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TT REPORTS 2021-22

updated 30/06/22

TT No.180: *Brian Buck - Saturday 25th June 2022; Estudiantes (London) v Hinton U23; Friendly Match; Venue: played at College of Haringey, Enfield & North East London, (aka CONEL College), Hertford Road, Enfield; Kick Off 3.40pm approx.; Result: 1-9; Attendance 3.*

We were expecting Edgware to provide the opposition for the second game, but Hinton U23 turned up instead and this seemed to bemuse Darren (see report below), as much as it did ourselves.

In this match, the hosts fielded a slightly older looking side with a few of the players from the previous game staying on to be involved. Things didn't go well for them though and by the 18th minute they were 4-0 down. But after they conceded another goal, a second penalty, they pulled a goal back on 33 minutes (in this 45-minutes each way game).

By now manager Darren was playing and you could soon see that he had played at a higher level. But although his side saw more of the ball in the second period, they couldn't prevent Hinton from rattling in another four goals before the end. After the game had finished Darren was very grateful to us for coming along to watch and insisted that we had our picture taken with the players. In turn, we were very pleased that he made us feel most welcome. This had been an enjoyable day out with no friction whatsoever, although I did feel rather tired by the end after standing watching 210 minutes of football in roughly four hours.

contributed on 29/06/22

TT No.179: *Brian Buck - Saturday 25th June 2022; Estudiantes (London) v Park View; Friendly Match; Venue: played at College of Haringey, Enfield & North East London, (aka CONEL College), Hertford Road, Enfield; Kick Off 1.10pm approx.; Result: 3-4; Attendance: 10 approx.*

This was at last a chance to see a game at a ground where on my original visit I was not allowed in - the only time in my football watching career this has happened to me. On Wednesday 3rd November 2010 it was my intention to watch Boreham Wood Blues here, at the then named Enfield College, but on my arrival, I found that they wouldn't let me in! No spectators were allowed, they said.

The school even had a security guard on the school gates, which were shut to traffic, although when I arrived soon after 12.30pm I did concede that it was lunch time for the kids who were in the playground. I argued the case with him and also with the admin staff that I'd come a long way to watch the match and that I was a really nice guy, but it had no effect. Later, I found out that one of my friends, namely the late and much missed Don Scott, had turned up to watch and was also

refused access. But as he was on foot and had no other alternative but to go home, he walked down a side street, found a back entrance, walked past some security guards unchallenged and then watched the match! Meanwhile I belted off to watch Boreham Wood Whites play on the back 3G pitch there and got my new ground here instead.

I remembered all of this when I arrived today. Once again, the Hertford Road entrance was locked, but anyway, my sat nav took me down The Drive. The entrance was off a side turning and I parked close to the 3G pitch. Estudiantes are managed by Darren Wiltshire, a UEFA B, German FA (DFB) Coaching and Technical Development Course; English FA Coaching (Level 2) Youth Modules 1 and 2 and Coerver Youth Diploma, who has coached FC Barcelona Escola, Boca Juniors Football Schools, Tottenham Hotspur Foundation. He has played 200 plus games in Semi Professional football in England and Uruguay, reaching Conference South level in this country. He has spent 10 Years working for Opta Sports Data London in football analysis and research and maintains a strong interest in Football for Development projects in developing countries. Also, he is reasonably well spoken in Spanish and French.

There were two matches here today and the first of these featured some of the club's younger players in this 40-minutes each half game. The first half wasn't that exciting, but the second half was much more watchable, especially after the hosts took the lead on 65 minutes, doubling it seven minutes later. Five minutes after that, Park View pulled a goal back with a stunning 25 yarder. After being moved into Thurlow Nunn League Division 1 South this season they were looking to completely re-organise their set up. At the end of 80 minutes that seemed to be the end of the first game and two of the four Groundhoppers present actually went home. But unbeknown to us, they then played a third 'half' of 40 minutes and in this period Park View firstly equalised and then took the lead. But then Estudiantes themselves equalised and a draw seemed to be the likely and fair outcome. But with the last kick of the game Park View snatched the winner.

contributed on 29/06/22

TT No.178: Brian Buck - Wednesday 22nd June 2022; Ely Rangers Veterans v Ridgeons Verterans; Friendly Match; Venue: played at Little Downham Recreation Ground; Result: 9-2; Attendance: 15 approx.

I'd been to this ground once before, on 8 April 1999, where I saw Little Downham Swifts lose 2-1 to Barton Mills in a Cambs County League Beaumont Stainless Steels League Division 1B match (att- 20 approx). In truth I remembered nothing about the venue until I and a small group of other Groundhoppers moved ourselves from the car park to the playing area. The game was played out on the middle pitch. Then with the setting sun partially blocking our view we suddenly saw this excellent looking stand behind the goals of 'our' pitch and the far pitch. It was then that I recalled that I had seen it on my previous visit here.

The hosts are a newly formed side for this season, whilst Ridgeons play in the Cambs County League Vets league on Sundays, and they are based in Trumpington.

This 40-minutes each way game started a tad late, soon after 7.30pm, but we were all done and dusted before 9pm. The pitch markings were almost invisible, but the lack of clarity didn't cause any real problems.

Despite having England over 70's International, John Shannon, aged 79, in their side, Ridgeons looked a bit 'wooden' and soon Rangers opened the scoring, doubling it on 7 minutes. Then the visitors' star player arrived, namely Neil Harvey, who is also the Cambridge City historian and a Groundhopper as well. It was he who flagged up this match. His silky skills showed that he could still play a bit as well. After a third Rangers goal on 16 minutes there was a drinks' break a few minutes later, before they added two more goals to their total by half time.

It seemed that the break did Ridgeons some good, as within five minutes of the restart they pulled two goals back, one from the spot following a gentle foul. But this didn't stop Rangers, and, in this half, they had added four more goals, one of which was from the spot, given for another basic foul and another which was an own goal. Also, in this period a few players from Rangers swapped sides to bolster their lack of numbers.

Overall, I thoroughly enjoyed the game. The players gave the ref no problems at all. There was hardly a foul at all in the match and the players just enjoyed playing the game as it should be played. Furthermore, the match was played on a lovely warm sunny night in June, rather than a freezing cold night in midwinter. What more could I ask for? It's about time more matches were played in the summer, especially when the muscles are more supple, meaning that there is less chance of getting injured.

v2 contributed on 23/06/22

TT No.177: Brian Buck - Saturday 4th June 2022; Tower United v Leicester Athletico; Somali British Champions League Semi Final 1st Leg; Venue: played at Stepney Green 3G pitch, Stepney Park, Stepney; Result: 4-2; Attendance: 50 approx.

Today was an interesting day and I travelled to this game by train. After arriving at Farringdon 15 minutes late I used the new Elizabeth Line from there to Whitechapel and then walked to the ground which took less than 15 minutes. I arrived just under half an hour before the intended 2pm kick off time, although the game started 15 minutes late. In some respects, I should have got here earlier, as the ground is barely two miles from Liverpool Street station. It is in a remarkably rural area adjacent to the attractive Stepney Park and a nearby farm and café, where one of my friends told me that he had a lovely egg benedict, made from local produce. Further up the road was St Dunstan & All Saints Church which was set in a spacious village green like setting.

To keep the '15 minutes' theme going the game kicked off 15 minutes late. Again, the setting was nice and the whole pitch was tree lined. But there was an old, small wooden stand in one corner of the ground. However, there was a problem which I was pre-warned about, in that there was no official spectator viewing

allowed inside the cage, so we had to watch it on the outside looking through it. But there were some double standards going on here in that if you were connected with either club (from a playing point of view or you were friends and family), then you were allowed in. As the game got to the business end, I did finally go inside with about 15 minutes left, as no one now cared. Despite all of this, the people I spoke to were very nice.

The game was pretty decent too, despite having a ‘handbags’ situation, caused by nothing really, on 38 minutes. The hosts had been the better side for most of the first half, but it was the visitors who took the lead on the stroke of half time. They carried their enthusiasm on into the second half and when they scored again, on 49 minutes, from the spot, they were the better side at that stage in the game. But gradually Tower worked their way back into the match, pulling a goal back on 67 minutes, via a 30 yards out direct free kick. But despite this and another handbags incident on 76 minutes, it looked as though Leicester would hold on. But on 90(+2) minutes Tower suddenly equalised. A draw would have probably been a fair result, but three minutes later they took the lead. Then even more remarkably they claimed a fourth goal on 90(+8) minutes to bring to a close an eventful game. My train home was late getting there, but to break the 15 minutes monotony, it was actually 23 minutes late!

contributed on 07/06/22

TT No.176: Brian Buck - Saturday 28th May 2022; Eversley Athletic v Great Baddow; County Motor Works Vauxhall Mid-Essex League Division 4; Venue: played at Ford Sports & Social Club, Basildon; Result: 4-0; Attendance: 25 approx.

Today as there was little to choose from, I settled for this game, knowing that there was something on it. Great Baddow would win the league if they won this match. But with nothing to play for, would the hosts turn up? In exchanges through Twitter, they said that they would and so I went for it. I drove though, as I had two other back-ups should there be a last-minute hitch.

The ground is located in the same road as that of Basildon United’s ground and although I found it easily, other people went to the wrong place. What we hadn’t realised though was that the Ford Sports ground covers land on both sides of Gardiners Close. People went to the ground on the north side because they saw cars parked there. But it transpired that they were there for a bowls match. Apart from toilets there were no spectator facilities here today. Worse still, according to one Groundhopper I spoke to, he told me that today’s game might be the last ever on this ground as the land, along with Basildon United’s ground, is about to be swallowed up for housing. He reckoned that United are supposed to move into where Basildon Town play but was not sure if that will actually happen. Incidentally Baddow are a reformed side coming back into football after leaving the Essex Olympian League at the end of the 2018/19 season.

On a well-maintained pitch the game kicked off five minutes early, meaning that when Eversley opened the scoring the goal came a few seconds before the match was officially supposed to start! The scorer and captain of Eversley was left in

space to finish impressively from the corner of the area. They were well up for it throughout the match whereas Baddow looked jaded. In fact, they disappointed so much that I had to enquire tactfully which side was which, as Eversley played more like the title chasing side. In fact, in the first period Baddow had no serious shots at all. In the second half the hosts increased their lead on 61 minutes with a header from a wide free kick. Then on 68 minutes Eversley got their third goal via a 25 yards out free kick. At this point the visitors only chance seemed to be if the game got abandoned. This was a possibility as on 74 and 86 minutes we ran out of balls, as the seemingly just two decent balls had been kicked out of the ground. But in both instances after a delay, they were retrieved, and the game was able to continue. The Eversley captain then completed his hattrick in added on time proving that far from not turning up for the match, as I had feared, they certainly did and by the end they were very happy that they had stopped Baddow from winning the league!

contributed on 02/06/22

TT No.175: Jon T Green - Saturday 28th May 2022; Caersws v Porthmadog; Ardal North Play off Final; Venue: played at Wern Mynach - Barmouth & Dyffryn United FC; Result: 0-5; Admission: £5; Programme: Free; Attendance 1,300

Boots. Tick. Shin guards. Tick. Shirts? “Ian, have you got the shirts?”. “Dave, Ian says you’ve got the kit”. “Charlie did you get the shirts off Ian?”. And so it came to pass that Caersws, in their most important game of the season, discovered that no one had the match kit (although there was a rumour that it had been seen in someone’s car earlier on!). In the end Barmouth were kind enough to lend them a full strip but, after such an ignominious start, things didn’t get a whole lot better.

