as it's hard to imagine a more magnificent back drop than the medieval church of St. Mary. If you like a bit of religious architecture (and even if you don't) then the 175-foot tower and spire is nothing short of awe-inspiring - think cathedral rather than village church and you get the picture. The church was used a landmark by sailors navigating the nearby coastal waters of the Wash so it's no surprise it dominates the ground.

The football club share the Memorial Playing Field with the cricket club which sits across the road from the Rose and Crown. This looks a nice little pub but, of course, today it wasn't open. There is also a Michelin star restaurant in the village but no shop or Post Office which means that you can get an over-priced starter for £20 but not a pre-game Mars bar.....

At this level there are naturally no facilities but, by scrambling up a steep bank along the road-side touchline, you can get a good elevated view of the game. The home side play in the North West Norfolk League, the visitors from Long Stratton residing in Division Three of the Anglian Combination. With so little football having been played it was difficult to assess the respective strengths but my pre-match money would have been firmly on an away win which I guess just goes to show what I know.

With the home team in an all-maroon strip and Stratton wearing red and black this wasn't the easiest one to watch, not that referee Mr. John Hodson had any problems in what was a first-rate performance from the official. The game itself was, in truth, slightly less than first rate but it was competitive and to my mind that made it much better than watching a seven-goal demolition. Stratton, with plenty of experience at the back, never really looked like conceding, but a lack of finesse at the other end meant they didn't trouble the home 'keeper too much either - nil-nil was a fair result and so we moved onto "kicks from the penalty mark", as the Laws of the game officially describe them. Stratton's young 'keeper nearly kept out the first effort and, whilst they then drew level, that was as good as it got. Their second struck the bar and the third was well saved by the home side's Number One. Meanwhile, Snettisham kept their nerve and found the target every time with the winner being thumped into the roof of the net.

Great to be back watching some live sport and bagging a new ground into the bargain. Fish and chips on the way home, now what more could you want?

contributed on 14/04/21

TT No.38: Keith Aslan - Saturday 10th April 2021; **SPARTANS YOUTH** v Merrow; Surrey Elite League Intermediate Cup 'B'; Result: 3-0; Kick-Off: 15.12 (tardy arrival of the referee); Admission: Free; Programme: An excellent 8- page pirate production from the 'Wiggins & son' stable; Attendance: 22 (20 home, 0 away & 2 neutral)

If I had a pound for every time that I've been past this ground, I'd have lots of pounds. Over the years I've seen it develop from a piece of wasteland to a piece of wasteland with a football pitch to a proper ground, fully enclosed with a chain barrier fully encircling the pitch, permanent dug outs and between them another small shelter which, I was told, was built to protect the 4th official! The daffodils along one touchline signalled that spring is nearly here, the freezing cold weather indicating it hadn't quite arrived. Every time I go past, I say one day I will see a match at this ground. That day was today.

The snappily named Carville Park North Ground is a ten-minute walk from Kew Bridge railway station situated adjacent to the elevated section of the M4. The walk takes you right past Brentford's new ground, seems impressive from the outside, but they all do. Doesn't look anything like the artist's impressions that regularly used to feature in their programmes. No sign of the tree lined vistas leading to the entrance, it's surrounded by a building site where yonks of luxury flats are being built. These are a must for any Brentford supporter with a spare half million burning a hole in their back pocket. Spartans play next to Gunnersbury Park where I spent many happy hours aimlessly wandering around when I used to live in the locale. There was a farmers' market taking place today. I find these places very expensive but in these troubled times of closed cafes I have to source my sustenance wherever I can. Spent most of the week's food budget on a toastie which, for what I paid, should be the best toastie in the world. And you know something, it was. I've had less filling two course meals, it set me up for the rest of the day.

Tea and coffee were supplied by the home club and they refused to take any money for it. They are a registered charity and have numerous teams of all ages hence the 'Youth' in their title but today all the players were grown-ups. Ridiculously, given their facilities, they spent the first part of the season ground sharing at Northwood (not very close to Surrey) as part of a plan to get into the Combined Counties for which they have applied. Stay where you are boys. Martin Coughlan is an ex. football league referee but today the 3 o'clock kick off proved to be a bit too early for him. He'd already phoned up to say he'd be late and he'd get the team-sheets sorted out after the game. Fair play to him, he emerged from his car at 15.09 fully changed and got the match underway 3 minutes later. This meant we all missed out on the minutes silence for Phil which was a bit disappointing. The FA decreed royalty get a minute's silence as presumably they consider it disrespectful having a minute's applause like everybody else gets. Note to the FA clapping like seals is disrespectful to anybody who's just died, doesn't matter who they are. 0-0 at half time Spartans came good in the second half which leaves them with a 100% record in their group, but early days, this was the first game they'd played. A wonderful colour programme was issued by fellow hopper Alan Wiggins, a perfect accompaniment to the match for a 'paperholic' such as myself. Spartans tweeted 'it was great to see over 50 supporters at the match'. Whilst the crowd fluctuated it never reached anything approaching a half century, someone got a bit carried away.

Good news, the pubs are back open on Monday, just as long as you don't actually go into them. Politicians eh, don't you just love 'em.

contributed on 11/04/21

TT No.37: Keith Aslan - Saturday 3rd April 2021; **TEMPLECOMBE ROVERS** v Milborne Port; Yeovil & District Premier; Kick Off: 14.01; Result: 2-0; Admission: Free; Programme: £1; Attendance: 59 (28 home, 7 away & 24 neutral).

Oh, happiness and joy, we're into April and I'm off to my first game of the year. Wake-up call was via the alarm clock, first 'early' rise since before Christmas which proved to be somewhat arduous, but that's an age thing. Thanks to the new freedoms bestowed on me by that nice Mr. Johnson I was soon sailing off the Isle of Thanet on HS1 excitedly looking forward to exploring the farthest reaches of the universe, or as it is more commonly known, Dorset. Trains 95% empty, great never having to worry about getting a seat but I do wonder how long this can go on for before the services start getting cut? For a Bank Holiday weekend, the lack of people on the concourse at Waterloo was surreal and the station's McDonalds had more staff than customers. The 'new normal' will take a bit of getting used to.

Templecombe is a dinky little village that I have had occasion to visit a number of times. A Co-op, a chip shop and a beauty salon, just about sums the place up. Disappointingly the latter two were shut (I could have done with a makeover) so sustenance had to be taken on board from the Co-op. Purchased a sandwich made from fibre enriched malted bread which sounds a lot nicer than it tasted. The ground is a three-minute walk from the station and with a 3.41 finish there were no problems catching my train home.

Nice set up, cracking clubhouse from the photos I've seen but a no-go area today of course. There are a couple of pitches, set on a hill with views of the surrounding countryside. A grass bank along one touchline with a series of benches along the top providing a perfect vantage point for the hard of standing. The game attracted a large hopping contingent thanks to a glorious colour programme issued by Chris Garvey, a new name to me. Downton's programme editor, he occasionally issues for other clubs and Templecombe were very appreciative of the profits which were donated to the club. As one official observed he'd never seen so many people at a match. In view of the average age of a groundhopper it was a good move to keep the toilets open throughout the game even though this was illegal! Who was it who said the law is an ass? It was nice to once again be standing out in the freezing cold sunshine chatting (socially distanced of course) to long unseen acquaintances. Never been to a Yeovil & District game before, nothing wrong with the standard of football, helped I suspect by a number of the players who, rumour has it, are campanologists! Hats off to the Milborne Port number 2. Karim Khalil is the man who having waited the best part of four months to get a game of football, got himself sent off after eight minutes. The home side scored their second from the resultant penalty and held on to create the shock result of the day (apart from Chelsea's 5-2 defeat at West Brom). Milborne were top of the league and unbeaten going into this one. The match had everything you could want, goalmouth action,

fine saves, near misses and all played with a feistiness of spirit, or just plain dirty depending on your viewpoint.

Today was all rather nice, better make the most of these games before Lockdown Down 4 kicks in.

contributed on 04/04/21

TT No.36: Brian Buck - Saturday 19th December 2020; **Luton Leagrave** v St Johns (Luton); Bedfordshire County League Division 3; Venue: played at Leagrave Park, Sundon Park Road, Leagrave, Luton; Result: 0-8; Attendance: 20 approx.

Having seen today's host get thumped 5-1 away on the previous Saturday and having a man sent off in the process, the home secretary was a tad bemused by the fact that we wanted to watch 'her' side again today. Of course, the main reason was that the game here today generated another new ground for me. It was not an unattractive recreation ground and it was enhanced by the slightly raised railway line, coming out of Luton, being fully visible just across the road. It must have been great here during the days of steam. A local claim to fame is that the source of the River Lea can be found in this park, although after looking at it I think I'll continue to put HP on my sausages! By coincidence, the top of the table visitors also play their games here, on Pitch 1, which has the luxury of a park bench.

Today though they had to trudge down a slight slope to reach Pitch 5. The visitors were well prepared. As the dressing rooms were locked, they had set up a gazebo, by the pitch. Complete with internal curtains it served them well when it came to getting changed. Today the home side had a problem in that they could only field ten players. Another one was added to the team sheet in case he turned up and had he done so then he would have brought his mate along to play as well, but ultimately neither of them showed. This generated another problem. They had a lino, but the lino had a dog, so he told the ref that he would only run the line if he could have his dog with him. The ref had little option but to agree and so it was a little strange watching the ref give out pre-match instructions to the respective club lino's and a dog, especially as the dog seemed more interested! Anyway, soon after the game started the dog owner's wife turned up and we were then back to normal. No, the dog didn't take over the flag! The outcome of the match was predictable and starting in the 9th minute the well supported visitors, making up three quarters of the crowd, scored four time in 15 minutes. At the break the hosts were somewhat disheartened, but morale improved after Mr 'it could be worse' told the players to just go out and enjoy themselves. This they did and despite conceding a further four goals, with one player getting five of them, they actually saw more of the ball in this period, even though they were now kicking uphill. So, on this rather mild day, for seemingly everyone but me, this for me, brought to the end of part two of the season, as the virus seemingly gets worse before it gets better. Merry Christmas everyone!

contributed on 24/12/20

TT No.35: Brian Buck - Saturday 12th December 2020; **Luton Allstars** v Luton Leagrave; Bedfordshire County League Division 3; Venue: played at Luton Road Recreation Ground, Kingsbury Park, Kingsbury Avenue, Dunstable; Result: 5-1; Attendance: 10 approx.

It always seems to rain on Fridays or Saturdays at this time of the year and so it was of no great surprise that it was raining when I got up. But it was forecast to clear during the day and the game was declared on by the Allstars manager mid-morning. We arrived here about twenty minutes or so before kick-off, by which time the rain had stopped, expecting the game to be played in Kingsbury Park and according to various maps, it was. So, on our arrival we were a tad surprised to find that the ground was called Luton Road Recreation Ground, bearing in mind that it was in a turning off Kingsbury Avenue, rather than Luton Road. Anyway, the pitch was grassy and in decent condition.

I had the league's vice chairman Peter Francis with me and clubs are always pleased to see him at games, especially lower down the leagues as they don't get many league officials visiting them. The ref today was Turkish and has been reffing for about ten years, mostly in Turkey. He was a very nice chap and he's in this country studying for a degree at Cranfield University before he goes home to pass on his knowledge to his fellow countrymen. Meanwhile the jovial visitor's secretary has been in her post for something like 18 years now and is still full of enthusiasm.

Soon the game started and we sat down on the shiny park bench to watch it, having wiped off the rain beforehand. After about a minute the game stopped after one of the home players spotted some dog poo on the pitch. He called for it to be removed, but before this could happen the ref just picked it up and chucked it off the pitch! By now the sun had come out and it turned out to be a decent afternoon. As for the game, it was soon clear that the hosts were the better side, but in the first period they found it difficult to put the ball into the onion bag, but finally, on 25 minutes, they managed it. But on the stroke of half time Leagrave equalised when the ball was hooked in from a corner. During the break the ref spoke to both club lino's, to remind them that they were here to assist him, not their respective teams! Although the game soon slipped away from the visitors, they had their moments in the second period, but despite this the hosts went on to get the goals their dominance deserved, starting with a spot kick, on 54 minutes, given for a tackle from behind. Then after the third goal went in on 61 minutes their fourth one came on 73 minutes by way of an obvious own goal. Things went from bad to worse for the 'scorer' as on 84 minutes he was sent off for a last man tackle. 5 minutes later the at times over excitable hosts then scored the last goal of the game. At the end we spoke to the nice Leagrave lady again and in no way was she disheartened by the events of the day, basically saying that boys will be boys and that they had to be given the chance to express themselves in whatever way they feel fit. I suppose that if you look at it that way then she's right. You're only young once, sadly!

contributed on 17/12/20

TT No.34: Keith Aslan - Saturday 12th December 2020; **HEACHAM** v Mattishall; Norfolk Senior Cup; Kick Off: 15.20 (late start due to Mattishall's reluctance to leave the changing rooms). Result: 1-0; Admission: £3. Programme: £1; Attendance: 78 (68 home, 3 away & 7 neutral).

It's a Saturday so another opportunity to shake off the shackles of tier 3 oppression and escape out into the free world for a few hours. And where better than at the epitome of non-league football, Heacham. Loads of helpers, food and drink available from the clubhouse veranda, souvenirs on sale, a really good vibe all round. And it helps that the team is top of the league. This was Heacham's first ever game in the Norfolk Senior Cup and they were making the most of it. One of those places you would take a non-believer to illustrate what ground hopping is all about.

Kings Lynn is the railhead for this one, the 34 runs every 15 minutes from the bus station and drops you outside the ground. Nice to see a bus service these days that actually has a few passengers on it. The added attraction for me is that now my bus rides are all gratis. I've finally got my free bus pass - I don't think I've mentioned it before but I got mine six years after everybody else. The 'Elavon' cafe, 30 yards from the bus stand, served up a mighty fine breakfast. Oh, the joys of sitting down for a meal, it's surprising how the little things in life bring so much pleasure after months of denial. Entry to the match was £3; I came the wrong week, it's only £2 for league games, and £1 buys you a spellbinding 24 pages of wonderfulness courtesy of '*Barnes Print*'. Much to enjoy with plenty of reading material as you would expect from this organization.

The ground is fully enclosed with a chunky brick-built stand that offers a perfect view of the back of the dug outs and a not so perfect view of the pitch. The match started late thanks to the away team messing about and also a minute's silence which loses its poignancy if you don't know who it's for. Barbara Windsor perhaps? When we eventually got going this was a proper full blooded cup tie with the visitor's higher status never overly apparent and Heacham were well worth their giant killing. At least Mattishall won't have to endure any further early kick offs that they find so difficult to comply with. On the downside it was one of those matches that went on for ever and there was a big bundle in the 94th minute of the 90. Didn't see what started it and, while it in no way excuses the socially un-distanced naughtiness, I couldn't help thinking it could all have been avoided if the referee had adhered to the concept of a match containing 'two equal periods of 45 minutes'.

The late finish meant a wait for the train and once again it was a rare treat to be allowed to sit down in the warmth of the Kings Lynn station buffet reading the programme and supping my cappuccino with sprinkles. It's a privately owned one so much better value than the awful franchised buffets that desecrate so many stations these days. Arrived back in the third world to find my '*Traveller*' had finally arrived, not much good on a Saturday. I'm looking to see how I can get some food parcels, with all the cafes shut, starvation is becoming a real possibility. The

only other alternative is to cook my own meals and that ain't ever going to happen. Only another week until I can visit civilization again.

contributed on 13/12/20

TT No.33: Brian Buck - Saturday 5th December 2020; **Lakenheath Casuals** v Hethersett Athletic; Central & South Norfolk League Ben Smith Memorial Cup 3rd Round; Result: 0-4; Attendance: 10.

Today I didn't really decide where to go until just after midday. As the games slowly started to return to something approaching normal many of my choices were off including my first-choice match and I was on the verge of giving up hope of getting a new ground in. Then I thought that I might have a chance with Lakenheath Casuals, even though Lakenheath Reserves, half a mile up the road had already been postponed. I had no contacts for the hosts and with *Twitter* being something birds just do in this region my last hope was the away team secretary. I caught him just as he was about to leave home for the match and by telling me this, he was also saying that the game was on.

So, I went for it as well, arriving at the ground just over an hour later. On the way I passed some of the remnants of the previous morning's snow and although there was a mixture of sun and cloud throughout this game, it was exceptionally cold. On a normal day this could have been a very enjoyable afternoon. The club play at Lakenheath Pavilion, opened in 2010 and looking through the windows I could see that they have a bar here, but like everywhere else at present, it was closed. It didn't take long to work out who the ref was. On his warm up top, he had a logo which read 'open your eyes ref'. He came from nearby Brandon, but since he first started reffing in 1986, he has also reffed in Oxfordshire, West Sussex and Germany. Despite being a Suffolk FA ref he usually refs at Norfolk grounds. Today he had a rather straightforward game despite booking four players and sin binning another, as they were all for indisputable reasons.

I think that this particular competition might be for the league cup as this was Division 3 versus Division 1. The visitors took the lead on 3 minutes after the scorer got hold of a back pass which the keeper made a mess of dealing with. Soon he made a mess of another one and for the remainder of the match his mates didn't pass the ball back to him anymore. I was a bit sceptical of the scorer's real name, as at the end of the match he was sitting adrift from the others and as soon as his mates knew that I was going to get his name from him, another player got to him before me. Far be it from me to suggest to you that he was told to give me another name, but that was the way it appeared. He also gave me a funny look when I told him that he was too good to play for this team. He said that he knew that but was unable to reply when I asked him why he doesn't play for some better side!

Anyway, the first half finished with just this goal. Hethersett were the better side against a team whose two aging central defenders seemed to be wearing their 19 and 20 shirts to signify their weight in stones! On 52 minutes the hosts keeper surprisingly pulled off a good stop from the spot following a leading arm into the

neck, but was unable to stop a second spot kick, given for a gentle nudge, on 61 minutes. Then two more goals right at the end, made the score look a bit more realistic, despite the second of these looking to be offside to me. The score might have been slightly different had the hosts club lino been more observant rather than telling everyone how he was always right even though often he wasn't! Overall, it was good to be back on the road again. The game wasn't so great, but on a freezing cold day it did hold my interest.

contributed on 10/12/20

TT No.32: Keith Aslan - Saturday 5th December 2020; **DUSSINDALE & HELLESDON ROVERS** v Beccles Town; Anglian Combination Premier; Kick Off: 13.29; Result: 6-3; Admission: Free; Programme: Donation; Attendance: 33 (22 home, 2 away & 9 neutral).

Lockdown II has all ended in tiers with the Kentish Riveria, predictably in the highest one. A couple of months ago we had one of the lowest rates of Covid-19 in the country but a dramatic increase has seen us vying with Hull* for top spot. Nobody claims to know why but I would have thought one in four children off school and having to self-isolate, might offer a clue? Today I decided to test my eyesight and with Barnard Castle too far to go I settled for Norwich.

A few travel problems today, a tree falling onto the track delayed the outward journey. Advance health warning: Hold onto your sides to stop them splitting. The woody obstruction was surprisingly at Chelmsford, I'd have expected it on a BRANCH line. Bit of a problem in Norwich finding bus stops and trying to board, unsuccessfully of course, Park & Ride buses, the usual thing that happens when you wander round in a daze. The X44 is the one you want, every half hour it goes right past the ground which isn't much use as there isn't a bus stop and you have to get off over a mile earlier at the Tesco Express. If you miss the stop, which we obviously did, the next one is in a different post code. Luckily, we had a nice driver who let us off, if it had been an un-nice driver, we would have still been wandering around the wilds of Norfolk come kick off time. 'The Nest' is a very impressive set up with two grass pitches and one 4g. A nice clubhouse and tea room, closed today, with more buildings currently being erected. The game was played on the main grass pitch, fully railed and aesthetically pleasing to the eye. Hellesdon always use this pitch as the manager doesn't like artificial surfaces, but any progression would entail a move to the plastic, not just because of the floodlights but its proximity to the changing facilities. In the current location they wouldn't go back in at half time even if they were allowed to. In spite of the weather which had caused a few local postponements the pitch was like a bowling green and one to bear in mind in wet weather. Those who know about these things said that Anglian Windows used to play at the complex, but their pitch was over a hundred yards away so the professional groundhopper will have to go back. The ground is adjacent to Norwich Airport, lots of British Airways planes stacked up but none actually going anywhere.

The vagaries of the British weather meant that after the previous days snowstorms this afternoons match was played out in bright sunshine, a fact lost on one groundhopper who was dressed up for a trip to the South Pole. A match of much entertainment. 0-0 after 24 minutes, 3-3 after 38. Six goals in 14 minutes. In spite of the away team looking the better side early doors in the second half it was Hellesdon that forged ahead. Having won their last game 6-4 Beccles is the place to go for goals. It's nice to have football back, even in limited quantities, and a sociable afternoon was had by all.

A punctual 15.13 finish equated to an hour earlier arrival back at my country dacha. Train home had twelve cars and I walked the length of the front six to get off at Broadstairs. They contained three customers including me, how long can this go on for?

**WebEd* - That's very kind of you to mention it Sir Keith.

contributed on 06/12/20

TT No.31: Brian Buck - Saturday 31st October 2020; **Stotfold** v London Tigers; Spartan South Midlands League Division 1; Result: 7-0; Attendance: 102.

Today was a difficult day on two fronts. Firstly, we had a 'domestic' when my wife discovered that she had a leaking radiator, which upset her a bit. While this was going on, I found out that my intended afternoon game had been called off because of some heavy rain which had deposited itself on us mid-morning. This despite being told that the game was on earlier in the day. So, in the end I decided, after checking that it was on, to go to this game at Stotfold. It's thought that unlike the old Roker Park ground, where sometimes you only had to pour a glass of water on the pitch to waterlog it, this one will take an absolute deluge to stop play, as it did in one match here last season. But generally, the pitch at New Roker Park seems not only to be sand based, but apparently it drains well and into a pond behind the goal, where the portaloos are. Anyway, as the rain stopped and the sun came out, I was joined today by my wife, who just wanted to do something a bit different, although this didn't extend to actually watching the match and so she spent the whole match in the clubhouse doing the crossword. The last of few matches she has ever watched was on 25th June 2016 when we saw Arsenal Ladies beat Sunderland Ladies 5-1 at Boreham Wood.

Today the club celebrated the fact that this was Halloween by having their bar staff in fancy dress. There were few of them so they had a skeleton staff! Anyway, after a quick pint, which was acquired with some difficulty through the clubs strange Covid procedures, I was ready for the match, one which Stotfold needed to win today in order to move them up the table. It took them just 73 seconds to open their account against the division's bottom placed club. The lead was doubled on 7 minutes and soon the frustrations of both sides came to the fore. But things gradually calmed down and by the time the third goal went in on 31 minutes the visitors seemed to have accepted their lot. On 49 minutes Stotfold in effect made sure that there would be no comeback when they claimed their fourth goal. By now the sun had disappeared to be replaced by a chilly wind. Then after they

popped in a fifth goal on 70 minutes Stotfold scored twice more at the end to bring to a close a rare Saturday afternoon game for me here. My wife, seemingly knowing what the refs final whistle sounds like, even from inside the clubhouse, was ready to go home as soon as I reached it though!

contributed on 06/11/20

TT No.30: Keith Aslan - Saturday 31st October 2020; **AFC WAKEFIELD** v Hepworth United; Sheffield County Senior League; Kick Off: 13.59; Result: 1-0; Admission: Donation; Programme: £2; Attendance: Take your pick - Official: 295. My headcount: 254 (236 home, 0 away & 18 neutral)

A trip to Covid Country today, last chance to visit this one before Wakefield goes into tier three on Monday. At least that was the logic, shared by a number of hoppers. Little did we know that as the ref. was blowing the final whistle Boris 'I expect things to be back to normal by Christmas' Johnson announced he was putting the country back into lockdown. Closing the North of England is one thing but doing it to the home counties puts things on a completely different level. Not to worry, schools and colleges will remain open, no chance of Covid spreading there! This was my first opportunity to ride on East Coast trains where you 'aren't allowed' to travel without a seat reservation. Was pleasantly surprised, a sensibly laid-back attitude to face masks, buffet open and a friendly guard who looked rather pretty from the bit of her face I actually could see. She took no notice of the seat reservations, the 11 'customers' in my carriage somehow managed to socially distance without them.