That Barmouth had been chosen to host such an important game seemed a little unusual - until you surveyed the playing surface, to say it was immaculate, hardly does it justice. Admittedly the Mid Wales League isn’t the most fixture heavy competition but, nonetheless, there wasn’t a blade of grass out of place and the goalmouths looked more like early August than late May - how the game panned out no one could blame it on the pitch...

In keeping with the rest of the town, Wern Mynach is a scenic ground tucked away between the steeply rising hills and the sea. The stadium is just a few minutes’ walk away from the railway station but if arriving by car then use the beach front car parks as there isn’t too much room in the surrounding streets. The stroll through town gives you the perfect excuse, if one is needed, to have an ice cream before the game and fish and chips post-match.

With the black and white seated stand edging towards capacity the rest of the ground quickly filled up too. Facilities were at times a little stretched but on a sunny, if slightly chilly, day everyone was in an expectant mood pre match.

Porthmadog began at a fast pace and barely 90 seconds had elapsed before Paul Lewis managed a shot on goal. Marcus Banks then forced Caersws' Stefan Jones into a smart save before what was perhaps the pivotal moment of the afternoon. Will Evans beat the Porthmadog left back and, as he bore down on goal, he appeared to be tripped. Evans steadied himself and got his shot away, but had he gone down then referee Sion Davies would surely have awarded a penalty; if ever there was a case of being penalised for doing the right thing, then this was it.

Neil Mitchell might have done better with a free header from a corner but that was about as good as it got for Caersws. Port's Rhys Williams had already given the opposing defence a torrid time, running intelligently off the shoulder of the last man and shooting with speed and accuracy, so it was no surprise when he opened the scoring on 37 minutes. Moving onto a neat through ball Williams opened up his body and angled a right foot shot beyond Jones. With seconds of the half remaining Williams added a second; Gareth Jones-Evans' long-distance effort bounced horribly in front of the 'keeper and when the ball spooned up off his chest Williams smashed in the rebound.

If there was to be a comeback then Caersws needed a quick goal after the restart and although Mitchell's run and shot did force Paul Pritchard into a diving save it wasn't to be enough. With an hour played Williams had his hat trick: Caersws tried to play out, Williams easily intercepted and beat Jones with a vicious shot. The game was now over as a contest but it wasn't until the last five minutes that Port added to their total: substitutes Ben Fisher and John Littlemore combined with the latter arriving at the far post to finish off a perfect centre before Paul Lewis drove into the box and fired home a bouncing shot to make it five.

At the end of the game Port celebrated with their large contingent of supporters and now look forward to the challenges of the Cymru North division next season. If they can keep young Rhys Williams fit and healthy then they may yet turn out to be a real force at a higher level.

Note on the programme; a rather disappointing four-page effort was produced by the Welsh FA and was given away free. Barmouth normally produce an excellent glossy issue for their league games, priced at £2.

contributed on 30/05/22

TT No.174: Keith Aslan - Saturday 28th May 2022; LEPTON HIGHLANDERS v Leeds City Reserves; Absolute Warehouse Services Yorkshire Amateur League Championship; Kick Off: 14. 00 on the dot; Result: 3-2; Admission: Free; Programme: £2; Attendance: 175 (73 home, 73 away & 29 neutral)

Another winner takes all encounter with a one-off programme the icing on the gateaux. Lepton is a few miles outside Huddersfield, but Wakefield is the station you'll want for this one with an hourly door to door bus service. There can be few more pleasurable experiences than sitting on the top deck of a bus as it meanders through the Yorkshire countryside, gazing out at the breath-taking scenery. It's

true what they say that the best things in life are free, at least they are when you've got an old person's bus pass. I got mine six years after everybody else. This route takes meandering to the max. and passes the grounds of NECL newcomers Horbury, and also Emley. Other bus routes are available to the former, not so the latter.

The ground is surrounded by hills and dominated by the Emley radio mast which is around a mile away. Lepton Sports club also contains a cricket pitch and clubhouse with a pint of larger advertised at £4.50p. Think I'll give up drinking until I win the Lottery. No food for football spectators, but a gravity buffet was tantalisingly spread out for the cricketers. I suppose if you'd been standing around pointlessly all afternoon you deserve a bit of sustenance. Lunchtime football would have been showing on a big T.V. screen had there been any.

As last week, the winner of this one wins the league. A draw would be good enough for Lepton. To a certain extent Leeds wouldn't have been too disappointed with the draw as it would have raised them to second place, and promotion. It wasn't to be, and like Banstead last week, defeat in the final game of the season cost Leeds the lot. They must have been particularly miffed as they'd already beaten Lepton twice.

As you'd expect with so much at stake, both teams gave it a good go, although when Lepton went 2 goals up it looked to be all over, but Leeds came back to equalise and looked the better side for much of the second half. 15 minutes from the end, at the same time Lepton scored the winning goal, one of their players went down with a serious knee injury. An ambulance was called, but this now being a third world country, there weren't any available and the instruction was to get the player into a car and bring him to the hospital. The medical advice I've heard every time an injury occurs is 'Don't move the player'. How life has changed! An anathema of mine is inappropriate applause. Somebody's just died. Let's show our respect by clapping like seals for a minute. So, when a poor bloke who is in pain and being taken away for an 8 or 9 hour wait in A&E, how much better he would have felt with the crowd frantically clapping as he was being driven off the pitch? Much respect for the referee who went round the ground explaining to the crowd what was happening. The game was held up for twenty minutes after which Leeds lost their momentum.

Everything good on the transport front, but it's fortunate I wasn't travelling the next day with both of the lines to London being closed. With all these rail strikes coming up in the summer, down here on the Kentish Riviera nobody will notice any difference.

contributed on 29/05/22

TT No.173: Brian Buck - Saturday 21st May 2022; Cadbury Athletic v Tipton Town; Birmingham FA Vase Final; Venue: played at Birmingham County FA Headquarters, Ray Hall Lane, Great Barr; Result: 4-0; Attendance: 280.

Today I felt well enough to drive here. It was quite easy really. I joined the A14 at the Godmanchester turning and from there it was a straightforward drive to

Junction 7 of the M6 and the ground was a few miles from there. It's so much easier now that the A14/M6 interchange has been improved. We were there well early though.

So, after eating our sandwiches in the car park, we made the short walk to a nearby hotel, which is supposed to serve real ale. It may well do, but on our arrival we and a procession of other Groundhoppers, were told that it wasn't going to open until 3pm, an hour after our match had kicked off! So, we traipsed back to the ground, only to find that despite being a large building behind the goal, the Birmingham FA ground doesn't seem to have a bar either, or if it does then it was only for important people. We knew our place and settled for a hot drink instead!

I'd actually seen a game in this complex before, on the back pitch. The two main pitches, side by side, definitely belong to the Birmingham FA and this back pitch may do as well. It was on 29 October 1996 that I saw Bustleholme beat GPT (Coventry) 3-1 in a Birmingham County FA Vase 1st Round match (att: 35 approx). Today's ground was fully enclosed, with two small, seated stands on one side of the pitch and two larger covered stands, complete with crush barriers, on the other side. The ground does not have floodlights at present, but apparently planning permission has been granted to erect some.

The game turned out to be rather one sided. I wanted Cadbury to win, mainly because my father used to work for them. They played in 'Bournville' colours of purple/mauve and in truth I got my wish far too easily. They took the lead on 4 minutes with a shot from about 18 yards out and then doubled it on 37 minutes after the same scorer slid home a short diagonal pass. The same scorer then claimed his hat-trick on 50 minutes with a shot which went in off the post. After this my concentration waned because I got chatted up by the mother of one of the Cadbury players, who came from Todmorden to watch with her family and she kept asking me difficult to answer questions, such as why do I keep detailed statistics of all the games I go to? How do I know? Anyway, she gave me her phone number at the end of the game, and it was good to know that I can still 'pull' even as I approach my 71st birthday! Anyway, I do recall seeing the Tipton (or was it the Cadbury?) keeper, pull off some very good saves, before Cadbury scored their fourth goal in added on time, same scorer of course. Overall, a good day out and it was nice to bump into a few old friends whom I haven't seen for some time.

contributed on 25/05/22

TT No.172: Keith Aslan - Saturday 21st May 2022; SOUTH CROYDON v Banstead Rovers; Surrey South Eastern Combination Junior Division 1; Kick Off: 14.30; Result: 4-2; Admission & Pirate Programme: Free; Attendance: 94 (52 home, 22 away & 20 neutral).

You never stop learning in this game and up to a few days ago I was completely ignorant of the fact that the South Eastern Combination has six junior divisions and the only match left to play in the top one was a biggy. A winner takes all contest with today's victors being crowned league champions, while a draw would give the

title to a third club, Clapham Old Boys. Little wonder this was the match of choice for the discerning groundhopper.

South Croydon play in Hamsey Green with a 25-minute bus ride from Croydon stopping outside the ground. Croydon was the epicentre of the 2011 riots leaving the town with millions of pounds worth of improvements. Tracy Emin was born here but always pretends she comes from Margate. Travelling through London the place was rammed with Sunderland supporters down for the play off final. I had wasted 30 seconds of my life the previous week listening to a politician bleating about the poverty in Sunderland. He should have been in London today to see his constituents tipping gallons of alcohol down their throats at £5 a pint, all wearing brand new £35 shirts. £80 plus for the train fares, £50 plus for the match tickets, Mackens have a strange definition of 'poverty'.

The John Fisher ground has a clubhouse with a tempting food menu prominently displayed. Alas they were only teasing, nothing to eat but plenty to drink. There are three pitches with the most interesting one on the near side which has six (6) large open stands. All in various states of disrepair, you can still sit in some of them if you were willing to ignore the health and safety consequences. Why were they built I wonder? The game was not played here and the pitch it did take place on had nothing in the way of facilities but could have done with a rope to keep the home fans from encroaching onto the touchline, making the linesman's job very difficult. The surface was immaculate after some much needed rain had fallen the previous week.

Pre match was pleasantly spent sitting on the large patio outside the clubhouse conversing with like-minded individuals. When groundhoppers get together there is usually only one topic of conversation; Who is going to die first. Bit disappointed that the consensus of opinion was that it was going to be me. My fans needn't be alarmed, there are many more of my wonderful reports still to come. The discussion was skewed by the fact that the oldest hopper present looked by far the fittest.

Three officials denoted the gravity of the game with metalwork pings from both sides littering an entertaining match in which Croydon always had the upper hand. 3-0, 3-1, 4-1, with the game finishing 4-2. However much the spectators enjoyed the match the referee enjoyed it more, to the extent 90 minutes just wasn't enough for him and he added 4 onto the first half and 10 (ten) onto the second. Nobody has a clue why, least of all the referee himself. Having seen a match recently with a player wearing a number 0, by contrast there was a player strutting his stuff today with 156 on his shirt.

So, Croydon win the league and poor old Banstead even miss out on promotion with only the top two going up. If this is to be my last match of the season it's a good one to go out on.

contributed on 22/05/22

TT No.171: Brian Buck - Saturday 14th May 2022; BKS Sports v Ashingdon Reserves; Southend Borough & District Combination Alex Faux Cup Group Match;

Venue: played at Victory Sports Ground, Sutton Road, Southend-on Sea; Result: 3-4; Attendance: 20 approx.

Today I travelled by public transport again to see a game in yet again a different league on a Saturday. In fact, this was the 37th different league I have ticked off on a Saturday this season, dipping out on only three Saturdays during the campaign, two of which were weather related and once because I had to go to a wedding.

Today I alighted at Prittlewell station and rather than turning right to go to Southend United, where I used to attend regularly when they used to play on Friday nights, I turned left and in under ten minutes I was passing through the impressive and large ornate park gates of the Victory Sports Ground. At this point, about an hour before the kick off, there seemed to be no one around, apart from some kids. But after I had eaten my sandwiches, the home manager, my *Twitter* contact, suddenly appeared from the dressing rooms and we had a long chat. Soon the away secretary appeared, who was equally pleasant and 'old school' as well, and with these lovely gentlemen around, I knew then that their respective sides would fulfil this fixture, even though it was a 'dead rubber' as both of them had qualified for the final and would indeed be meeting each other again this coming Saturday.

As I still had time on my hands, I returned to the station to have a couple of quick pints in the adjacent Railway Tavern, but I was back at the ground well in time for the kick off. Employees of BKS Engineering Limited formed BKS Sports Football Club in 1956. The firm was based at Southend Airport and the engineering staff used to have lunchtime kick-abouts outside one of their hangars. It was during these lunchtime games that it became obvious that the firm had enough players with the required ability to form a team and enter a league. Club officials were elected, and BKS Sports was accepted into Division 4 of the Southend Borough Football Combination for the 1956-57 season. BKS Engineering was a sister company to BKS Air Transport Limited and was responsible for the high standard of maintenance applied to the BKS Fleet from the start of their services in 1952. Indeed, the club's current chairman since 1956, was a former employee and he was present today.

The game started off evenly with the visitors perhaps having slightly more possession. But, on 20 minutes BKS opened the scoring after a long forward ball found the scorer, who finished well from 20 yards out after holding off his marker. The lead was doubled fifteen minutes following another long ball up to the eventual scorer, who outpaced his defender before finishing with a sharp shot past the keeper. But then Ashingdon scored two goals before half time. The first, on 35 minutes, was an excellent near-post glancing header from a corner and the second, five minutes later, came from an unmarked player some 15 yards out.

The second half was difficult to call, with both teams enjoying spells of good possession. BKS regained the lead on 59 minutes when, from a cross, the ball was side footed home at the far post. Ashingdon again drew level four minutes later when the scorer turned and hit the ball home from the edge of the area, thus wrong footing the keeper. Then it was nip and tuck right up to the end of the

match. But on 90(+1) minutes Ashingdon suddenly bundled in the winner from close range. I didn't see the goal clearly because I was in the corner of the ground, hoping to make a quick getaway to catch an earlier train home. But I missed it because in the build up to the goal a home player was seriously injured, and it took a long while to get him off the pitch. Nonetheless this was an excellent day out here in all respects. Not quite so pleasant though was that once back in London, two consecutive trains home were cancelled and the next one which did run, left 15 minutes late!

contributed on 18/05/22

TT No.170: Jon T Green - Saturday 14th May 2022; **MOLD ALEXANDRA v Porthmadog**; Ardal North West League; Venue: Alyn Park; Result: 3-2; Admission: £3; Programme: £1; Attendance 286.

Us hoppers can't resist just one more game can we and, with the weather set fair for North Wales, the pull of a top of the table clash in the Ardal North West League was simply too good an opportunity to pass up.

Mold have had an extraordinary season, already having clinched the League Championship along with winning the FAW Trophy; no mean achievement for a team who had been predicted to be no more than 'also-rans' at the start. Porthmadog had clinched second place and with it a berth in the play-off final against Caersws at the end of the month.

Alyn Park is easily missed, situated down a steep slope, leading from a busy arterial road, the floodlights are difficult to spot especially if, like me, you spent 10 minutes driving around a nearby housing estate without ever really getting any closer to finding a way in! Once inside, the ground has the feel of a rural venue with plenty of open grass areas surrounded by mature trees. The spire of St. Mary's church peeps above the highest boughs and adds a sense of serenity to the surroundings. Not that there was anything very serene a few months back as the roof of the stand was ripped off in a fierce gale. Repairs have been made and it should be back in "action" next season in order to satisfy the ground grading requirements at Welsh Step 2.

Luckily with the sun beating down there was no need for any shelter as the visitors provided a guard of honour to welcome Alex onto the field. Any thoughts that Mold might be taking things easy were dismissed within the opening two minutes as Henry Carver teed up Dominic Doherty. Bradley Roberts did well to half block the first shot, but Doherty was quickest to the rebound to slide his shot under the 'keeper. Alex soon made it two as Daniel Warren's through ball found Rhys Nash on the right and his centre was dispatched from close range by the on-rushing Carver. It looked as though the game could turn into a landslide victory, but Porthmadog had other ideas and quickly cut the deficit. Matty Jones, leading the line despite giving away a considerable height and weight advantage to the Alex centre-halves, found some space and slipped a beautifully weighted pass into the path of Dewi Thomas. The midfielder bore down on goal and giving 'keeper Elliot Quinllan "the eyes" calmly slotted his shot inside the near post whilst Quinllan moved in the opposite direction. Despite the warmth of the afternoon the pace was unrelenting,

and, before the mid-point of the half, Alex had restored their two-goal advantage: Warren exposed the left back and sent in a low cross which was met with a spectacular diving header from the impressive Nash. Doherty then struck the bar from distance as the home side exerted pressure on Porthmadog all over the pitch. Half time must have come as a relief for the team from the coast but whatever was said during the break certainly did the trick as Rhys Williams, only on the pitch for a minute, found the far corner with a low drive to once again reduce the arrears. A slew of substitutions and bookings then drew the sting from the game but, perhaps more important, the visitors realised that this wasn't their season finale and dropped the pace a little. Chances became few and far between with only Sol Kempster's downward header a few minutes from time really looking to bring the scores level.

As the players left the field with the sun still shining it really did feel as though the season was at an end. Driving back across the border I thought about the play-off final and decided there might still be time for just one last match...

contributed on 17/05/22

TT No.169: Craig Dabbs - Saturday 14th May 2022; Beeston v Meden Vale Colts; Nottinghamshire Senior League Division One; Venue: Trent Vale Community Sports Association; Result: 2-4; Admission: Free; Programme: None; Attendance: 28

Back in 2016, two years after Beeston Football Club was formed, I attended a Notts Senior League Hop and watched them play at the Hetley Pearson Recreation Ground. In the match programme, issued that day, it stated that the club's intention was to move to this site ready for the 2016/17 season. Well, for various reasons, this didn't happen as quickly as anticipated, until now that is.

The ground used to be the former home of the Ericsson & Plessey works team who later became Siemens FC. It has seen a complete rebuild of the pavilion for this season into what is now a very smart facility at a cost of £600,000. With cricket no longer played on site, its sole use is for football, providing Beeston with three additional pitches along with those already in place at a local school and the Hetley Pearson. In total the club operates almost thirty teams.

Now you would expect a club of this size to have a large pool of resources to call upon. Due the vast number of teams they organise, they still need more helpers. Despite having a superb pavilion there really isn't anyone available to run the bar or provide refreshments which is something they need to address as they are losing vital revenue. Indeed, the only official I saw at this match was the club secretary which tells you something!

Now in my limited research I have noticed on the programme cover that the badge states the club started in 2014. However, the same badge on the sign outside the ground points to 2015 and I can confirm that Beeston were actually playing in 2014 so the sign is incorrect. Apparently, the club were borne out of a three-way amalgamation of AFC Beeston, Beeston Centurions youth team and Boots Athletic (yes that is the high street chain) who incidentally used this ground prior to the merger.

The pitch, currently used by the first team, is furthest away from the changing rooms (not that it matters) and is roped off down the pavilion side. Elevated views of the action can be found from the bank that runs down the Marina side of the ground. This extends around the far end and is actually a flood defence meaning the club can't do much with it.

The match, attended by a few spectators standing on the bank (with me hiding in the doorway to the club shed) wasn't bad at all. However, the score line isn't a true reflection on the game. Although Beeston were by far the better side, it was Meden Vale who took their limited chances, resulting in a fine away win on a game that had nothing really riding on it except pride. From a personal point of view, I'm glad the result went the way it did (not that I have anything against Beeston), as it would've been the easy option for the visitors to forfeit the game and not turn up like so many do this time of year. So full credit to them for their positive attitude to it.

contributed (via Brian Buck) on 15/05/22

TT No.168: Keith Aslan - Saturday 14th May 2022; Woodnesborough Reserves v Barham; Canterbury Charity Cup - Junior Section; Venue: played at WHITSTABLE TOWN FC; Kick Off: 13.00; Result: 3-2 to Woodnesborough aet; Admission & Programme: £5; Attendance: 88 (36 W, 28 B & 24 neutral)

It's Cup Final day and the excitement was palpable as I sat on the train as it sped along the Kent Coast towards the big match. Although called a Junior Cup Final the players were all grown up, with the Senior version following it. The 'Belmont Stadium' is a 12-minute walk from the station. A proper ground is this, covered at both ends, stand down one side, changing rooms and bar on the other, all painted white which is very easy on the eye, and everything predating 'Atcost'.

Some people baulked at paying a fiver for this level of football, especially when the Thanet Cup Finals are only a quid. But money these days is so meaningless that I was quite happy to pay, how many of the complainants would think twice about shelling the same sum out on a pint of lager? Watching the two girls serving in the refreshment hut is worth the admission money alone. A Latino in her thirties and a teenager spend their time bickering with each other in a double act as entertaining as Morecambe and Wise. And the food is very good.

For those unfamiliar with Kentish geography, Woodnesborough is a village between Deal and Sandwich and are one of the very few teams in the Kent County League (or anywhere else these days!) to issue programmes. Barham is a hamlet 5 miles south of Canterbury.