My last visit to Post Office Road (now officially called the 'Millennium Stadium' by absolutely no one) was to watch Featherstone Rovers Rugby League back in the eighties. Much changed now, three new stands, two transferred from Scarborough's old ground, but behind one goal remains a bank of the wonderful terracing that used to surround the pitch. New clubhouse, very plush, showing the lunchtime football. Six hoppers sat round a table in spite of notices saying we must all come from the same household. Not only six different households, different parts of the country ranging from Broadstairs (bet you can't guess who came from there?) to Edinburgh. We were naughty. Featherstone Rovers are pleased to see the football team here, filling an empty ground that would otherwise be unused. Whether they will be so welcome when Rugby is allowed to start up again remains to be seen. Another change since I was last here is that the place has acquired a railway station four minutes from the ground. Featherstone itself looks like what it is, a mining village with the mines all closed down. Arrived two hours early and the programmes were already on sale, 32 pages of glossy goodness. Went and found a cafe and treated myself to a roast diner, cheap and fulfilling. For most people 'eat out to help out' lasted a month, for me it's a lifetime commitment.

Wakefield's ambition is to bring league football back to the town. Lower your sights a bit, boys, it ain't going to happen. But I doubt there are any other clubs in the Sheffield Senior League getting crowds of 250 plus and playing at a stadium like this one. The game was between two very evenly match teams. Last season

produced two draws while last week Hepworth managed a 3-2 win, today one goal was enough for Wakefield to exact revenge. Unusually the game had three different referees. Half way through the first half the match referee pulled a muscle and changed places with the linesman. In the second half a completely new referee magically appeared and took over. I was left wondering how the payments were worked out. When the Hepworth number 9 was sent off the very loud tannoy played 'Hit the road Jack'. How we all laughed.

A new *Greggs* tick at Wakefield station on the way home almost made up for there being no fast trains between London and Broadstairs again. I'd like to take what will probably be the last opportunity to wish all my fans a merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. Peace and goodwill to all men. Except politicians.

contributed on 01/11/20

TT No.29: Brian Buck - Saturday 24th October 2020; **Bardwell Sports** v Laxfield; **Macron Suffolk & Ipswich League Division 3**; Result: 3-0; Attendance: 15 approx.

This ground was something of a Groundhopper's nightmare, but only because they have a choice of two grounds to play on in the village. Today I let my trusty sat nav take responsibility for getting me here and after taking the A143 Bury St Edmunds to Diss road off the A14, I was directed down a 'no passing' place single track road towards the village for a few miles. At times I enjoyed some panoramic views, but there were times when I couldn't see a thing and I was just grateful that a car didn't come the other way. Eventually I arrived in the village, which is popular with ramblers. Then after passing a (or the) pub on my left I soon saw what looked like the entrance to the ground, on the same side of the road. But a sign said that this was the overflow car park. Then a player appeared holding what looked like a goalpost, as you do and he confirmed that the match was here. As I was early, I told him that I'd park up and go down the pub. But he suggested that I go into the club's bar instead. So, I did. The entrance to it was less than 50 yards further up the road and on the right. This is really the cricket ground bar, but I found out that they play some of their football matches here as well, but they are not always in good condition. So, it looks as though I'll have to come back again in due course to tick off their other ground. Apparently, the players prefer to play here, but only because it's nearer the bar! Inside the clubhouse there was no need for track & trace, as apart from the barman there was no one else present, until a young lady appeared to help out with the curry night they were having later on. They were expecting 70/80 people but about ten had blown out already! Also, they decided not to put out the menus until the players had left after the game had finished, as they tend to make paper aeroplanes out of them!

So, after the West Ham United v Manchester City game finished on the TV at 2.20pm I walked back to 'my' game which started seven minutes later, some three minutes early. Despite the scenic views, this was a cold, windy and cloudy afternoon as I sat in my garden chair and I felt the need to put my coat hood up. Until I got home, I hadn't realised just how well Bardwell were doing in the league this season. So today they had a rather easy win against a side who were making

the transition into adult football after playing youth team football last season. Someone they called Lampy opened the scoring on 23 minutes. His real name was actually Lampshire! A second goal was added on 30 minutes and the experienced visiting lino thought that this would be enough to see off his side. I wasn't so sure, but he proved to be right and a third goal on 66 minutes made sure. Like the previous night the ref had very little to do in this enjoyable game and he never needed to use his cards. This win took Bardwell to the top of the table having won all their six games apart from one drawn match. However, the team below had won all five they had played so far.

contributed on 28/10/20

TT No.28: Keith Aslan - Saturday 24th October 2020; **SOUTHWICK 1882** v Polegate; Mid Sussex Championship; Kick Off: spot on 14.00; Result: 3-2; Admission: Free; Programme: Donation; Attendance: 54 (42 home, 0 away & 12 neutral).

Through no fault of their own Southwick have been unceremoniously dumped from their ground. Stories going around of the land owner using it for drug dealing and when he got locked up, he just passed the lease over to his equally law un-abiding brother. The upshot was that the ground was taken over by the council with Southwick told they could only stay on if they paid off debts of £500,000 which were nothing to do with them. They've got a crowd funding page going but somehow, I don't think that's going to produce the greenbacks in sufficient quantity. With good footballing people determined not to see the club die they moved it down a few tiers and carried on playing 50 yards away in the Mid Sussex League. While technically a new club it isn't really, with the same officials, players and fans as the old set up. Had a look at the old ground next door, a bit run down but easily fixed, which it won't be in a couple of years. They are currently using the ground that Midway used to play on in the Sussex County League, back in those days ground grading wasn't such a big thing. Just a pitch with the only football furniture comprising of a few park benches for the hard of standing (like me). It's adjacent to a very sorry looking leisure centre which was closed but from the outside looked even more down at heel than the old ground. Somebody had the bright idea of putting up a small marquee to act as a changing room. Great move on a balmy summer's afternoon but totally useless in today's wind and it lasted half an hour before collapsing in a heap. The wind also meant the corner flag finished twenty yards away from the pole.

The programme was a thing of beauty, 24 pages edited by someone for whom it is obviously a labour of love. Plenty of enthusiastic officials including the chairman who had a megaphone that supplied crowd noises. He also read out the team changes on it. All in all, a good vibe. Once again, hats off to the B.B.C. weather forecast that predicted rain at 3 o'clock in Southwick. It started to come down at 2.58. How do they know? Fortunately, it was more drizzle than the heavy stuff and a tree lined far goal kept me relatively dry. The Polegate lines-boy was about 10 years old. He loves running the line, as he said, if he wasn't doing this, he'd just be sitting indoors playing on his X box. A future referee in the making? And the £5 he

got paid didn't go amiss either. In spite of the wind, both sides produced an entertaining match with a couple of cracking goals among the five. Twice Polegate pulled back from a goal down but they couldn't manage it a third time. This season, with changing rooms out of bounds, most games have been kicking off when they should, and, it's amazing how short half time team talks can become with an icy wind blowing round your shorts. In spite of a 49-minute second half it was still all over at 3.44. No problems catching trains these days.

Seeing the efforts people are prepared to go to keep Southwick football club going is an uplifting experience. As it's the weekend the fast line into London was shut meaning an almost two-hour drag along the Kent Coast. Not such an uplifting experience.

contributed on 25/10/20

TT No.27: Brian Buck - Saturday 17th October 2020; **Spratton v Harpole**; Northants Combination Premier Division; Result: 1-4; Attendance: 55 approx.

This was an enjoyable day out. I took a slightly longer route to get here, coming in off the A14, turning right at Brixworth, rather than taking the shorter route, which meant working my way through Northampton. On my arrival, I was pleasantly surprised to find that the underused bar was open and I was able to make use of it without being unduly burdened by the Coronavirus rules. Although each table had a card on it that read 'sanitised', which I suspect had more to do with its scribe's ability to spell the word correctly than suggesting that only people with sanitised drinks could sit here! Anyway, I finished my first slurp for about a month and then went out to watch the match.

Though my fellow Groundhopper friend, who had arrived after me, was allowed to take his pint outside of the clubhouse and finish it off while the match was in progress. Most of the spectators stood on the clubhouse and car park side of the ground, along with the away fans, but my friend and I stood on the unpopular 'home' side and watched the game from behind the fully roped off pitch. Today Spratton were up against it almost from the start as the visitors were top of the league having won all four of their matches so far. But despite this Spratton took the lead on 4 minutes when a shot from the edge of the area curled into the net just inside the far post. But Harpole were level on 14 minutes when the scorer got to a cross before the keeper, leaving him with a simple finish. Six minutes later Harpole took the lead when the scorer finished off another cross whilst lying on the ground. Then when Harpole grabbed a third goal on 28 minutes it looked like they might get a cricket score. So, I kept routing for Spratton to score in the hope that it might make this decent game a bit more exciting. But early in the second half it lost a bit of 'zing' after a stupid foul saw Harpole given and score from a spot kick, awarded for a stupid foul. Harpole fans were happy though. You only 'zing' when you're winning! These are exciting times for the visitors, who announced in May of their intention to build a new development, which will see a new pitch with facilities to progress the club and also a 4G pitch on the land next to the club, to help them celebrate their 125th anniversary in 2021. Overall,

despite the result, I enjoyed my day here, as it was nice to enjoy once more the kind of day out, I regularly experienced in previous seasons.

contributed on 21/10/20

TT No.26: Keith Aslan - Saturday 17th October 2020; **WIRKSWORTH IVANHOE** v Woodhouse Colts; Central Midlands League Division 1 Central; Kick Off: 14.54 Wow! Result: 3-3; Admission: Free; Programme: £2; Attendance: 62 (51 home, 2 away & 9 neutral).

I bravely decided to venture into the distant foreign country known as 'The North of England'. Not the far north where people roam the streets with a hand cart shouting 'Bring out the dead'. Nothing to do with Coronavirus, just an average Saturday night in Liverpool. Derbyshire was as far as I dared to go and with Wirksworth tweeting every few hours about issuing their first ever programme it would be churlish not to give them my support. East Midlands Trains confirmed my decision as they have abandoned seat reservations 'to help social distancing'. Going north from Kings Cross seat reservations are compulsory 'to help social distancing'. Work that one out. Social distancing on trains has ceased to be a problem since Boris demonised anyone travelling on public transport. One of his very few success stories with trains I travelled on today running at 15% to 20% capacity. It's nice knowing I'm not going to have a problem getting a seat but something really has to be done about facemask vigilantes who need to get a life even more than I do. There is an hourly bus service from Derby bus station (the quaintly numbered 6.3) but I carried on to Belper and picked it up from there, same bus, less walking. I'm glad I did so I didn't miss out on the winner of 'The Great British High Street Awards 2019' an accolade Belper proudly embraces. However great it is I still couldn't find the Greggs. Arriving at the ground it's at the southern end of Wirksworth, a fifteen-minute walk from the non-award-winning High Street.

In this part of the world it goes without saying that the scenery is delicious with the backdrop to the ground captivating. Mostly railed with a small kitchen that will be serving hot drinks in happier times. It is adjacent to the cricket ground and bowling green. First ever programme but a tad optimistic having a print run of 100 with a crowd of 62. Plenty left over and I can't understand why somebody didn't go round selling them. Hope that this hasn't put them off issuing in future. Just don't do so many copies next time. Having got the desired paper, I walked into town and had a mosey round the Heritage Railway and made a pitstop to refuel. Plenty of places to eat here in what is normally a very touristy town, but not so in today's drizzle.

One of the best games of football I've seen all season. Wirksworth were 3-0 up at the break and early in the second half they got a penalty which would have been game over if they'd scored. They didn't and the miss proved to be the catalyst for a pulsating 35 minutes of football as Woodhouse gradually fought (sometimes a bit too literally) their way back into the match. The equalizer finally came well into stoppage time and was greeted by wild unsocially distanced celebrations by the team and their two supporters. With the game getting more fractious as it went

on, the referee, probably wisely, decided to end things there and then without bothering to kick off. He blew the final whistle at 4.39. Great stuff.

Many thanks go to the junior director of the Groundhop UK conglomerate for a lift after the game. With the extremely punctual finish it meant a much earlier than expected arrival back at my country dacha. The lack of people on the concourse at Euston Station at 7 o'clock in the evening was quite spooky. The day was overshadowed by the news that Matt Le Tissier has been dropped from Soccer Saturday on *Sky Sports*. It puts Coronavirus into perspective.

contributed on 18/10/20

TT No.25: Brian Buck - Saturday 10th October 2020; **Puddlebrook 68** v Clare Town; Suffolk Junior Cup 1st Round; Venue: played at Puddlebrook Playing Fields, Homefield Road, Haverhill; Result: 4-0; Attendance: 20 approx.

Today it was time to dip into the Cambs County League for a match. I've been to most of the grounds in this league over the years, so it was a bit strange that I found myself watching a Suffolk Junior Cup match here. I'd been a bit put off coming here when I heard from a friend, who had been here a few years back, who told me that the ground wasn't too much to write home about. He was right, but I'll carry on writing about it.

It is located just off the Haverhill by-pass and I couldn't see any dressing rooms, just a vet's, which is great if you have a Vets team which plays here. Aerial photography suggests that there are five pitches in this complex. I could only see three of them marked out. The other two may have been, but they were on a raised plateau and if you venture over that way then there are some dressing rooms apparently, but you can't see them because they are down the bottom of a slope. Today we were supposed to be on Pitch 1, but I think that this game took place on Pitch 2 as it was in the middle of the three that I saw marked out. On what I considered to be Pitch 1 Motts County Pirates, who were also at home today, had a match against Haverhill Town, who play at Mottsfeld Playing Field, down in the town. That was a 3pm kick off, but they started just after 2.45pm. Our game actually kicked off four minutes early and it started in bright sunshine after the nets were fixed to the goal frames by using black sticky tape. The captains were the respective keepers.

The visitors were expected to win this one, based on the fact that they play in a division higher than their hosts, but you got a hint that not all was well with them, when only eight players joined in their pre-match warm up. But eventually they did have a full team ready with two subs. The hosts meanwhile were better prepared and went through a 'proper' warm up and with a full complement of players. So, it was then that the eventual outcome wasn't too surprising. Puddlebrook were a goal to the good by the 15th minute and were three nil up by the 37th minute. Being somewhat of a local derby, I thought that this might be a game full of friction, but nothing much transpired and the decent ref handled any differences comfortably. This was a good dog walking area and in the second half I got to know a few as I retreated to under a hedge some distance away from the

pitch, as the rain started. After Puddlebrook got their fourth goal on 51 minutes it got heavier, making the pitch surrounds even more boggy than they were at the start, although the pitch itself was fine. As I left the other game was still going on and eventually Haverhill Town won that one 9-0. They now make the long journey to play Puddlebrook in the next round. I did feel for the players at the end as with nowhere to change they would have to get back into their cars drenched and covered in mud. To get home I had to drive through partially flooded roads and I heard on Radio Cambridgeshire that Cambridge United's game was in danger of being abandoned. But by the time I reached home, 50 minutes later, it hadn't rained here at all!

contributed on 14/10/20

TT No.24: Steve Hardy - Saturday 10th October 2020; **North Solihull** v Lodgefield Park; Birmingham & District League Division 2; Result: 6-1; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 3 h/c.

Hoorah! Back to my favourite league in the world today for the first time since last January. Oh, how I have missed you.

The new season has brought 4 new venues for me to visit, and with this match the only one of the four who were at home, it was a no brainer really. North Solihull don't play in Solihull, but 8 miles north of it in Coleshill. The venue is the Memorial Park, the home of the local Cricket club, a kiddie's nursery and 2 footie pitches. There are no facilities at all for players or spectators, with the former getting changed pitch-side in torrential rain today.

The match was as one sided as the score-line would suggest. 3-0 to the homesters at the break with most of the damage being inflicted by the Solihull right winger who ran his opposite defender ragged. Another 3 in the second half were met by a lone Lodgefield Park goal near the end.

The diminutive Lady referee was excellent and gave me my first sin binning of the new season too.

Sorry that my photos are a bit blurred, but I was like the chap on those weather vanes you see. Out with my camera when it stopped raining, and back in the car when it wasn't.

Finally, don't tell anyone, but I got the two teams mixed up again, and thought that Lodgefield Park had won 6-1 at the end. A rookie mistake for someone my age eh?

contributed on 12/10/20

TT No.23: Keith Aslan - Saturday 10th October 2020; **OVER SPORTS** v Cherry Hinton; Cambridgeshire League Premier Division; Kick Off: 14.58; Result: 0-0 when the game was abandoned after 25 minutes due to excessive amounts of H2O falling from the sky; Admission & Programme: Free; Attendance: 40 (33 home, 0 away & 7 neutral)

I travelled on the Cambridge busway to this one, a dedicated road built on the old railway line from Cambridge to Oxford, surely the transport of the future (if you believe this country has one). Apparently, the ultra-modern buses can travel along the busway without the driver having to steer but as I was on the top deck, I can't confirm this. Journeyed its length to St. Ives where I had a little wander and ticked off the Greggs. Also got off the train at Cambridge North, a new station for me. Outside they are building a very large office block complex, which might not be such a good idea in hindsight. My 1967 Ordnance Survey map did the job today as the railway line was still open then so I could follow exactly where I was going. Swavesey Bus interchange (or halt as it is shown on my map) is the one you want, about 45 minutes from Cambridge, less from the north station, and the ground is a 20-minute stroll up the Over road.

Nice clubhouse here but with facemask nonsense rigidly enforced it somewhat detracted from the coffee drinking experience, but only 75p. a cup. They were showing golf on the TV. Wasn't there any proper sport on? A gaggle of hoppers arrived while I was chilling out and nominated me to stay and get the programmes while they all pushed off down the pub. When Mrs. Editor arrived with the precious paper I asked for five and tried to make a donation. She insisted they were free but I could still donate to the club by going home and logging on to their crowd funding page. Wouldn't it be simpler just to give you the money now, I asked? She thought about it for a moment before deciding I might be right. I hope I gave the youngster a lesson in old technology, handing over cash face to face without the aid of a computer. Simple, yet effective. Computers do have their place though and I am looking forward to seeing photographs of the beer pumps one of today's hoppers puts on social media. Makes me feel a lot better about what I do!

BBC weather forecast spot on as usual. Mostly sunny but some showers, heavy in places. One of those places was Over. Having spent the day roaming round Cambridgeshire in the sunshine, 10 minutes before kick-off it started to rain. Not any old rain, this was heavy duty stuff. It didn't bother the crowd as a large marquee with an excellent view of the pitch comfortably kept everybody dry, if not socially distanced. To the half a dozen hardy souls who remained outside getting soaked I have one question. Why? The deluge continued and on 25 minutes the ref. took the players off for 10 minutes. As the rain eased, and this is relative, he went back out onto the pitch towards the centre circle where he'd left the ball. Only got half way before turning round and making a gesture with his finger across his throat which either meant he was going to kill somebody or he'd abandoned the match. Fortunately, it turned out to be the latter.

The professional groundhopper couldn't count the game and would have to go back. Luckily, I'm only an amateur.

contributed on 11/10/20

TT No.22: Brian Buck - Saturday 3rd October 2020; **Apsley Argyle** v The Engineer; West Herts League Premier Division; Venue: played at High Street Green Playing Fields, Hemel Hempstead; Result: 0-5; Attendance: 10 approx.

Today initially looked as though it was going to be a complete wash out as it seemed to have been raining persistently for over twelve hours before I finally braved the elements. So, I spent most of the morning on the computer trying to find out what was on and off. My evening game on the previous night at Harlow Town's 3G pitch was postponed, as was today's game at Ware Sports 3G and this was accompanied by photographic evidence showing their flooded pitch. Despite this, I noticed that gradually more and more clubs were saying that their games were on and so I sent a Tweet to my chosen game, with the reply being that the pitch was OK at 8.30am and so were leaving it up to the ref. It's financially better for them if they do this because they only have to pay half his match fee if he arrives and then calls it off!

Anyway, although it was still raining a bit, but forecast to clear soon, I set out, more in hope really, but having back-ups in mind if things went wrong. But I needn't have worried, as the sun had come out by the time I'd arrived and more importantly it stayed out for the whole match. The pitch was fine, but it was a bit squelchy around parts of the perimeter. The ground can be found a few hundred yards north of their more illustrious neighbours, Hemel Hempstead Town and it contains three long but narrow pitches. This game was played out on the one furthest from the dressing rooms, but it was the best one for spectator viewing. Apsley Argyle are a newly formed side this season, so it's a bit surprising that they were put straight into the Premier Division. However, they had won their opening game 4-1 away. Today they were up against a visiting side who had won their opening game 7-1, so a good match was in prospect here. My friend turned up to watch, so like a couple of old men we watched proceedings sat in our garden chairs on a bank.

The Engineer kicked up the slope in the first half and initially we thought that the ref was going to wear a mask throughout the game. But after completing the toss up with the captains he removed it and things were as normal. The hosts couldn't get into the match and were 2-0 down by the break. Soon after the second goal the ref asked one of the home players to remove his watch! About time too! The match was played out in a good spirit and on 60 minutes one of the visiting subs helped treat and carry off one of the home players following an injury. Soon the scorer of the first two goals completed his hat-trick and further goals on 77 and 90(+1) minutes helped seal an easy win for the visitors, who on this showing looked like eventual title winners. Overall a better than expected afternoon out, played in an unexpectedly attractive public park and right next to some woodland walks. Comments from the home manager afterwards: 'Unfortunately not the boy's day yesterday, sloppy from the get go. A lot to work on for next week!' and from the away manager: 'Booooo! A convincing 5-0 win against Apsley. Totally dominated the match and we looked awesome.' which sums the game up really.

contributed on 07/10/20

TT No.21: Keith Aslan - Saturday 3rd October 2020; **LONDON SAMURAI ROVERS** v Indian Gymkhana; Middlesex County Premier; Kick-Off: 15.00; Result: 3 -2; Admission & Programme: Free. Attendance: 39 (12 home, 21 away & 6 neutral)

Used to live up the road from this one for a bit. Not been back for over 55 years so thought I'd take a trip down Memory Lane and have a look at my Alma Mater, North Road Junior, one of the few schools I didn't get expelled from, probably because I wasn't there long enough. The house where I used to live has changed beyond recognition, but the newsagent opposite is still there. I'd come back from football on a Saturday and stare out of the window waiting for the paper van to arrive with the classifieds. Then it was time to settle down with Mum and Dad to watch Dixon of Dock Green. Different times. Better times. Used to have family outings to Spikes Bridge Park where Samurai are now playing. Back then it was a pretty major athletics stadium with a large wooden stand, long gone of course, but the track is still there, now a footpath with the 3g pitch in the middle of it. Do it yourself teas were available from the adjacent dressing room block. For public transport junkies it's about a 20-minute walk from Southall Station.

Being the Middlesex League I was expecting a basic four-page accompaniment to the match. Imagine my happiness and joy to get a 12-page glossy colour production packed full of information for which they refused to take any money. Well done boys. Kai Tills was the subject of the player profile whose hobbies are drinking and watching football so no surprises there. Another expectation was that London Samurai were all from the land of the rising sun given their website is mostly in Nippon. Only four Japanese on show. In contrast Indian Gymkhana were all from where their name would suggest. (Where is Gymkhana I hear you ask!). For those people who think three substitutions just isn't enough the Middlesex League has rolling subs. This totally ruins the game and it broke up the match almost beyond repair. The 53-minute second half was exclusively prolonged due to the constant changeovers, just what is the point? One hopper who religiously documents this stuff got very confused. When we managed to get a bit of football between the stoppages it was a good game with Samurai eventually putting Gymkhana to the sword. With most of the games I've seen the players have to stay on the pitch at the interval and the length of half time is dependent on the weather. This afternoon being dry and mild we had 14 minutes which was how long the Gymkhana manager needed for his team talk. Bet he wouldn't have needed so long if it had been pouring with rain!

Spikes Bridge might, or might not be Samurais home for the season. The programme says it is, the manager says it is but *mitoo* shows a few games down the line being played at Wasps training ground in Acton which is shown as their base. Apparently, Acton is 'long term project' whatever that means, so you pay your money and take your choice (except everything's free). Ultimately, they are looking for a groundshare to give them the facilities to move upwards. Stands, floodlights etc. are just what the club needs to cater for its 12 supporters. But at the moment Spikes Bridge will be The House of the Rising Sun. One plus side with Covid restrictions is that Boots on St. Pancras Station puts out the reduced sandwiches much earlier, reduced in price not content. I bagged a couple of triple decker's containing Cheddar Ploughman's, egg mayonnaise and cheese and ale chutney for 50p a go. At those prices I could afford to eat every day. Glossy

programme, cheap food and home in time for Strictly Come Dancing, life doesn't get much better than that.

contributed on 04/10/20

TT No.20: Brian Buck - Saturday 26th September 2020. **Marshland Saints v Snettisham**; UK Van Solutions North West Norfolk League Division 1; Result: 6-1; Attendance: 15 approx.