The match was a cracker, proving what I've always said, no matter how low the level, a good game of football is a good game of football. Barham took the lead in each half, with the 'Woodies' equalizing both times to take the game to extra time where they got the winner. With five minutes left, Woodnesborough took the ball into the corner and just kept it there. Apparently, this is known as 'Game

'Management' or as I call it, 'playing silly buggers'. After a couple of minutes of this a Barham player got fed up and found an inventive way of getting the ball back into play with a move that would have looked very impressive in WWE, but not quite so impressive in a game of football and he got sent off. It's drinks break season, and although the weather could be described as warm rather than hot, everything had to stop as the players tipped back the H2O. Barham added a new dimension to the drinks break by going back into the changing room for theirs. At the end of the 94-minutes they also returned to the changing room before they felt able to start the extra time. As changing facilities are virtually non-existent at their level, I presume they were making the most of the novelty value of having an on-site dressing room. At various times during the game a blue ball came into play. Not seen one of those before. They announced over the tannoy that due to extra time the second final would be kicking off half an hour late. I wouldn't have been best pleased if I'd come to watch that one.

As I left, the victorious side were partying like politicians during lockdown and it was back home to watch the other Cup Final, the second one Chelsea have managed to lose this season without conceding a goal. Sometimes life just isn't fair.

contributed on 15/05/22

TT No.167: Brian Buck - Saturday 7th May 2022; **Nottingham v Sherwood Colliery Reserves**; Abacus Lighting Central Midlands League Black Dragon Premier South; Venue: played at Melbourne Park, Melbourne Road, Aspley, Nottingham; Result: 1-7; Attendance 30 approx.

I travelled to the game by public transport, and it seems that nothing had changed on the trains. I got to Peterborough easily on one of their 12 carriage trains but once more East Midlands Trains (EMT) thought it clever to provide its passengers with a two-carriage train from there to Nottingham. It was OK until we got to Grantham where it felt as though the entire population of the town had boarded the train and from here it was standing room only. The train seemed to struggle to move efficiently due to the sheer weight of the people on it.

Anyway, with built in time added in, we arrived in Nottingham roughly on time. Then it was off to find my bus, which I thought would be a Purple 78, but I quickly realised that a Purple 77 runs every 7 to 10 minutes and you can pick this up from the nearest stop to the station in Canal Street. The outward journey takes longer because it goes round the city centre, but the return journey takes around 20 minutes. Alight at Melbourne Road and from here Melbourne Park is about a ten-minute walk away.

Despite this being a public park there are three railed off pitches in the complex. Two of them are side by side and the railing is filled in. These are both used by Nottingham, I think. The other one, nearest Melbourne Road, was used by Pythian of the Notts Senior League today. The railing on this pitch is not infilled. Also, another Notts Senior League side, Education FC, play here, but I don't know which pitch they play on.

On my arrival there was a distinct lack of enthusiasm and the ref told me that he thought that they should have called the game off and paid the fine! There was a clubhouse, but it was closed, due to refurbishments. Luckily, I had brought my sandwiches. But you couldn't even get a cup of tea here. As for the game, I could soon see the referee's point. The hosts did score first, on 20 minutes, but by half time Sherwood were winning 4-1. Nottingham faded quickly after the break, especially when the fifth and sixth goals went in by the 54th minute. Then the highlight of the day arrived. An ice cream van turned up! I had a tango orange to match Sherwood's colours, but I could have had a 7 Up, as moments later they scored their seventh and last goal! The match, which had long since held any interest, saw the ref blow the final whistle as soon as possible.

I headed back to the station quickly and then it was time for EMT to play games with its passengers again. A six-carriage train arrived, but only two were going forward. The passengers had to guess which two and try to get a seat. I just managed to do this, but again others had to stand again. I wouldn't be surprised if I get COVID now! The upshot of all this was that I missed my connection at Peterborough. Luckily my connecting train ran, as the next two were cancelled. Thus ended a not entirely enjoyable day, the only saving grace is that I might decide to tick Melbourne Park off as three grounds visited on the day, as I don't really want to go back there again!

contributed on 10/05/22

TT No.166: Craig Dabbs - Saturday 7th May 2022; **Trefonen v Llanfechain**; Montgomeryshire Amateur League; Venue: "The Pit" Trefonen Playing Field Result: 3-2; Admission: Free; Programme: 12pp, £1; Attendance: 43.

Today I'm back home in Shropshire for another bit of Welsh Football. Hoppers may be interested to learn that the county does have its fair share of clubs that elect to play over the border in Wales due to the geographical nature of the county. Indeed, it's not the easiest to get around and leagues on the doorsteps of clubs like Trefonen in the shape of the MAFL do lend themselves well with much reduced travelling owing to a much smaller footprint versus competing in the County League. Having said that I'm told that Llanymynech (who I visited right at the start of the season) are considering switching over to the County League next season. Whilst Trefonen is just three miles from the border, it actually runs right up the middle of the main street in Llanymynech.

Anyway, back to "The Pit". Situated on the edge of the village, it's a real focal point for the community, not just Trefonen but also the nearby villages of Treflach and Nantmawr. The site which includes the village hall and adjacent primary school has the one pitch with banking behind the goal and a separate play area at the School Lane end of the ground. The steep bank at the far end has two interesting features - one is a memorial with thirty poppies each representing a man from the area who gave his life for his country in the First World War, forming part of something called the World War One Centenary Trails. A board at pitch-side provides more detail. The other is a sculpture of a miner, complete with pick, set into the banking which is actually where the old pit mound once stood with the

last pit closing in 1891. All this of course explains why the ground gained its nickname "The Pit".

The current football club was formed in 2008. However, records show that a club with this name was actually around in the 19th century when a previous incarnation lost to the eventual champions Oswestry White Stars back in 1884. Fast forward on to 1981 when Trefonen FC was re-formed competing in the Wem & District Sunday League, until folding in 1996. The current club were born out of a charity match between veterans from the old side and villagers. They went West into Wales and joined the Monty League where they have established themselves since. This season, in an eight-team competition, they currently sit second and almost certainly look to be going up.

This afternoon's match pitted them against lowly-placed Llanfechain. The reverse of this fixture finished 0-11 and I was concerned that being right at the end of the season they may not fulfil the game. However full credit to them as they not only turned up but also made a real fight of it despite looking second best (going three down) and coming up just short in the end. In hindsight, it was a really entertaining game watched by a fair few of us groundhoppers who helped to bolster the crowd.

The club is very well organised. On matchdays they operate a tea bar and issue programmes on a regular basis. They also aim to get some merchandise ready for next season and are clearly ambitious.

On a side note, and away from Trefonen now - on the way back home I quickly stopped at Morda United FC to take a couple of pics of the wonderful stand which is currently condemned. However, I understand that work will take place on it over the summer so that it will be ready for next season.

So that's Trefonen done and very enjoyable it was.

contributed (via Brian Buck) on 08/05/22

TT No.165: Keith Aslan - Saturday 7th May 2022; **FC HARTLEPOOL v Gateshead Leam Rangers; Wearside League Alan Hood Trophy Final**; Kick Off: 12.00; Result: 2-0; Admission: £1 for 'aged persons'; Programme: £1; Attendance: 328 (252 home, 70 away & 6 neutral)

For a midday kick off at Hartlepool to work two things had to happen. I had needed to get up at 5 o'clock in the morning, and the train had to be spot on time. I managed the former and Grand Central Trains achieved the latter. A 27-minute limp through the Hartlepool hinterland saw me arrive at the ground a quarter of an hour before kick-off with the programmes still in full flow; so, all good. The trophy was on display as you entered, one of the biggest I've ever seen. If the winning captain tried to lift it above his head, a visit to the chiropractor would surely follow.

The two major cup competitions in the Wearside League are always played at the home ground of one of the participating teams and always superbly organized. Today there was a barbecue which I got stuck into, and a bouncy castle, which I didn't. There is a large clubhouse which was showing the lunchtime football. The ground is much as you would expect. Enclosed, fully railed, with a grass bank along one side. If it rains, you'll get wet.

The first half saw both sides reduced to ten men after the obligatory fracas, and two goals in the second saw Hartlepool lift the trophy (probably not literally in view of its size). Both clubs are fairly recent additions to the non-league scene, Gateshead were formed in 1993 while the home side go back to 1979. Hartlepool are the current holders of my favourite competition 'The Washington Aged Persons Trophy'. Must be the only cup named after me and I'd be happy to be the guest of honour at a final one day.

At the final whistle I was tempted to get a double header in down the road at Woolviston where visitors Chester-le-Street needed a win to take the Wearside League title. Only the cost of a taxi prevented this excursion. Chester got a draw which should have been enough as it meant Darlington Town needed to overturn a goal difference of 11 against Anfield Plain to overtake them. Darlington won 19-0! They won't be dancing in le streets tonight.

With connections not fitting in very well on my homeward bound journey it did give me the opportunity for a bit of sightseeing in Middlesborough. The town now strangely calls itself 'The Gateway to Captain Cook Country'. Be that as it may, it's still a tip.

With £1 to get in and £1 for a 24-page glossy programme the Wearside League could give a few tips to our wonderful politicians on how to control inflation.

contributed on 08/05/22

TT No.164: Brian Buck - Saturday 30th April 2022; Emerson & Upminster v Felsted Rovers; County Motor Works Vauxhall Mid-Essex League Division 2; Venue: played at Hall Lane Playing Fields, Upminster; Result: 3-3; Attendance 15 approx.

With this being a Bank Holiday weekend, it was difficult to find a new ground which suited my needs today. I contacted one club, who had already won their league, who told me that their game was off because their intended visitors didn't want to travel all the way there only to get thrashed. So, were their reserves going to visit a side that had won the league themselves? Answer, no, because they said that they had injuries, suspensions and also an important cup final on the following Monday! Anyway, I found this match instead and both sides told me of their intention to play.

Getting here by public transport was quite easy and involved a train to Finsbury Park, tube to Blackhorse Road, a train across the rooftops of East London to Barking and a tube from there to Upminster, the last part being by train on the way back. From here it was about a 15-minute walk to the ground in a northerly

direction. The entrance to the ground, next to a golf course and shared with rugby, is indicated by a sign which shows that it is also home to the Tithe Barn Museum of Nostalgia, which I never located. Perhaps it is no longer what it was! What did surprise me though was it had a rather large clubhouse with an operational bar, which I made use of.

The club were originally known as Emerson United and is a Chartered Standard Saturday adult football club and was created in 2017 by a man called Paul Stringer, who had previously managed one team that came from an old Upminster FC reserve side. He then split away from Upminster and managed to stay at Hall Lane Playing Fields, by building strong relationships with the community and leagues. Today he is the Chairman and Secretary. Emerson United now have three teams and have changed their name to Emerson & Upminster to reflect the local community.