This was a cold, damp and drizzly day as I made my way to the back of beyond and I entered the wilderness, otherwise known as The Fens, soon after I left the A10 at Littleport. The ground is actually in Marshland St James, which as the crow flies and there were plenty of them around today, about 4 miles east of Wisbech, but a lot longer if you go by car! The village is made up mainly of well-designed bungalows, but is with any shops or pubs, which was just as well really because at one point my journey here was along a very bumpy, narrow and undulating road, right next to a dyke and when a lorry came towards me, I thought I was going to be in for an early bath. But on the way back home three others, on the pitch, had already beaten me to it, having all been shown red cards.

I arrived here about 25 minutes before kick-off, to be followed into the car park by the thankfully experienced ref. The ground itself was quite smart, boasting what looked to me like a fairly recently built new village hall, complete with dressing rooms. Today, not only was it a bit nippy, but it was very windy as well. So complete with my trusty garden chair, I positioned myself on the far side of the pitch, which sheltered me not only from the wind but the rain, when it came, as well. But with leaves blowing across the pitch there was a very autumnal feel to the afternoon. As for the match, imagine newly promoted Leeds United hosting Liverpool and beating them 6-1! Visitors Snettisham had only lost one league match during the whole of last season, whereas Saints topped Division 2. The visitors also had the league's prima-donna in their line up and the number 8 managed to throw himself to the floor in such a way that would have made Bobby Davro jealous. He soon had a penalty claim turned down, then appeared to have a life-threatening injury which saw him leave the pitch until his presence on the pitch was required again later in the half.

Saints took the lead on 19 minutes, increasing it on 28 and 39 minutes. At half time many of their side lit up fags as they tried to keep warm. On 58 minutes Snettisham pulled a goal back from the spot 'won' by the number 8, but a minute later Saints scored their fourth goal, again from the spot and this one looked more genuine. The game continued, now with added friction, coming to a head on 68 minutes when a player from each side was sent off, one for a dreadful tackle and the other for seeking revenge. This saw the departure of the visitor's number 8. Then on 72 minutes Saints had another player sent off, this coming after the player concerned kicked the ball violently at the visitor's lino. But despite going down to nine men the hosts still managed to score twice more before the end after Snettisham seemed to give up. By the end the locals were very excited and winning this game must have been the most exciting thing they've seen here for

donkey's years. If you are around, or indeed if any of us are around, for the return game, then it should be well worth watching!

contributed on 29/09/20

TT No.19: Brian Buck - Friday 25th September 2020; **Thrapston Venturas v** Kettering Nomads Reserves; Northants Combination Division 2; Result: 3-1; Attendance: 95 approx.

Just two matches to choose from tonight and this one won over because it was easier to get to and cheaper than watching Woodford Town at Harlow, where recently I have been struggling getting down the steps in the stand and also the deafening noise their band makes. They have been temporarily housed in the seating area whilst the standing cover on the other side of the pitch remains out of bounds. The only disappointment at Chancery Lane was that the seats were taped off and so I had to stand.

Thrapston Venturas FC was originally formed for the 1960-61 football season and the club has experienced much glory over the years. The club entered the United Counties League in the 1978-79 season and were then renamed Thrapston Town following the restructuring of the league. Thrapston Venturas (Saturday) were reformed for the 2017/18 season and they play in Northants Combination and are hoping for back to back promotions to get them back to where the original Thrapston Venturas team enjoyed their football in UCL Division One.

Tonight, there was a typically large crowd for a Friday night match, possibly enhanced by the fact that there was no bell ringing going on in the nearby church. Oh, how the bellringers must anguish when there is a Friday night game going on at the same time! Tonight, it was interesting to note that the hosts lino was no other than Calvin Maddix, who used to cycle all the way to Potton United to do the same thing for them. So, on a cold night with occasional light rain the hosts took the lead on 16 minutes, but rather than force home their advantage they eased off and Nomads, playing with what looked like a number of their vet's team, equalised on 37 minutes. The second half was initially fairly even but towards the end Thrapston reasserted themselves and goals on 72 and 81 minutes saw them secure the points. Their lot was then made easier for them when Nomads had a player sent off right at the end for picking up a second yellow card.

contributed on 29/09/20

TT No.18: Steve Hardy - Saturday 26th September 2020; **Punjab United v** Inter Belper; Midland Regional Alliance Division Two; Result: 1-1; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 15 h/c.

Until last season, I had never heard of the village of Etwall, just south of Derby. Then CML side Hilton Harriers played a few games on the 3G pitch at Etwall Leisure centre, and today I discovered that Punjab United of the MRA were playing games at the Sandypits Playing Fields in the village as well.

It would be fair to describe the facilities here as non-existent. An un-roped off pitch at the rear of the Etwall Army Cadet hut on Sandypits Lane. The hut stayed firmly closed throughout, and the players changed pitch side. No refreshments available either, but at this level you wouldn't really expect there to be any, would you?

This is Inter Belper's first season in the league, and their supporters numbered 13 of the 15 people present. Punjab, on the other hand, are established members of the league with a 100% record so far this season.

The match itself was not as close as the score-line would suggest. Punjab were much the better club throughout, but didn't make it easy for themselves by missing two penalties in the first half hour. It looked as these misses would come back to bite them just after half time, when Belper were awarded a penalty of their own. Amazingly, this penalty was skied miles over the bar too and I began to think a 0-0 was inevitable. Punjab kept pressing though and got the breakthrough their pressure deserved with a glancing header on 70 minutes. Could they hold on? Of course not, and Belper got an unlikely equaliser in the last ten minutes to frustrate them again.

No covid19 precautions at all here, and I was the only person wearing a mask. Excellent day out on the whole though and a day off for Sarah Satnav who wasn't needed at all.

contributed on 27/09/20

TT No.17: Keith Aslan - Saturday 26th September 2020; **CHARLWOOD** v Worthing Town; Southern Combination (nee Sussex County League) Division 2; Kick Off: 14.58; Result: 1-2; Admission: Free; Programme: £1; Attendance: 35 (26 home, 5 away inc. 3 WAGS & 4 neutral).

The Sussex County, renamed Southern Combination by someone with too much time on their hands, has always been one of my favourite leagues. Most clubs are easy to get to and nice places to visit, with programmes being a requirement even in these dark days. Nice place and easy to visit describes Charlwood to a tee. A door to door bus service from Crawley station with a perfect view of the game from the bus stop going back. Only a 2 hourly service it fits in perfectly with a 3 o'clock kick off, but no good for a 2p.m. start. With the aftermath of a major signal failure at Gatwick still causing a few disruptions I played it safe and caught an earlier train. No problems but it meant I got to Crawley disappointingly early. A chance to explore the town to see if it had improved since my last visit. It hadn't. I did get a new Greggs tick but a with a bit of a wait to get in. Remember when people diligently queued up 6 feet apart. Not anymore. For the energetic hopper (surely an oxymoron) apparently you can walk to the ground in about an hour from Horley Station. I wasn't going to put it to the test.

The club play on the village green as they have done since 1901, a delightful setting less than a mile from Gatwick Airport although you wouldn't know it was there, at least not these days. Charlwood 'won' the mid-Sussex League last season

and are late arrivals to the Sussex County due to a drop out. They have adapted perfectly to their new status with everything up and running including the team. The brand-new changing room block was opened in 2016 including a club house, obviously currently shut. Hot drinks, sweeties and programmes were being sold from a table outside. A number of chairs were provided for spectators although the eight permanent benches along the far side were for the exclusive use of the two teams (why do they need eight?). Behind the goal is the glorious wooden double-sided bus shelter which would provide refuge from the rain, but not for very many. Across the road is a little cafe, recommended as a good venue to hang out pre match. Not cheap but a nice vibe and most importantly, warm. While last Saturday was a job for the sun tan lotion, today it was freezing cold with a wind chill factor Frobisher could relate to. With the away team not allowed in the changing rooms, their alfresco half time team talk was one of the shortest on record, sure to be beaten when the rainy season starts.

I don't normally support either team on my trips but I really wanted Charlwood to get something out of this one. Two nil down at half time they gave it a really good go in the second half. Two metal work strikes and a 'goal' disallowed for not crossing the line. I thought it did but the linesman disagreed. Unusual for this division he was a kosher official and not supplied by the club. When the home side did eventually score with ten minutes left, they laid siege to the Worthing goal with Charlwood's keeper spending as much time in the opposition's penalty area as his own. Running up and down the pitch didn't do him a lot of good. It would be unfair to call him fat, let's just say he was morbidly obese. Charlwood never scored their deserved equalizer while on another day they would have got a hatful.

I'm still giving the north of England a wide berth, very wise in view of a quote from the Lancashire F.A. in this week's 'Traveller' "Clubs and leagues are asked to effectively discourage non-essential spectators". Who are these non-essential spectators and how do you discourage them? Tell them they can come to the game but it will probably be rubbish so they'd be better off staying at home! Oh, and the mythical fines for not wearing a piece of cloth over your face on the trains, which started at £100, are now doubling every week and have now gone up to £6,400. The 'science' clearly states they make hardly any difference. Stop being silly.

contributed on 27/09/20

TT No. 16: *Brian Buck* - Saturday 19th September 2020; **Cropredy** v Yarnton; Oxfordshire Senior League Premier Division; Result: 2-0; Attendance: 30 approx.

Today was supposed to be one of those rare days when Mrs Buck and myself went to a game together, with our destination intended to be Aldeburgh Town in the Suffolk & Ipswich League, but after travelling no further than 200 yards my good lady decided that she didn't want to go after all. So, I turned round, dropped her off and headed roughly the same distance westward instead and after a slow drive I arrived in Cropredy about two hours later. This is a clean and pleasant village a few miles north of Banbury and not too far from 'Midsummer Murders' land. No dead bodies here though. Nonetheless Cropredy is famous as it's where Fairport

Convention live. They are apparently a rock band and as such they play one concert a year (but not this year) at the sports complex, which houses two cricket pitches and a football pitch. It seems that they all do rather well out of their hire fee. There are two pavilions, one is for one of the cricket pitches and is built on stilts and the other is part cricket and part football, but not open today until the football had finished. They also have two stands, of sorts, both three seaters, or double that if you are prepared to sit on the narrow foot rest. They are really the former dugouts. So, I plonked myself in one of these and true to form my view was soon blocked by three men who although they could have stood anywhere, decided to stand in front of where I was sitting. This was a warm sunny day and the 'crowd' socially distanced around the pitch, railed off on two sides and wooden fenced off on the other two sides. The hosts looked to be a useful, but aging side and they went a goal down on 9 minutes. But they then equalised immediately. Yarnton regained the lead on 24 minutes before the hosts scored what would be the final goal on 60 minutes, to eventually bring to a close a friction free relaxing afternoon, both on and off the pitch.

contributed on 22/09/20

TT No.15: Steve Hardy - Saturday 19th September 2020; **Eversley & California** v Long Crendon; FA Vase 1st Qualifying Round; Result: 1-3; Admission: £3 OAP; Programme: No; Attendance: 57 h/c

The glamour of the FA Vase was too big a draw to resist today, so it was off to poshest Berkshire for Combined Counties league Eversley and Hellenic league Long Crendon.

For some reason I was really grumpy all day today, and my mood wasn't improved when I eventually found the ground to be met at the gate with the dreaded 'no programme today' from the lad on turnstile duty. The programme was online he told me, but it turned out to be read only, and not available for download. Luckily, he then went on to say they had printed 5 copies of the programme for their sponsors, and should there be any left at kick off I could have one of those. There was one left at 2.59pm, so I gleefully snatched it out of his hands as the whistle blew for the start of the game!

The game itself was really one-sided, with Crendon coasting to a 3-0 half time lead. Eversley were dreadful and arguing with each other from start to finish didn't help their cause. The half time chat from the Manager was 'intense' as he changed his formation and brought on a couple of subs straight away. They never looked like getting back in to the game in the second half, although they did try a bit harder and deserved their consolation goal on 75 minutes.