The match had something on it meaning that if either side won then they would finish second in the league. The game was played on the pitch nearest to Hall Lane and I watched it sitting on a park bench away from the noise of the respective benches and fans, from where I had a good view of the gentle hills of East Essex in the distance, known locally, I believe, as Basildon! For a long while it seemed that we weren't going to see a goal on this hot day, but on 35 minutes, a short while after a drinks break, Rovers took the lead. But in the fifth minute of first half stoppage time the hosts equalised and then took the lead a minute later. Then on 52 minutes they moved into a 3-1 lead before goals on 58 and 69 minutes made the game all square. Towards the end Felsted missed a really easy chance to win the game and then right at the end there was a short-lived punch up. The upshot of this was that the hosts would finish second in the league whilst the visitors still had the opportunity to finish third. This was a day which went better than I had expected it to.

contributed on 03/05/22

TT No.163: Steve Hardy - Saturday 30th April 2022; Bilston Town Community v Leafield Athletic; Birmingham & District League - Division 3; Result: 1-1; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance 2 h/c.

I attempted something new today. I went the 13 miles from home to the match by bus, and that turned out to be an adventure in itself. 1 hour 45 minutes to get there and 2 hours 45 to get back as my bus broke down in Walsall! The journey there was enlivened by a very young lad sitting upstairs, who was out of his brain on weed and spent most of his time dancing and shouting the lyrics to whatever rap song he was listening to. Can you become intoxicated just by breathing in his smoke?

Anyway, feeling very light-headed, I finally got to see a game at Red House Park in Great Barr after two previous attempts failed. It was touch and go today though as the Council hadn't marked the pitch out, and the away team seemed reluctant to play at first. Luckily, they changed their mind and off we went.

Facilities wise, there are none in the park at all. Four full size footie pitches with only one actually deemed playable today. Dressing rooms at the Newton Road entrance car park and that is it. Pitch not even roped off and no corner flags to speak off.

The match had nothing riding on it, although Leafield could have finished third with a win. That was never going to happen though as BTC were much the better team for the first 70 minutes, before tiring and allowing Leafield a 70th minute equaliser from a corner. BTC themselves had scored first on 17 minutes, also from a corner, and played a very good brand of attacking football I thought.

So, the curtain comes down on a very disappointing season for me. My mental illness problems have restricted me to just 27 games, which is an all-time low. My hope is that the summer break will renew some enthusiasm, but if I am still not enjoying myself by August then I won't be going.

contributed on 01/05/22

TT No.162: *Keith Aslan* - Saturday 30th April 2022; **ASHFORD UNITED v Herne Bay;** Pitching-in Isthmian League South East Division Play-off Final; Kick Off: 15.01; Result: 0-2; Admission: £6 for oldies; Programme: £2, but I paid a lot more for mine; Official Attendance: 1865 (best part of a third from Herne Bay plus at least two neutrals).

As the season winds down, it had to be a revisit for me this afternoon and a return to Ashford after 33 years fitted the bill nicely. My only other visit to Homelands was for the ground opener against a group of teenagers masquerading as Charlton Athletic. July 29th 1989 was the big day, and I managed to locate the A4 match programme among my collection which would have bought the memories flooding back if senility hadn't already kicked in. The only two things I remember about the day was the football special bus from the station to the ground, and the pre-match display by a group of majorettes (I like majorettes). The reason I haven't been back since is that while Ashford is just down the line from my country dacha, the football ground isn't anywhere near Ashford.

The stadium is about 4 or 5 miles south of the town centre with various buses taking you to points closer to the ground, but whichever one you catch involves a walk at the end along a foot pathless main road with death stalking you at every step. To attempt this in the dark would be suicidal. 'Stagecoach' buses were having an off day today with everything running late or cancelled and I've had less stressful journeys to Scotland.

Stress levels hit the roof when I got into the ground over an hour before kick-off and found the programmes had sold out. The gates had opened at half twelve and the paper had all gone by one. Apparently, Ashford always have the same print run and they weren't going to increase it just because of a play-off final. Very few people had one and my attempts to try and buy somebody else's for a fiver were unsuccessful. So, I upped the ante and started offering a tenner. A 12-year-old was reading one in the stand and while he appeared reluctant to sell it, his dad, sitting

next to him, bit my hand off with the boy not given any option in the matter. I hope he doesn't suffer from mental health problems later in life when he realises what a big gap this will have left in his programme collection. Just as well I got one or I'd never have known that Jay May's favourite T.V. programme is Only Fools and Horses, and his favourite car is a Lamborghini. What it didn't tell me is what his parents were on when they named him.

Ashford's time at Homelands has been somewhat fraught with winding up petitions being an annual event in the early days. Ashford Town did actually disappear but quickly reinvented themselves as Ashford United. They have been locked out due to unpaid rent and they laid down a rubbishy artificial surface that the league wouldn't let them play on because it was too dangerous. But they've put all this behind them and have been on an even keel for the past few seasons.

The match was very tight, and it was midway through the second half when Herne Bay got the breakthrough and treated everybody to a sparkling display of time wasting for the remaining 25 minutes during which they added a second from a penalty. Did I just dream the rule that a goalkeeper can't hang on to the ball for more than six seconds? The final whistle sparked a pitch invasion. Thanks to Stagecoach's problems in running buses, I just caught one that was fourteen minutes late which got me home considerably earlier than expected so all's well that ends well. Highlight of the day was a young girl wearing a high visibility vest which had 'Ashford United Official Photographers Daughter' printed on it. Does the photographer have an unofficial daughter as well?

My two visits to Ashford's new ground have had attendances of 2,313 and yesterdays of 1,865. Can this just be coincidence as they don't get anything like those crowds when I'm not there!

contributed on 01/05/22

TT No.161: Jon T Green - Saturday 23rd April 2022 **WOLVERHAMPTON CASUALS** v. Stourport Swifts; Midland Football League - Premier Division; Venue: Brinsford Stadium; Result: 5-1; Admission: £5; Programme: £1; Attendance: 75

It's 11am on the final day of the season as Mick Green parks his car at the Brinsford Stadium. A few minutes later he is busy checking stock at The Cass Bar in the smart clubhouse. "I've been here 62 years now" he nonchalantly says. "My Father played for the club and so did I. When I stopped playing, I did a few other things." This is something of an understatement as during his time Mick has served as club president, groundsman and is now first team secretary. Modestly he fails to mention the picture hanging on the wall showing him proudly holding his 50-year service medal given to him by the FA. Casuals come into today's game knowing that a win will keep them safe from relegation. "We are on a great run of form" Mick smiles "In the last few weeks everything has come together, and we are playing much better as a unit. We are the only team in the league not to pay players and at Christmas everyone expected us to be relegated. It will be a great achievement if we stay up." Having tidied the bar Mick heads outside to check the pitch, Casuals are closely linked with the Wolverhampton and District Sunday

League and there had been a cup final played here the previous night.

Situated just off a busy stretch of dual carriageway, not far from the M54, the Brinsford Stadium feels a more rural venue than perhaps you would imagine from a team with Wolverhampton in their name. The main stand contains four rows of bench seating all neatly painted in the club colours of green and white. Next to this is the clubhouse and behind a secondary pitch used for Sunday League matches. There is uncovered hard standing on two of the other sides, but this is looking likely to change as Casuals are seeking planning permission to build a covered stand behind the near goal. The far end of the pitch is out of bounds to spectators with a long line of mature trees standing just a few feet behind the goal.

Today's visitors from Stourport bring a coach load of fans who are soon enjoying a pre-match pint from The Cass Bar. The teams are welcomed onto the pitch by The Clash's classic song (think about it!!!) and from then on, the afternoon goes rapidly downhill for those supporting the away team. Just three minutes have been played when Jake Auld opens the scoring for Casuals. A left-wing corner strikes the far post and the centre-half is on hand to prod the rebound over the line. Jordan Spragg then goes close with a 25-yard effort before the home side double their lead as Josh Hesson strikes a bouncing ball from the edge of the area which leaves Swifts' keeper Dominic Richard's rooted to the spot. Stourport do their best to respond to the onslaught with Lee Chilton being the main focus of their attacking play. The striker is desperately unlucky to see one effort smack against the crossbar before rebounding to safety. A few moments later he cleverly plays in Taylor Townsend, but the home defence somehow scramble the shot away. With nearly half an hour played the game, as a contest, is over as a raking diagonal pass is picked up by Ronan Sheehan. Richards dashes from his goal but can only half smother the shot and as the ball squirms loose Sheehan slides it into the unguarded net. Before the break there is still time for a fourth with Sheehan turning provider as his cross is smashed in by a grateful Jordan Wilson. This is fantasy football time for the home side who leave the field knowing that it's already job done.

Unsurprisingly the second period brings little of note other than two further goals. Hesson scores his second of the afternoon converting Joe Clarke's header from a hotly contested corner before Swifts finally get off the mark as Townsend makes no mistake from the penalty spot. As referee Mr. Rowley brings the game and the season to an end the Casuals players celebrate on the pitch and somewhere, in the background, Mick Green has a very big smile on his face.

contributed on 28/04/22

TT No.160: Gary Spooner - Monday 18th April 2022; Scawthorpe Athletic v Dog Daisy United; 125th Montague Cup Final; Venue: Mexborough Athletic FC; Kick-Off: 11am; Result: 3-3 (4-3aet); Admission: £3; Programme: Yes, 28pp, free; Attendance: 1700

The Easter football bonanza continued with one of the best matches I've ever seen! My morning entertainment was at Mexborough Athletic for the 125th Montagu Cup Final - lots of info here: [Football | Montagu Cup | Mexborough](#) and on [twitter](#)

[Montagu Cup \(@montagucup\) / Twitter](#). The two finalists (both of whom I'd never heard of), were Scawthorpe Athletic and Dog Daisy United.

I arrived at the ground around 10.30 for an 11am kick off and there was already a sizeable crowd gathered. Admission was £3 which included a superb glossy programme. The ground is magnificent with terracing on three sides and a seated stand. The fourth side opens onto the cricket pitch with views of the Yorkshire countryside in the distance.

As more and more people arrived the game kicked off in glorious sunshine. There was certainly an explosive start. After 11 minutes Dog Daisy United were 3-0 up. Game over surely! A Scawthorpe fan next to me was going ballistic. Worst defence ever, worst manager ever etc etc. Hope he didn't leave early in disgust! As the game progressed Scawthorpe steadied the ship and scored on 33 minutes. No more goals before half time. The second half was as exciting as the first. Proper cup tie football with 100% commitment from everyone on the pitch. On 58 minutes Scawthorpe pulled another goal back and it was definitely game on. The comeback was completed on 78 minutes when Scawthorpe equalised. Incredible stuff! A very tense last 12 minutes saw no further goals and so it was extra time.

Both sides were still giving their all and half time in extra time was reached with the score still 3 all. At this point I was sure there would be penalties and given the extra time as well I thought it highly unlikely that I would get to a second game of the day (at Golcar United FC). However, in true Roy of the Rovers style on 109 minutes Scawthorpe scored what proved to be the winner. A sensational comeback.

What a ground, what a crowd, what a match!!!!!!!!! Absolutely brilliant!!!!!!!

contributed on 19/04/22

TT No.159: Steve Hardy - Saturday 23rd April 2022; **Twyford & Ruscombe v Maidenhead Town 'A'**; Thames Valley Premier League - Division Two; Result: Result: 0-0; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 12 H/C

Not the fun packed day I had in mind on Friday. The plan was AFC Wimbledon U18 at 11am followed by Westside of the Kent league at 3.00pm. Unfortunately, I discovered on Saturday morning that Westside, who normally play at Colliers Wood United's ground, had switched their match with Rochester to Banstead Athletic. As I had been there many times before my big plans were left in ruins!

An alternative took some time to find. With so many CoCo League teams' ground-sharing it ruled out most of the clubs I still need to visit. Luckily the Thames Valley League is always a good alternative, and as I worked for over twenty years in Twyford I thought I would give their local team a try. Of course, they don't play in Twyford anymore, but have moved to the village of Charvil, just outside Wokingham. Their base is now East Park Farm, which is a multi-sport facility housing changing rooms, 2 footie pitches, a rather ropey cricket pitch as well the local branch of the WI. A strong smell of herbal refreshment was emanating from

the home dressing room. It also turned up pitch side where one lad was smoking a joint and sharing it with any of the players who ran over to him for a quick drag. Two matches were scheduled here this afternoon, but only one took place, which luckily was the one I wanted.

You will have noticed that I haven't mentioned the football yet. Well, the score-line says it all. Both teams tried quite hard, but it was always going to end up goalless. Instead, I concentrated on trying to take some arty photos of trains passing behind one goal, or the herd of red kites that were flying overhead with limited success.

Just 10 miles from where I was staying gave Sarah satnav a very easy afternoon too.

contributed on 26/04/22

TT No.158: Brian Buck - Saturday 23rd April 2022; Long Wittenham Athletic v East Hendred; North Berks League Division 1; Result: 2-0; Attendance: 15 approx.

I was going to have a day on the trains today, but with the north London duo having games in the capital, I changed my mind and drove once more. Long Wittenham is a small village just a few miles to the east of Abingdon and the River Thames, which in its infancy in this area, passes close by.

The ground was quite easy to find but was still very rural. It reminded me a bit of going to Yaxley. On my arrival the car park, beside the pitch, was almost full and I found it rather strange that after I got here, some 45 minutes before kick-off, hardly any more cars arrived for the remainder of the afternoon. The club had an operational bar and so I decided to have a pint of real ale before the start of the game to wash down my sandwiches. Then the visiting secretary arrived. He had been my main point of contact in checking this game out, although the home secretary was equally helpful when I spoke to him just before I left home.

We had reached the stage of the season when sometimes teams don't turn up if there's nothing to play for. In that sense this game had nothing on it, because East Hendred had already won the league and up until today they had only lost one game doing so. The hosts were in a solid mid table position. The visiting secretary assured me that they would never fail to show up for a game. The ref was from the Army FA and as such controlled the game, which didn't need controlling much, very well. On a pitch covered with daisies and dandelions it was chilly if you caught the wind, so I stood on the other side of the pitch where not only was I sheltered from it, but I was also away from the team benches (I don't think that there were actually any) and also the other spectators. But soon I found that I was expected to be a ball boy as well. As this task is not mentioned in my Duties of a Groundhopper book, I walked round and rejoined the others. But it was just too windy there, so I reverted to my original position, where strangely no loose balls came my way for the remainder of the game.

As for the match, East Hendred started off well and then eased off, seemingly believing that the game was there to be won whenever they felt like scoring. But

as the half wore on, the hosts slowly started to come into it a bit and by the end of the half they had missed two good chances to take the lead. But on 52 minutes they did after the scorer finished off a square pass, but I must have been mistaken as later the chap I had identified as being the scorer later denied doing so and the goal was eventually given as an own goal with the scorer being named on *Full Time!* East Hendred immediately made four subs, but despite regularly rotating their team, they couldn't score. Long Wittenham could though and on 81 minutes they claimed their second goal after an angled free kick went directly in or was touched over the line by someone, so the scorer was one of these two people. At the end the visiting officials were livid with the performance of their side whilst the hosts just walked off, bemused about events and probably by my presence at the game!

contributed on 26/04/22

TT No.157: Keith Aslan - Saturday 23rd April 2022; LEIGH FOUNDRY v Digmoor; Wigan & District Amateur League Mike Taylor Trophy Semi-Final; Kick Off: 14.27; Result: 3-1; Admission & Programme: £3; Attendance: 42 (36 home, 0 away & 6 neutral)

A regular bus service from Wigan station to Leigh town centre from where I'm reliably informed the ground is around a 20-minute walk. Not for me though as I managed to get completely lost and was wandering aimlessly around the outskirts of town until rescued by a kindly Stockport hopper. My trusty Ordnance Survey Map would have got me to the ground no problem if I'd been making the trip in the nineteen-sixties, but it wasn't much use for a 21st century journey. But as everybody else in the universe apart from me has one of those magic phones, people shouldn't go wandering off-piste like yours truly.

My first, and probably only, dip into the Wigan & District League, and you must be thinking that there won't be much in the way of facilities at this level. How wrong you would be. Siddow Park is fully enclosed, roped on two sides, with advertising boards along one touchline. It also boasts a television gantry! Refreshments? Tick, with a tent erected serving hot and cold drinks and bacon rolls. Programme? Tick, 20 pages of glorious glossiness, a stupendous effort for this level (or any other). Souvenirs? Tick, key rings, coasters, and mugs, the latter being eagerly snapped up by one hopper who claimed it was a lifetime's ambition to own a Leigh Foundry drinking vessel. Coupled with a largeish crowd for this level and you had a perfect matchday experience in what must be, by quite some distance, the most progressive club in the league.

The one thing the ground hasn't got are changing facilities, a big plus for the spectators. After the teams had spent the obligatory 45 minutes running pointlessly round cones they can't go and hide back in the dressing room when the match is due to start, hence todays kick off time. And half time was barely five minutes, what do players find to talk about for the 15 plus minutes they usually spend in the dressing room at the interval? A 2.30 kick off finishing at 4.20. My kinda game.

The first half was a tale of two penalties in quick succession for Digmoor. One scored, one missed, to leave the score 1-1 at half time. Second period and the Foundry asserted their authority, including a penalty of their own, to make it through to the prestigious Mike Taylor Trophy final. I wish them well. Something I've never seen before Leigh had a number nought playing for them. It was a shirt actually printed with just a zero on it, not with another figure having peeled off. Is there anything in the rules about this? He was the most photographed player on the pitch.

If I thought this set up was typical of the Wigan and District League, I might be tempted to delve into it a bit further, but I think Leigh Foundry is a bit special.

contributed on 24/04/22

TT No.156: Jon Green - Wednesday 20th April 2022; CASTLE RISING v. Clenchwarton; North West Norfolk League - Division Two; Venue: Police House, Old Hunstanton Road; Result: 0-3; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 14 head count.

There are many wonderful things about the game of football but perhaps its most endearing quality is its unpredictability. Rather foolishly I like to think that perhaps I know a little bit about the game and have a rough understanding of what I am about to see. This is a preconception that I need to rid myself of, as clearly, I know nothing!!!

Three weeks ago Rising defeated tonight's visitors 7-1 in a League Cup semi-final and since then Clenchwarton had suffered a 4-0 loss against local rivals Terrington. Taking all of this into account it was a nailed-on home win. Wrong. Not just wrong but totally and utterly wrong.

The village of Castle Rising is an interesting place; set a few miles north of King's Lynn on the edge of the royal estate of Sandringham, it's been owned by the Howard family for the past 900 years. The current Baron is a direct descendant of the Norman Lord who was responsible for the building of the castle in 1138. Despite its population of less than 250, Rising remains a parliamentary constituency and in the past was known as a "Rotten Borough" (think the Blackadder sketch where Baldrick is elected). Diarist Samuel Pepys being the most famous of its MP's.

Like many rural Norfolk venues, this one is a tricky reach without a car. King's Lynn is the nearest railhead and from there a bus will get you onto the main coast road to Hunstanton where it's a 15-minute walk into the village itself. Luckily there is an excellent pub, in the shadow of the hugely impressive church, just a few yards from the ground.

The football club shares their facilities with the local cricket team and on a beautiful late Spring evening it is a glorious venue. The call of pheasants could be

heard from the nearby woods and a pair of Red Kites circled above the farmland. Three jet black horses leant over a low wooden fence keen to see what the commotion was about but soon realising there was no food on offer turned their attention elsewhere. Maybe they expected an easy home win as well...

Attacking down the not inconsiderable slope Rising dominated the opening minutes with Ryan Barnes almost lobbing Martin Cherry. Barnes was only to play less than 15 minutes, disappearing back to the pavilion before reappearing a few minutes later in his civvies before making a swift exit from the car park. Answers on a postcode if you can shed any light on what that was all about...

Clenchwarton gradually found a foot hold in the game with young Masayso Zulu looking a great prospect in midfield and Lewis Burton using his speed upfront. Zulu was to come close with a curling right footer which home 'keeper Chris Hunt did well to gather. Burton then set up Keenan Elfleet but the midfielder's weak shot was easily cleared.

Burton was then involved twice more in quick succession; firstly he reacted quickest to a loose ball only to see his goal bound shot brilliantly blocked and then he was brought down by James Manning when clean through. Liverpudlian schoolteacher Mr. Brian Humphreys took a lenient view and settled for a yellow. It was an eminently sensible decision as he explained that Manning had made a genuine play for the ball. Kerr stepped up but Hunt diving away to his right made a superb save to keep the game scoreless. With four minutes of the half remaining Clenchwarton deservedly went ahead; Josh Thurston sent in a long free kick and Zulu rose above the home defence to head home.

The second half began much as the first had with Rising looking the more dangerous as Matty Pearson called Cherry into a fine reaction save. The same player went close a few minutes later firing over after a neat turn on the edge of the box. Undeterred, the visitors continued to play calm possession football and got their reward with a little over twenty minutes remaining. Kerr sent in a right-wing corner and Paul Stone timed his run to perfection to head in from an unmarked position. Clenchwarton added a third soon after; another corner from Kerr was spilled by Hunt and Connor Jackson had the easiest of finishes from close range. Rising's evening was summed up a moment later when Pearson executed a near perfect dipping shot only to see the ball strike the underside of the bar and bounce away to safety.

With the shadows lengthening across the pitch and a slight chill in the air Mr. Humphreys brought proceedings to an end. It had been an excellent, if slightly surprising, game played in good spirit at a wonderful country venue. Castle Rising is to be thoroughly recommended for your next visit to Norfolk.

contributed on 21/04/22

TT No.155: Brian Buck - Saturday 16th April 2022; Holbeach United Sports v Peterborough City; ChromaSport Peterborough & District League Division 2; Venue: played at Holbeach United Community Sports Academy, off Penny Hill Road, Holbeach; Result: 0-7; Attendance: 30 approx.