Crendon brought a good, few supporters with them and there was generally a good atmosphere throughout. Social distancing worked well and their Covid19 regulations were well organised and practical. There is a super tea hut to the right as you come in to the ground, and both that and the admission charge were card only payment today.

I was still grumpy when I got home too, having ignored all Satnav Sarah's suggested directions, but at least the soar-away Royals result cheered me up.

contributed on 22/09/20

TT No.14: Keith Aslan - Saturday 20th September 2020; **EPPING TOWN** v Harold Wood Reserves; Essex Olympian Division 2; Kick Off: 14.29; Result: 7-3; Admission & programme: Free; Attendance: 54 (49 home, 3 away & 2 neutral)

Latest stop on my world tour of the south of England is the farthestmost reaches of the Central Line where a bus from outside the underground station will take you on a ten-minute ride to within three minutes Epping's ground. Don't leave it too late as the times on the internet don't match the timetable on the bus stop and the bus didn't correlate with either of them. Coming back everything went pear shaped, more of which anon.

Epping have been unceremoniously evicted from their Stonnards Lane ground and are now playing at Upper Clapton Rugby Club in the village of Thornwood Common, a few miles to the north of the town. A good move for both sports, the ground would otherwise be lying fallow as the playing of Rugby is still a no-no and the way things are going, is likely to remain so for some time to come. The rugby club moved there in 1933 when their east end ground kept on being flooded by the River Lea and they have retained their name ever since. Like most rugby clubs the bar facilities are top notch with hot drinks available, but no food. No lunchtime football either as they only put the TV on to show rugby games. Epping have made a good job of the ground, completely surrounded by a luminous green rope with matching posts. Very effective. On a glorious autumnal afternoon, the matchday experience was also enhanced by numerous planes flying overhead from the nearby North Weald Aerodrome. Only one dug out, they haven't got the money for the away one at present! Epping apologise to all their opponents in advance who are so far quite happy about it. Might not be so happy if it's pouring with rain? For their opening game a fortnight ago, they attracted a crowd of 126, less than half that here today. Track and trace seemed to be operating on a voluntary basis, nobody asked me for my details. The bar had a clearly signed one way exit and entrance system which appeared to be far too complicated for many of the locals. And the football team fund raising cards aren't going to be a big seller at a fiver a pop. On my last visit to Epping's old ground they had a bloke called Stan Bowles playing for them who looked rather good.

Mr. Referee, Alan Moore, deserves a name check. Spent many minutes pre. match talking to both teams, another long tete-a-tete with the club linesmen, checked both nets and still got the game going on time. See boys it can be done. And a 2.30 kick off that finished at 11 minutes past four, oh happiness and joy, a proper football match. The first half will live long in the memory with a goal every five minutes. 0-1, 1-1, 1-2, 2-2, 2-3. At this point I confidently predicted Epping wouldn't come back a third time with Harold Wood looking the better side. Within 20 minutes 2-3 had become 6-3 proving even someone as wonderful as me can occasionally get it wrong. Only one goal in the second half, but still much to enjoy.

Got back to the bus stop but from the outset it was apparent all was not well. A very busy road with a constant stream of traffic in the other direction, hardly any cars at all going towards Epping. When I noticed a van go by then come back a couple of minutes later, I knew Mr. Bus wouldn't be making an appearance this afternoon. Found out later an accident two miles north had closed the road. With much trepidation I began the three-mile trek back to the station. Not something I was looking forward to in my delicate state of health. At the next stop, 15 minutes down the road, a passenger had ordered a taxi which was turning up as I arrived and we shared it back to the station so all was well in the end and no delay to the arrival time back at my country dacha. And good news for all you Stratford fans, they now let you go from one station to the other without sending you on a detour around the Olympic Village. Lots of arrows in Westfield Shopping Centre telling people where to walk. Lots of people ignoring them too.

contributed on 20/09/20

TT No.13: Brian Buck - Saturday 12th September 2020; **Fleckney Athletic** v Sileby Town; Everards Brewery Leicestershire Senior League Premier Division; Result: 0-2; Attendance: 65 approx.

Today we had an easier than it looked journey to our chosen game. Fleckney can be found a few miles west of the A6, roughly halfway between Market Harborough and Leicester. On our arrival at the ground, just under an hour before kick-off, it looked as though we might have a problem. As we drove into the car park the pitch, where we thought that the game was going to take place, next to the dressing rooms, was marked out, but without any other football furniture being in place. Then we were directed, past a cricket match in progress through a gap in a hedge, to find the landscaped pitch down below us. It was on a partial plateau, with banking on two sides, with the other two sides dropping away. Then, certain that the game was on, we headed to the nearest watering hole where we were served by a lovely smiling barmaid who looked just as good wearing her see-through plastic face shield.

We were back well in time for the start of the game. I think that this might have been the first time I've ever seen a Leicestershire Senior League Premier Division game not played out on a railed off pitch, but being a Step 7 division, they don't need to rail it off and so instead it was roped off on one side with the occasional barriers on the dugout side. Viewing was supposed to be on the roped off side only and generally this was adhered to, although a few people strayed from this from time to time. Nonetheless this was a scenic ground and being in a dip behind some trees on a pleasant afternoon there was a good rural feel to the place. Newly promoted Fleckney weren't quite at the races in this match and going two goals down, both scored in the last 15 minutes of the first half was about right. The hosts made at least two subs at the break and I doubt if one of them saw either of the goals scored as he only turned up for the game just before half time. The second half saw Fleckney play better, but Sileby easily held on to take home all the points. This was a decent enough afternoon's football and it was good to see some friends here whom I only seem to see occasionally.

contributed on 15/09/20

TT No.12: Brian Buck - Saturday 5th September 2020; **Epping Town** v Hullbridge Sports 'A'; ProKit Essex Olympian League Senior League Cup 1st Round; Venue: played at Epping Upper Clapton Rugby Club, Upland Road, Thornwood Common; Result: 2-0; Attendance: 160 approx.

Today we undertook a scenic route to this game, avoiding Harlow and Epping to get to Thornwood Common by going via St Margaretsbury's ground and also that of Roydon, where our back up match was taking place. This season Epping Town have been forced to move here because they have encountered problems with the Town Council over the use of their ground at Stonards Hill in Epping itself. From what I can tell, the club want to restore it, to as it was in their 'glory' days, which came to a halt when the original Epping Town resigned from the Isthmian League mid-season and appeared to fold.

In fact, between December 1974 and March 1984 I saw twelve games here. Many of my visits to games here were made by public transport in the days when I lived in Cheshunt. I can't tell you what fun I had changing buses in the middle of Epping Forest by the Wakes Arms for evening games, where street lights were almost non-existent! But on 21 April 1986 I also saw a game on a recreation ground, behind Epping Town's ground and here I saw Coopersale beat Upminster 5-1 in an Essex Olympian League Senior Division 2 match (att: 9). In 1992 they became Eppingsale and Epping in 1999 before becoming the reincarnated Epping Town in 2018. These days with the fencing taken down and the two grounds seemingly looking as one, you can see why the Council want both grounds to form one recreation ground in the middle of Epping. However, if Epping Town's old ground was sold for housing then I'm sure that the sparks would fly.

Today we arrived at the ground some 45 minutes before kick-off and then made use of the excellent bar the balcony of which offers a good, but distant view of the pitch, which was one pitch width away, that one being for use, but not today, by the rugby club. We also picked up a team sheet. Ours were in colour. There was information printed on both sides but there were no line ups. On a breezy, sunny but not too cold day, this was a fairly even game to watch. Neither side looked like world beaters but the hosts won it with goals on 27 and 80 minutes. In a match of limited scoring opportunities at no stage could I see Hullbridge winning, even though they tried hard. This is early days for Epping here. If they work hard at it, both on and off the pitch and develop a strong relationship with their landlords then this move could end up being the best thing they've ever done!

contributed on 15/09/20

TT No.11: Keith Aslan - Saturday 12th September 2020; **HANBOROUGH** v Cropredy; Oxfordshire Senior League Premier Division; Kick Off: 14.35, late start due to the home team reluctant to leave the changing room; Result: 1-5; Admission: Free; Programme: £2.50p; Attendance: 41 (34 home, - 0 away & 7 neutral).

The ground is a 20/25-minute walk from Hanborough station, the stop after Oxford. Coombe is somewhat closer, but with five trains a week and none on Saturday it's probably better to give that one a miss. The ground is in a rustic setting, brand new brick-built dugouts with a chain erected along a small part of the pitch before they lost interest and left the rest of it lying on the ground. The village hall contained the dressing rooms with a small bit of cover outside giving a reasonable view of the pitch if the weather turns dodgy. Round the back is the important bit, the clubhouse, serving tea and coffee at half time with a television which somehow managed to show the Brentford v Birmingham match in spite of not having Sky. Apparently, someone ran it off their mobile phone, the wonders of modern technology are a mystery to me. No food but the chip shop up the road provided adequate sustenance. A colour programme with more issues to follow if it's a success. Don't quite know how they would gauge 'success'. There were around ten left over, can't understand why Hanborough couldn't get someone to go round the ground flogging them. They remained in situ on the bar which most of the crowd didn't visit. The area is where *Midsummer Murders* is filmed but everybody managed to see out the match without falling victim to the myriad of serial killers floating around. Indeed, the locals all looked harmless, it's the groundhoppers you needed to worry about.

I know I say it every week, but really nice people running this club, and they donated their match fees to a fund set up for Cropredy player Aaron Field who suffered a massive stroke the previous weekend. Would be interested to know what Hanborough's 'match fees' actually are? As last Saturday, a pretty substantial win for the away side. When Cropredy were awarded a penalty in the second half the home goalkeeper lobbed a hail of abuse at the referee which as I heard from a considerable distance he certainly did. The correct decision would have been to send Mr. Potty-mouth off but the referee did nothing. I suppose you've got to expect an increase in abuse without the 'Respect' handshakes. ha! ha! When the dust settled the keeper did pull off a fine save. Cropredy would have won the league last season and look like carrying on where they left off, while Hanborough weren't too bad at all with plenty of hope for the future.

TRAIN WATCH: Running at around 70 per cent capacity of pre Covid levels, not anything official just my observations, no catering on any of them and I've yet to come across an on-train ticket inspection making them a mecca for fare dodgers. At Paddington a note on the loos said 'toilets shut due to reduced customer numbers' You what? I'll draw a veil over the facemask fiasco (mythical fines now up to £3,200) but much kudos to the tourists who tried to put one on the statue of Paddington Bear. With West Ham at home I would under normal circumstances expect to be overwhelmed by belligerent cockneys at Stratford station so there is a definite plus side to not allowing any spectators.

While I was on my travels, on the home front Ramsgate sold out their cup tie with Chipstead on Friday morning. That's 400 tickets, where have all these people come from. And Sundays *'Non-League Paper'* had yet another photograph of the famous

Margate Crosses. These are becoming the town's number one tourist attraction (there ain't much else to do in the place).

contributed on 13/09/20

TT No.10: Gary Spooner - Saturday 5th September 2020; Easington United v Billingham Synthonia; Northern League Division Two; Kick-Off: 3pm; Result: 2-1; Admission: xx; Programme: Yes; Attendance: 131.

It's good to be back! Yesterday saw my first competitive game on a Saturday since March 14th. I do love a trip to the seaside and yesterday saw me heading to Easington Colliery for their game against Billingham Synthonia.

Very friendly welcome and big credit to all the Easington staff whose tremendous hard work had ensured that a crowd of 131 could watch the football. Similar efforts up and down the country too so that local fans and hoppers alike can get their weekly footie fix. Most definitely appreciated!

Onto the game and Easington took the lead in the 21st minute only to see Billingham equalise in the 22nd minute. 4 minutes later Easington were back in front from a 40-yard free kick. Superb precision or wind assisted luck - I'm sure there were different opinions! No more goals but a very competitive game with high drama in injury time. A goal-bound Synthonia header was saved on the line by an Easington player. Handball! Red card! Penalty! The Easington keeper then pulled off a tremendous save to deny Synthonia a share of the points.

Sweeping views out to sea from most of the ground, superb pie, chips and peas from the food hut and a decent game as well made for an excellent day out. Long may they continue.

contributed on 06/09/20

TT No.9: Keith Aslan - Saturday 5th September 2020; **CLARENDON** v Denmead; Hampshire League Division 1; Kick Off: 14.59; Result: 1-7; Admission: Free; Programme: £2; Attendance: 48 (29 home, 4 away & 15 neutral).

Standing in a field in the middle of the warm Wiltshire countryside, stuffing my face with sausage baps, clutching some paper and chatting to like-minded souls about the evils of e-programmes, it's afternoons like this that make me almost glad to be alive. This one is virtually impossible to do for the carless, it can just about be done for an early kick-off if you get a bus from the Russian tourist hotspot of Salisbury, but you have to return via Andover. So, this afternoon I was grateful to a well-known northern hopper who chauffeured me to the game from Grately station. Having driven down from Stockport he picked me up spot on the time we agreed. I can only marvel at his accuracy in working out exactly how long the 150 odd mile drive would take. The 20-minute car journey took us through the delightfully named village of Over Wallop to the ground in the equally bewitchingly monikered Middle Winterslow. Two miles south was the village of East Grimstead; I wonder how much of their mail ends up in Sussex? The ground is a beauty, dressing rooms and a tea bar, two pitches at the back with Clarendon debuting on the

newly acquired front pitch. It used to belong to the cricket club and when it dispersed in 2018 the football team put the land to much better use.

Clarendon have got it all sussed off the field. Track and trace on entry, hot and cold drinks and scrummy bacon and sausage rolls served by a couple of sensual ladies and an all colour glossy programme from the JMA stable. Tea bar was out of bounds and serving was through a hatch. No problems on a day like today but I do wonder how all this alfresco caper is going to pan out in the winter months. The chairman welcomed us on arrival, a really nice set up with their home debut in the Hampshire League being an absolute pleasure to attend. And to answer the question on everybody's lips, they're called Clarendon because they play adjacent to the Clarendon Way, an old Roman road (aren't all Roman roads old?)

While everything is hunky dory off the pitch the football team is still a work in progress with the higher grade proving a bit of a struggle. 1-0 down in two minutes, 3-0 down in 15, and 5-0 down at half time the outcome was never in doubt. Had to admire the optimism of home goal scorer, Sam Cook (not that one), who pulled a goal back in the second half, then picked the ball up and rushed to the centre circle to get the game restarted quickly to give more time to continue the comeback which needless to say never came. I really would like to see Clarendon settle down in the Hampshire league, a lovely club run by wonderful people. They deserve success.

The paper accoutrement attracted some top of the range groundhoppers one of which had been to an Arthur Dunn Cup semi-final in the morning. This had finished level and now is to be replayed. Must be the only competition in the country that has extra time and replays, at the moment. Good to see the AFA going their own way. Also present this afternoon was an overlord from the Hampshire FA who must have been the only spectator who was surprised to find there was a programme. I did suggest programmes should be made compulsory in the Hampshire League, but I don't think he took it on board. If anybody wants to know why I do what I do an afternoon at Clarendon would explain everything.

contributed on 06/09/20

TT No.8: Brian Buck - Tuesday 25th August 2020; **Slip End United** v Lancot Park; Friendly Match; Result: 2-0; Attendance: 15 approx.

Having done my homework, I knew where this ground was located, but others might struggle as the entrance to the playing field is not signed. However, it is on the way to Airparks, where people leave their cars (at a cost) before flying out from Luton Airport and it is next to St Andrews Church, which is signed. Slip End play in the Leighton & District Sunday League and the visitors tonight were Lancot Park of the Beds County League and they put in a decent warm up session before the match started promptly at 6.30pm. Meanwhile the hosts appeared in drifts and drabs and did a token warm up just before kick-off.

As this ground is right next to the M1, I was expecting to be deafened by the noise of the traffic, but with a combination of a high wooden fence and the wind

blowing in the 'right' direction you couldn't hear it at all. The match kicked off roughly on time and it saw the hosts attacking the end which had a 'Danger Archery in progress' sign behind the goal, which was irrelevant on such a windy night as this. On 35 minutes we had a brief rain shower and then three minutes later Slip End scored. It was a curious goal. A long ball was played forward towards the centre forward. He had his back to it but knew it was coming and indeed it did, as it went over his head. He then waited to see where it bounced before deciding whether to chase it or not. But as it was 'within range' he decided to and he soon collected the ball, ran on and slotted home easily. In this half Lancot Park had started well, but the spoils went mainly Slip End's way. The second half was slightly more even, but for me the hosts still shaded it. Both sides were now making subs but as they had very few to bring on it was more of giving players a rest before they returned. At the end I went to the 'bench' get the goal scorer's name, only to be told that he got both goals! But I'd only seen one. Despite this he had scored twice, as he told me as he helped take the nets down. Perhaps I was watching the planes passing overhead from nearby Luton Airport when he got his other goal!

contributed on 04/09/20

TT No.7: Keith Aslan - Saturday 29th August 2020; **CORINTHIAN CASUALS SCHOOLS XI** v Lancing Old Boys; Friendly; Kick Off: 11.06; Result 1-1; Admission: Free; Programme: £2; Attendance: 66 (60 home, 2 away & 4 neutral).

As soon as I saw a photograph of the front of the programme this was the match for me today. Probably the best cover in the world. It features one of those cheesy L.P. covers from the 70's, retro chic I think you'd call it, and best of all, it had nothing to do with football. Check it out on their website. This should be nominated for the Turner Prize. Had a long chat with Stuart Tree, the editor, who tried, and very much succeeded, to do something a bit different on the front. Sixteen glorious pages of glossy colour with everything you could possibly want to know about the two teams (but alas no information on who the six pollo-necked pullover clad chaps on the cover were). While Margate wouldn't give out team sheets last week for fear of the paper spreading Coronavirus, no such problems with today's programme. Maybe it's printed on the same Covid resistant paper that Margate used on their raffle tickets which they were freely hawking around without any thought for public safety?

The Corinthian Casuals Schools XI definitely weren't schoolboys, far from it, while Lancing Old Boys were all quite young with a couple of them looking as though they should be back in school next week. It's all explained in the programme. In truth this wasn't the best game I've ever seen, spoilt by the strong wind and the fact that neither side were very good at playing football. The ground, a 12-minute walk from Tolworth station, has changed little from my last visit, the clubhouse is full of old photographs and the back of the stand has a large tableau of figures from Corinthians past. When you've got a history as rich as theirs it's worth flaunting. A wooden shed has the word 'Megastore' emblazoned above the door that I took to be ironic. There is a horsebox from which food will be available in

happier times. The stand is festooned with flags including one from the 'Airdrie Casuals', a bit of a trek to home games I'd have thought. Only thing open was the bar which also sold hot drinks, but when I went to get my half time 'cuppa' they wouldn't let me in without a face mask which I didn't have. No problems, they gave me one. A free facemask, what more can you ask for, I will keep it as a souvenir of my visit. I suppose it will always come in handy if I decide to rob a bank.

COVID WATCH: Temperature taken on arrival, apparently I'm still alive, and I had to give my details for the 'World beating track and trace system' as Boris calls it, or 'shambolic mess' as it is more widely known. I've lost count of the number of times I've been to Cafes, restaurants, pubs and football grounds and given them my phone number but not one of them has ever called me up to ask how I'm doing. Casuals have a scaled down version of Margate's famous crosses on the terraces, these weren't painted but made from tape, the type the police put round your house when someone's been murdered. All very confusing because at Margate you were supposed to stand on them while here you had to avoid them. A man with a contraption on his back went running round the ground spraying wayward balls with antiseptic before they were allowed to be put back into play. While the supporters were well protected, the Lancing players didn't have enough shirts and kept swapping them around when substitutions were made. A big no, no.

First time I've been on a tube train since lockdown, the government's policy of scaring people off public transport is one of their success stories, putting the fares up again is a masterstroke. I don't get as much pleasure from travelling as I used to, this facemask caper is a big turn off, and I can't see me travelling any great distances in the foreseeable future. The highlight of my day was lunch in my favourite Euston eatery. No track and trace, face masks or social distancing here, it's just like the old days. And the delightful serving girl is still there. She said how nice it was to see me again, not words I'm accustomed to hearing.

contributed on 30/08/20

TT No.6: Keith Aslan - Saturday 22nd August 2020; **MARGATE** v Ramsgate; Isle of Thanet Cup; Kick Off: 14.58! Result: 3-2; Admission: £4 for old people; Programme: Well I got something (see below); Attendance: Covid-19 capacity of 300 (228 home, 72 away & 0 neutral).

I spent more time trying to get a ticket for this one than I did watching the match. Computer owners only and my computer skills are basic with a capital 'S'. Just about managed to fill in all my details and order a ticket but I have no facilities to print it off and long phone calls to the exceedingly helpful chap at Margate meant that I was able to quote my ticket number on arrival and he would be on the gate to allow me entrance. He said I could also use my smart phone. What's that? My mobile makes and receives phone calls which is as smart as it gets. Why does the club need all of my details anyway? If it's discovered someone at the match has Coronavirus are the other 299 really going to be contacted and told to self-isolate. I think not. Ten out of ten for Covid compliance here, somebody must have spent hours painting socially distanced crosses all around the ground for people to stand

on which nobody did. Don't understand why the council don't draw crosses in the sand on Broadstairs Beach, that's sure to end overcrowding. Two out of every three seats were marked as being out of bounds. Not if you're a family of four they aren't. The toilets were shut up at half-time because that's when everybody wants to use them! Bar shut but amazingly the burger van was open, surely this was the greatest danger to public health, not through Covid but salmonella. Now it just gets really silly. No programmes of course but someone went round the ground and Sellotaped a rather sexy looking team sheet to a couple of walls. It was part teams and part programme containing lots of bits about the game and containing vital information about toilet closures. I asked for a copy and was told that, due to Covid restrictions, they can't hand them out. If paper spreads the disease my newsagent is living on borrowed time and the mortuaries would be full of dead postmen. Come on boys, if you aren't going to do a programme just 'fess up, don't pretend they are plague carriers. As soon as the team sheets were put up, they were taken down, mostly by me, and I have a nice little addition to my collection.

The Non-League Paper issued a 'Margate Special' on Sunday to celebrate the biggest game in the country. That might at first sight seem a ridiculous thing to say, but you try and think of a bigger one. Three of the six photographs on the front page were of Thanet's finest, I found particularly enchanting the snap of a section of the crowd all dutifully standing apart on the crosses. I wonder how long it took to choreograph that one. Page four has a large photograph of the legendary crosses. Who on earth would look at that picture and think 'That's social distancing all sorted out'. And Charlotte Richardson obviously enjoyed the game. In her match report she gave it five stars. It was good, but not that good.

The Isle of Thanet Cup has been going for as long as I can remember (not a great distance these days), a pre-season match between the Islands big two (only?) clubs. Always a joyous occasion the attendance would have been well over double today's in normal times. It's also the friendliest derby you'll ever attend off the pitch, with both sets of fans happily frolicking together, but not on their allotted crosses. Before the game there was a minute's applause for an ex-Margate player who had recently died. I never join in with these, I find clapping somebody who has recently died to be extremely disrespectful, If you can't have a minutes silence, don't bother with anything. An entertaining match you needed to get there early with Ramsgate's opening goal coming before the advertised kick off. Five minutes in it was one all which was how it stayed until the second half. Margate went two goals in front before the Rams pulled one back five minutes from time resulting in a pulsating climax. It was good to be part of an actual crowd watching football, a small step in the right direction.

The match kicked off two minutes early, comprised of two 45-minute halves and didn't have any water breaks. If only this was the 'new normal'.

contributed on 23/08/20

TT No.5: Keith Aslan - Saturday 15th August 2020; **ROCHESTER CITY** v **POTTERS**; Pre-Season Friendly; Kick Off: 14.20; Result 1-2; Admission: Free; Programme: I

can just about remember what they used to look like; Attendance: 15 (12 home, 0 away & 3 neutral)

Latest stop on my 'why am I watching this' tour is the Victory Sports Academy in Chatham. Like all Medway towns Chatham is a festering pit of hopelessness and despair where there is nothing much to do other than ponder on the futility of life. The only recollection I have of my trip to Chatham Town many years ago was climbing the brutal hill to the ground, and to reach today's destination the same ascent was required. Back then I was young, fit, and handsome while today I am old, decrepit but still good looking. Let's just say I wasn't too perky by the time I reached the ground. It took 45 minutes of toil and struggle to arrive at the Academy but less than half an hour to roll back to the station. As well as the 3g my game was played on (Guess what colour the surrounding fence was?) there are three other grass pitches with another game taking place on one of them. There are spectator facilities along one side where the vast crowd somehow managed to socially distance themselves. Next door to the Academy is Fort Luton which is now a museum of the Second World War mainly featuring the Dunkirk evacuation. I would have liked to have seen it, but it was closed due to a bug that's apparently floating around, at the moment. Good job the rescue didn't have to take place these days. By the time a risk assessment was carried out and everybody was checked to make sure they were wearing facemasks before boarding a boat we'd have lost the war. And coming over from France don't forget the two weeks quarantine.