This was one of the few grounds I had yet to visit in the Peterborough & District League and I had been trying to see a game here for a couple of months, but due to inclement weather conditions, I had to wait until today to tick it off. This was the club's last game of the season and ironically it was played out on the warmest day of the year, so far.

I don't know that much about the set-up of the ground, but the club is obviously linked up with Holbeach United, who continue to play at the nearby Carters Park. But through various grants and possibly with money from housing developers after they built a small housing estate next to the ground, this three-pitch venue has sprung up. It will soon become four pitches, as there are plans to build a 3G pitch here as well. They have a decent size car park and a large clubhouse, which from what I saw consisted mainly of dressing rooms. Apart from toilets though there were no other spectator facilities from what I could see.

The ground is clearly visible on *Google Street view* and currently it's a smart facility surrounded mainly by fields, which are part of the Fens. If coming from Spalding way then once you reach the Holbeach United turning on the A17 on your right, instead turn left and the ground is a few hundred yards on your right. Today they played on the pitch furthest away from the clubhouse, which was handy, because one side of the pitch was bordered by a wooden fence, and it offered some shade on this hot day.

Holbeach United Sports were destined to finish the season in an upper, mid-table position, but Peterborough City could still win the league at this point, but they would have to win all their remaining games to do it. Their name struck a chord with me. Although they seem to be a new club now, there was a Peterborough City in the early 1990's. They are derived from the old Baker Perkins club who eventually became APV Peterborough City in 1991/2 before dropping the APV bit in 1992/3. All three teams played in the United Counties League at the time. They may be back there soon as they have announced plans to take over the old Peterborough Northern Star ground as from next season.

Today I had a chat with the ref before the match started and he told me that he had been reffing for over 35 years now, meaning that none of today's players were born before he took up the whistle! I suspect that this was on his mind when he frequently limited their expectations as the game progressed, especially those of the visitors who at times seemed to want to play the game to their rules, as opposed to the laws which the game is played under! But when they focused on their football, they were the better side. In the first half Sports lived with them though and limited them to two goals, but once the third goal went in on 49 minutes their heads dropped, and City ran out easy winners.

contributed on 19/04/22

TT No.154: Keith Aslan - Saturday 16th April 2022; BOLDON COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION v Bedlington Terriers; Ebac Northern League Division 2; Kick Off: 15.00; Result: 2-1; Admission: £3 for the aged; Programme: £1; Attendance: 116 (86 home, 28 away & 2 neutral)

Over forty years ago I visited Jarrow Roofing and gazed longingly at the football ground next door and promised myself that one day I would return to tick it off. Today was that day. A long trek over the Easter Weekend would not have been my first choice, but L.N.E.R. were just about the only rail company actually running trains where they should do. Over 100 (one hundred) engineering works meant that wherever you wanted to go, you were being shafted. While many lines are shut down on a normal weekend, *Network Rail* really go to town over Easter and close virtually the lot. They do this every bank holiday because 'not so many people are travelling'. Really? I must have dreamt my train up to Newcastle was rammed full, with standing room only. Rant over.

Brockley Whinns is the metro station you want for this one with an 18-minute walk through a nature reserve taking you to the Welfare ground. Although Jarrow Roofing are no more, it's good to see their ground next door is still in use by somebody and it was looking pristine with all the stands still in place. Boldon's ground has a stand along one side with a row of benches in the front to comply with ground grading. A much smaller stand opposite has a few seats in it which don't serve any purpose as people stand in front of them. This stand also houses the refreshment hatch, with one of the best selections of goodies to be found at this level. They even had the legendary Scotch pies, although in truth they weren't up to the standard of the ones you get in Scotland. It didn't stop me having seconds though. There is a souvenir hut next to the changing rooms from where programmes were available. They would shift a lot more if somebody actually stood outside selling them rather than having to ask for one.

Boldon have been going a long time and in 1892 they became founder members of the Wearside League. Their most famous ex-player and local resident is Sam Bartram whose name is all over the ground. As well as the Sam Bartra41m stand are the Sam Bartram floodlights which were switched on by his daughter in 2011 who travelled from Canada to perform the ceremony. Bartram made 623 appearances for Charlton; a figure made all the more impressive as there was a six-year gap due to the war. On the page in the programme of his life is the story of him getting married in the morning then turning out for Charlton in the afternoon. This was the first match his new bride had missed since they met as she was stuck at the reception. Different times.

I've never seen a match in this league that hasn't kicked off punctually. Why should this be when here in the south starting matches on time is just a dream. Something to do with the Northern being a better run league, perhaps? And today we had a 12-minute half time! The players down here would have paroxysms if they didn't get their full 17-minute break. Boldon's win was much more stressful than it would have been if their finishing had matched their approach play. Indeed, it all got a bit frisky when Bedlington pulled a goal back in the 93rd of the 90 minutes. It

resulted in one of their players being sent off after the final whistle, presumably for undue mouthiness. All this could have been avoided if the referee had just played the hour and a half as written in the rule book. The win confirmed Boldon as runners up, not bad for their first season in the Northern League.

Only one more to do in the Northern League. Come on Redcar Town, start issuing programmes again.

contributed on 17/04/22

TT No.153: Brian Buck - Saturday 9th April 2022; Dodworth Miners Welfare v Jubilee Sports; EV2 Sportswear Sheffield & Hallamshire County Senior League Premier Division; Result: 5-1; Attendance: 50 approx.

Today I was able to accept the kind offer of a lift from a friend who dropped me off before continuing on to watch Liversedge play. I didn't cause him too much inconvenience as the ground is about a mile west of Junction 37 of the M1.

I was there early enough to have plenty of time to practice my drinking skills in the clubhouse. It's something I miss from doing regularly during my 'glory years'. Most wouldn't agree with me, but I don't have a problem with John Smiths keg, especially when it's only £2.80 a pint! This was a place where even the women drink pints. In fact, apart from the fact that they didn't do food, I was impressed with the whole place. The only downside for me was that I couldn't find a contact number to check out the game beforehand, so we travelled more in hope than anything else.

Rather surprisingly the ground is situated right next to a pub, the Thornely Arms and you have to go down a short driveway next to it to reach the car park. It's all very clean and tidy and on arrival your eyes are soon drawn to two immaculately kept bowling greens, both of which have small, covered viewing accommodation for spectators. To reach the football ground you have to go down one a short pathway behind one of these bowling greens and then you reach the playing area, which drops sharply down in front of you. This reminded me of my visits to Bradford City and the old Grays Athletic ground, both of which you accessed from street level to find yourself at the back of the stand.

They have a stand here as well, which really is their jewel in the crown. The sheer size of it took me by surprise. I knew that they had a stand, but I didn't realise that it could hold, to my reckoning, over 500 spectators. It also had steep steps and crush barriers and compared most favourably with other grounds I've been to in this area, namely Houghton Main and Dearne Colliery Miners Welfare, the latter which seems to have been knocked down now. Also, the pitch was fully railed here, and the views of the game and the surrounding houses and trees were splendid. In addition to the main ground, they also have a rugby pitch, and another football pitch and the newish looking dressing rooms are in between the three pitches.

As for the match, this was a third versus bottom game. Dodworth can still win the league, but it is going to be tight for them. Today they had to initially work hard to

see off a spirited visiting side, but eventually this was accomplished with ease. They started off well enough though and they took the lead on 6 minutes with a well struck 25-yarder. Then on 20 minutes a close-range diving header saw them double their lead after the excellent ref played a good advantage, in what was generally a friction free match. In this period Dodworth should have scored more, given the amount of possession they were having, but a resolute visiting defence held out fairly well. In fact, on 54 minutes they started to make a game of it when they pulled a goal back with a 25-yarder, but within two minutes Dodworth restored their two goal advantage. This gave the scorer his hattrick and then he was immediately subbed! Then further goals on 70 and 82 minutes by their captain gave Dodworth an emphatic victory. I then returned to the clubhouse to wait for my lift home. By now it was rather full as the Grand National was being shown, so I'll probably be getting Covid soon! Overall, this was a great day for me and a reminder of what I used to get up in my grand old days of Groundhopping!

contributed on 13/04/22

TT No.152: Craig Dabbs - Saturday 5th April 2022; English Bicknor v Quedgeley Wanderers; Gloucestershire County League; Venue: English Bicknor Playing Fields; Result: 1-1; Admission: Free; Programme: 24pp, £3; Attendance: 72

I do enjoy watching football in the Forest of Dean. It's one of my favourite places but I don't do it nearly enough. So, with a promise of keeping fellow hopper Mitch Tovey company, we set off in that direction arriving at the small village of English Bicknor in Gloucestershire (just). To be honest I hadn't spotted that it was to be the club's last game at the English Bicknor Playing Fields although I certainly knew it was going to be their last season in the County League.

On arrival in the sleepy village of English Bicknor, yes there is a Welsh Bicknor too, it's in Herefordshire, we parked up alongside the pitch and after settling in I went and asked the question as to why the move.

I'm told that the new owners of the hall don't see the club as part of their future plans here. They wish to incorporate a children's play area on the site of the car park and focus on larger events such as weddings. On top of that they state they don't like the barrier that is around the pitch or the dugouts, both of which are fairly recent additions to enable the club to stage County League Football.

Having been formed in 1953 the club has played here throughout that time, and it was clear to hear the emotion in the voice of the person telling me the story. The club do have a plan, apparently sharing at nearby Ruardean Hill Rangers FC who have three pitches at their disposal. One of these is at nearby Worrall Hill who I think had a side fairly recently, and they will take the fixtures and fitting's setting them up there instead moving out of the village after nearly seventy years.

As it was the last match at the venue, I thought it would be rather fitting for the club to sign off with a win. However, sitting second from bottom on 16 points, it didn't bode well although Quedgeley are safe mid table and have nothing to play for other than pride. So maybe English Bicknor could get the win. Of course, the score-line tells the story, it was a stalemate and a very stale second half indeed.

The first half promised much, a shock early lead following the own goal and despite Quedgeley getting the equaliser the game looked Bicknor's but they couldn't capitalise in the second period in what proved to be a very dull half of football.

So that's it for football here for now unless there is a change of heart. It's a shame because whilst it doesn't kill the club off thankfully it does end football being played in the village.

contributed (via Brian Buck) on 10/04/22

TT No.151: Keith Aslan - Saturday 9th April 2022; **Meon Milton v Michelmersh & Timsbury**; Hampshire Premier League Division 1 South East; Kick Off: 15.05; Result: 1-1; Admission & pirate programme: Free; Attendance: 22 (17 home, 0 away & 5 neutral).