Rochester City hail from the Kent County while Potters play in the Sevenoaks & District League. I have done Potters, (impressed huh?) for a final of the 'Craske & Wells Trophy' They still do a proggy. for the final of this competition and back in the day it used to be played at the home of one of the competing teams but is now played at the grandiose surroundings of Sevenoaks Town. The difference in status between the two teams was not apparent with Potters scoring the first goal thanks to a goalkeeping boo-boo then quickly adding a second before Rochester reduced the deficit before half time with one of the best taken penalties you're ever likely to see. There were no goals in part two. A fashionably late start the referee atoned by just playing 45 minutes in the first half and a truncated 43 in the second due to the teams who booked the pitch for 4 o'clock champing at the bit to get on. He forgot the first half drinks break but surprisingly none of the players appeared to be suffering any effects of dehydration due to the omission. He made up for it with an extra, long break in the second that was one fifth drinkies and four fifths team talk. I got my first soaking of the season but didn't care, it's just nice to be watching football again.

These shortened trips, Chatham is just an hour from Broadstairs, make for an early return to my country dacha giving me the opportunity to watch Total Wipeout, a classic edition with Freddie and Paddy. Almost makes me pine for Mrs. Brown's Boys!

contributed on 15/08/20

TT No.4: Keith Aslan - Saturday 8th August 2020; **STURRY** v The Fountain; Kick Off: 14.05; Pre-Season Friendly; Result: 1-0; Admission: Free; Programme: Don't be silly; Attendance: 16 (15 home incl. 5 W.A.G.S., 0 away & 1 neutral)

No surprises that the station for this one is Sturry, next stop after Canterbury and a mere 6-minute walk from the ground by following the footpath along the south side of the tracks. I've been through here literally millions of times but this was the first occasion I've actually got off the train. The ground is on the cusp of Fordwich, an olde worlde Disneyesque town that on a boiling hot day like today was rammed with tourists. I've been to numerous places that boast they are the 'biggest village in Britain' but Fordwich has no rivals for the 'smallest town' accolade. Population 381 its town status is due to having a town council and a town hall. Another claim to fame is that it's the smallest Town Hall in the country. Originally erected in Norman times it was rebuilt as recently as 1555. (how did I ever manage to live my life before Wikipedia?) Two pubs in Fordwich, the first one you come to is the George and Dragon. Someone was standing at the door with a clipboard wearing a facemask so I gave that a wide berth. No facemasks at the Fordwich Arms but I was forced outside to consume my very expensive pint. (What are they going to do in winter?). The beer garden was on the banks of the Stour offering a perfect view of some rather comely young girls jumping off a boat into the river. Didn't get much of the giant Sudoku done.

Nice ground partly enclosed, with hot and cold drinks plus nibbles for sale from the tea bar, although they had to be bought outside to you due to Covid restrictions. A miniature railway is next door, not running today and it backs onto the main line. I was kept entertained checking the timekeeping of passing trains (and to think some people call me sad). Sturry are fairly new arrivals in the Kent County League while The Fountain strut their stuff in the Ashford & District League. The Waterboys had the best of the first half before Sturry took over in the second, scoring the only goal of the match on 60 minutes. I thoroughly enjoyed the game, just happy to be watching live football. With both teams ready to go well before the allotted kick off time the referee emerged from his car at precisely 2 o'clock making for a late start. Would it really have been too difficult for him to have rolled up 5 minutes earlier? Apparently so. No linesmen's flags so one was waving his shirt around while the home official chose a cone to attract the ref's attention. Mr. referee wasn't going to let the fact it was a friendly being played in 34 degrees heat stop him from adding oodles of time on to the 90 minutes. Towards the end players were going down with cramp but he made everyone aware he was going to add on the time they were being treated. Presuming he knew why the players were cramping up did he really think adding more time on to the match was a particularly good idea? The obligatory water break in the second half took longer than usual as The Fountain weren't ready to start up again so soon. How long does it take to have a drink of water? Only an eight minutes half time enabled me to catch my train after the match. The home goalie strolled onto the pitch smoking a cigarette, a proper non-league footballer. At half time a real live skinhead turned up. Known to the locals he wore a tee shirt, jeans, braces and bover boots with the appropriate haircut. He made a bizarre sight given that he was older than me

and even less well preserved. For most people being a skinhead was a teenage phase, for this bloke it was a lifestyle choice. Good luck to him.

Home by five, this was a nice short trip for me. It will be sometime before I consider making any long journeys to watch my football. Even though I wasn't actually supposed to be watching the game due an F.A. directive, I just about managed to social distance among the 16 'crowd'. So, when the 'second spike' hits us it won't be because I went to a football match.

contributed on 09/08/20

TT No.3: Brian Buck - Saturday 1st August 2020; **Oracle Components** v Hatfield Town U23; Friendly Match; Kick-Off: 3pm Venue: played at Richard Hale School, Hertford; Result: 2-2; Attendance: 20 approx.

After the previous match had finished there was just enough time to nip home for a cup of tea and a sandwich before setting out again. I arrived at this 3G pitch about twenty minutes before kick where I bumped into a couple of other Groundhoppers and we spent the afternoon in each other's company, socially distancing of course! They have a big pitch here and more importantly to us Groundhoppers, a spectator viewing area, accessed today by walking onto the 3G surface and going through a side gate. The game seemed to start a few minutes early and was quite a competitive one without any serious friction, although the ref did get a bit of an ear bashing from Hatfield until they realised that despite his attire, he was actually quite a decent one and they eventually left him alone. The score was 1-1 at the break and then with the visitors replacing just about the whole of their side it seemed that they might dominate the second half and they took the lead on 72 minutes, but Oracle, making fewer changes, dug in and equalised with a cleverly won spot kick six minutes later. Although this was a school ground it was one of the better set ups and with it being partially tree lined this wasn't an unpleasant place to watch football at this time of the year.

contributed on 05/08/20

TT No.2: Brian Buck - Saturday 1st August 2020; **Renhold United** v Ampthill Town; Friendly Match; Kick-Off: 11am; Result: 0-10; Attendance: 10 approx.

With my last game being on 14th March at East Ruston, that was it for four and a half months when all live football was stopped. But things got worse for me as in June I was sent to Bedford Hospital for tests, after I reported severe pains in my back and chest. Furthermore, my GP noted that I had an irregular heartbeat. I was expecting to be there for a few hours but in the end, I was there for three days. During this time my heart returned to something like normal but it was discovered that I have gallstones. Now I am waiting for an operation to remove my gallbladder, where most, if not all, of the gallstones are hiding but because of a back log it seems that I will have to wait months for this to happen!

By now I was on a low-fat diet and most of my pains had gone, although I was still feeling a bit lethargic, but it was the first day when friendly matches could start again. Since our last visit here the remains of the bulldozed Three Horseshoes pub

have been removed and has been replaced by three nearly finished detached houses, making spotting the entrance to the ground behind them a tad more difficult to find. I watched the match from the comfort of my trusty garden chair. It was a decent day for football, warm when the sun was out, but a bit nippy when replaced by the rain threatening clouds. On the pitch you could work out what was going to happen before a ball was kicked. SSML Division 1 side Ampthill had enough players to field a different side each half whereas the hosts, who will be playing in Beds County League Division 2 this season, just had an enlarged squad, with the emphasis on 'enlarged' and some of them will need to shift a few pounds before competitive football starts. As is often the case in these games the inferior side started well and for a while the spoils were even. But on 18 minutes Ampthill took the lead and they were leading 3-0 by the break. At this point Mrs 'Renhold' or Mrs 'Renhold - Wixams' these days, because she and hubby have moved house, came to see us, primarily to get our contact details, not because we will get a Christmas card from her, but it had more to do with the 'track and trace' regarding the virus. In the second half Ampthill racked up the goals. Eventually it was just a case of when they would get double figures. They had a chance to do this on 90(+3) minutes from the spot, but the shot was impressively saved. But the tenth goal did arrive two minutes later.

contributed on 05/08/20

TT No.1: Keith Aslan - Saturday 1st August 2020; **HAROLD WOOD ATHLETIC** v LAINDON ORIENT; Pre-Season Friendly; Kick Off: Noon; Result: 1-2; Admission: Free; Programme: In my dreams; Attendance: 44 (36 home, 4 away & 4 neutral)

Dateline March 14th, AFC Stoneham, seems like a lifetime away. My last live football, no social distancing, no facemasks, chatting with fellow hoppers over a cup of tea and cake. Who'd have thought life would have changed so much. Nobody could have foreseen four months on we would be playing football with no crowds, five substitutes, compulsory drink breaks and no 'Respect' handshakes. I was desperate to see a football match today. Didn't care if it was rubbish without any paper, I just had to get some live action. First choice would have been up the road with Ramsgate taking on Folkestone, but obviously that had to be played behind closed doors. It would be impossible to socially distance around a hundred people crammed into a ground that can only hold four thousand! I chose Harold Wood as the early kick off meant I could get home in time to watch the Cup Final. With the F.A. Cup a shadow of its former self I don't even bother to watch the final these days unless Chelsea are in it. So that's virtually every year then. In view of the result I could have quite happily given this one a miss as well.

Harold Wood is so named as it was the old stomping ground of King Harold. You can see what attracted him to the place, a pleasant suburb on the eastern outskirts of London with the 'recreation park' just six minutes from the station. As well as the main pitch it contains a number of others of various sizes, tennis courts, and not one but two cricket pitch's both of which were in operation today. Double the boredom. Hot drinks and sweeties were available from a hatch in the middle of the park, next door was a bar which claimed to open up at twelve o' clock. I think they

were just teasing. The arboreal surroundings made this an aesthetically pleasing venue to watch your football. Denizens of the Essex Olympian it complies with the leagues ground grading requirements by virtue being fully roped off but there are four seats dotted around the pitch for the hard of standing but you have to get there early if you want to bag one. In one corner of the ground is a large stone human sundial. You stand on the month and your shadow points to the time. It works.

Match not as bad as I was anticipating, both teams gave it a go and all of the players looked as though they wanted to be there, not always the case at some end of season games. Kicked off spot on time, well actually 25 seconds early if you want to be pedantic and was won by Laindon with two goals in the 46th and 48th minute of the first 45. Like their professional counterparts they had to stop every 20 minutes or so for 'water breaks'. Possibly if the two teams hadn't pointlessly run around in the hot sun for 40 minutes prior to kick off they wouldn't have got so thirsty.

Football all good but the journey to and from deeply unpleasant due to current restrictions. There are ten stations between Stratford and Harold Wood and at each one was a booming recorded message telling passengers/customers there is a £1,000 fine for not wearing a facemask. A thousand quid, it's only £100 everywhere else, or in reality nothing as the police quite rightly have more important things to occupy their time. As well as facemask vigilantes to contend with you can't just walk from one station to the other at Stratford, you have to take a circuitous route that takes twice as long. And 'Westfield Shopping City' provides a wonderful example of the illogicality of all this. No numerical restrictions or queues to enter, everybody just piles in, no social distancing whatsoever on the concourses and strangest of all, no compulsory facemasks either. But if you want to go into a shop you have to queue up (again no social distancing) and wait until the store is almost empty before you are allowed entry providing you first put on a facemask which now becomes compulsory. My groundhopping will be somewhat curtailed while this nonsense carries on. If you spend up to 14 hours on a train, you have to enjoy travelling by train. That enjoyment has now gone.

Still hope is on the horizon with our flaxen haired leader telling us it will all be over by Christmas. Didn't one of his predecessors say the same thing about the First World War?

contributed on 03/08/20

End