Fratton is the one you want for Meon Milton with a 12-minute bus service from outside the station taking you about two thirds of the way to the ground with a 16-minute walk to top it off. During the Iraq set to (weapons of mass destruction and all that) the then foreign secretary Geoff Hoon described the port of Umm Qasar as similar to Southampton, causing much derision among the troops there. As one soldier on patrol in Umm Qasar put it 'There's no beer, no prostitutes and people are shooting at us. It's much more like Portsmouth', neatly summing up the gateway to Gosport.

Like most things in Portsmouth, The Cockleshell Community Sports Club is the property of the M.O.D. and on entering you pass a cricket ground and a number of football pitches before turning right for the football ground, which is tucked away in a corner giving it an enclosed feel. Fully railed, there is a defending wall along one side of it that is clearly at least a couple of centuries old, with slits for gun emplacements. There are also the remains of an old fort, if Putin tries a pre-emptive strike on the Hampshire League he won't get very far at this ground. The Royal Marines Club is adjacent which is nothing to do with the football club, but they let them use it, somewhat reluctantly I thought. This is a weird set up, having ordered my pint of golden nectar, the miserable barmaid gave me instructions that when I'd finished my drink, I had to put the glass in a basket at the end of the bar as the staff weren't allowed to touch them! I thought she was winding me up because I was a stranger, but everybody else was doing it. Like I say, all very strange. I wondered what would happen when somebody just walked out and left their glass on the table. Do the staff have to put on Hazchem suits to pick it up? On the plus side the beer was very cheap, but hot drinks and food were non options.

Today's programme was from the Steve King stable. He does a programme for every match he attends for personal use, and should they desire, he also gives his friends a copy. Today he let me have one as well. An enjoyable match in the sunshine with one all a fair result for these two mid-table teams. All trains and buses were on their best behaviour to make for another sparkling Saturday.

contributed on 10/04/22

TT No.150: Jon T Green - Saturday 2nd April 2022; **IRVINE MEADOW XI v. Kirkintilloch Rob Roy**; West of Scotland Football League - Premier Division; Venue: Meadow Park; Result: 3-5; Admission: £8; Programme: £2; Attendance: circa 220.

Maybe it's a geographical issue, or perhaps the use of the word "Junior", but it seems that the Scottish non-league game doesn't get the coverage South of the Border that its rich history deserves. 'Junior' seems likely to disappear from league football with clubs being given Senior status and divisions restructured into a pyramid system already familiar to those following the English and Welsh game. The standard of play outside of the Scottish League is certainly comparable to, and likely exceeds, the lower levels of the Scottish professional game and, with an abundance of "old school" grounds, it's an opportunity simply too good to miss.

Founded in 1895 Irvine Meadow XI are amongst the oldest ex-Junior clubs still active today; classed as a "juvenile" team they began life as tenants of Irvine Celtic and used Celtic's Meadow Park whenever it was available. When Celtic ceased playing that same year Meadow took over the ground and would eventually buy it from the local council. A year later the club joined the Irvine and District League winning both the championship, with an unbeaten record, and the Ayrshire Juvenile Cup. Buoyed by this early success the club moved up to the Junior ranks the following season and from where they have achieved a huge amount of success. The Holy Grail of the Scottish Junior Cup has been lifted on three occasions: 1958/59, 1962/63 and 1972/73. The latter after a three-game titanic struggle which finally saw them beat Cambuslang Rangers 1-0. Although losers in 1951, they did set a Junior Cup final attendance record when 77,650 spectators saw Petershill score the only goal of the game at Hampden Park. In 2009 Meadow became the first team from the "Joons" to defeat Scottish League opposition when they knocked out Arbroath in a Scottish Cup third round tie. Sadly, the run did not continue much further as they were beaten 3-0 at Hibernian in the next round.

Alongside their cup successes, Meadow have picked up plenty of league silverware with 12 Junior championships and three West Region Premiership titles. They joined the West of Scotland League in 2020 and so officially moved to Senior football, albeit they remain members of the Scottish Junior Football association in order to take part in the Junior Cup. As a part of the town's Marymass Festival, Irvine Meadow take part in an annual derby fixture against Irvine Victoria every August; it might be a pre-season game, but it shouldn't be described as a "friendly"!

There are many reasons for selecting a particular game but the chance to visit a club who has Roman numerals in its official name playing one with a semi fictional character in theirs (Rob Roy was the Highland equivalent of Robin Hood and immortalised in Sir Walter Scott's book) looked like manna from heaven.

Situated within walking distance of the town centre, Meadow Park is an absolute beauty. Dominating the ground is the 700 capacity Main Stand, resplendent beneath a large sloping roof are rows of blue painted benches standing out perfectly against the bright yellow markings of the gangways. In classic style there is a terraced paddock at the front along with a snug social club and extremely well stocked tea bar. The turnstile block is at the end of a residential street and opens

immediately onto a terrace behind the goal. To the left, one of four identikit covers has been bolted to the concrete, whilst to the right the terrace bends away before stopping short of the corner flag. Along the far side (which seems to be the unofficial “away” section) are two more small, covered stands but the joy here is to climb on top of the grass bank for an elevated view of the action. The remaining end of the ground is now somewhat cramped with a high brick wall separating a couple of steps of terracing from the new build houses behind. Floodlights were erected in 2021 to meet ground licensing requirements.

Fears of a potential relegation battle for the home side had been eased the previous week with a 2-1 win at Blantyre Victoria but with Kirkintilloch still sitting uncomfortably close to the bottom of the league it was the visitors who struck first in what turned out to be a rip-roaring 45 minutes of action. Play built up cross field and when the ball reached Scott Callum on the far left, he stepped inside and fired in a shot which goalkeeper Marc Waters, who was perhaps a little unsighted, could only parry into the path of Robbie Kane who made no mistake from close range. The visitors, who had turned out in a black and red hooped shirt reminiscent of Dennis the Menace, didn’t hold the lead for long and on 20 minutes Meadow were level. Mark McLennan pumped in a long free kick which was inadvertently helped on by a defender and Callum Graham was on hand to out jump the ‘keeper to head in for his first goal in Irvine colours. Back came Rob Roy and with a certain *deja-vu* regained the lead; a long throw was headed goalward by Chris O’Kane, Waters once again unsighted could only push the ball away and Young repeated his earlier feat by tucking in the rebound. Susceptibility to the high ball was proving to be a serious problem for Kirkintilloch and when McLennan delivered another delicious free kick into the box, Graham Boyd had the simplest of tasks to guide it beyond Christopher Smith. Young, who was the recipient of some overly physical attention by the home defence, was having a superb game. He twisted, turned and ghosted away into space, provided a willing outlet and held up the ball with some aplomb. It was therefore no surprise when he was once more involved as Rob Roy again took the lead. Holding the ball with his back to goal he had the presence of mind to look up and lay a pass into the path of Dean Cairns who fairly hammered it into the net.

It’s rare that the second half lives up to the first but this one most surely did. Within ten minutes of the restart Meadow were yet again on level terms and once more it was the aerial threat which led to the goal. Jared Willet sent in a corner and Graham Boyd, pulling away from his marker, planted his header downwards beyond the covering defenders. If Kirkintilloch were dismayed by having given up the lead, they didn’t show it and back they came; Young fed O’Kane and, when the midfielder was sandwiched between two defenders, Ben Daily made no mistake from the penalty spot. This time there was to be no way back for Meadow and, in an afternoon of repeat action, Rob Roy wrapped up the win with another penalty. Young surged into the area and was unsurprisingly fouled; Daily stepped forward once more and placed his penalty into the same corner. Just in case the action hadn’t been breathless enough there was still time for Willet to be dismissed for a second yellow, the foul tackle was of course made on man of the match Robbie Young.

Leaving the ground two elderly gents were discussing the game: “*What a great*

game" said one. "Aye" replied his friend "*nae bad but there was sum sloppy defindin'*". Standards are clearly very high in this part of the world...

contributed on 06/04/22

TT No.149: Brian Buck - Saturday 2nd April 2022; Charlbury Town v Hanborough; Witney & District League Ted Young Senior Cup Quarter Final; Result: 0-5; Attendance: 15 approx.

Time to dip into yet another new league, for me, although I have visited some of its clubs' grounds before when they were in other leagues. I arrived here roughly in sat nav time to find the car park rather full and no wonder, as there are shops nearby along with a doctor's surgery, a dentist's practice and Charlbury Community Centre, which houses a gym, a library and a café, making it great if you want to read a book while you are on your exercise bike!

I soon realised that the theme of the day here was that everyone seemed to be in a hurry. I saw a player, probably arriving late, rushing off to the dressing rooms and although he replied to my basic questions, he was in too much of a rush to speak to me for long. Charlbury being just in the Cotswolds, is therefore in *Midsomer Murders* territory, so I resisted walking around the town before or after the game. With an average of at least four murders in each of its 130 plus episodes so far, I wasn't going to take any chances! So, I sat in the car and devoured my home-made refreshments instead.

Then it was time for the match. Soon I bumped into a locally based Groundhopper I know, and we watched the game together. The game was played on the top pitch, which was on a kind of plateau, having been cut out of the side of a hill. The club probably once played on the pitch nearest the club's changing rooms though, but these days it's too narrow for adult football, because of the newish looking tennis courts eating up space on one side. But the main pitch is a work of art. Despite having an undulating appearance and still sloping up and down a little, it must have taken an enormous effort to build up the plateau and make it as flat as it is. On the side we stood, there were also some amazing scenic views to behold.

As for the match, a 1.30pm kick off, I think that Charlbury knew what was coming, as they had been beaten 5-0 away to Hanborough, on the previous Saturday. Today they lasted 24 minutes before conceding, when a shot was pushed up in the air by the keeper, with the scorer getting to the ball to force it home before the keeper could reclaim it. Then just before half time the hosts conceded a spot kick, given by the referee for handball. Technically he should have sent off the offender, but firstly he couldn't be sure if he was already over the line when he handled the ball, and secondly, he took the view that Charlbury probably needed all the players they had in order to avoid a big defeat. After little more than a five-minute break at half-time Charlbury shipped another goal from the spot on 48 minutes, also given for handball. For me this one looked more ball to arm though. Further goals on 52 and 57 minutes brought the score to the regulation 0-5 and this coming Saturday the two sides are due to meet yet again, back here in a league match. As the match neared its end, the partner of one of the frustrated Charlbury

players spotted that he had been subbed. "I'm glad you've come off early," she told him, "We can go home now." Clearly though, she wasn't aware of the roll on, roll off sub rule! But she didn't have to wait too long for her wish to be granted as with 86 minutes 12 seconds played and with the time being 3.03pm, the ref blew the final whistle, possibly noting that the bar in the clubhouse was now open. As I said earlier, everyone was in a hurry today!

contributed on 05/04/22

TT No.148: Craig Dabbs - Saturday 2nd April 2022; Brackley Town v Gateshead; National League North; Venue: St James Park; Result: 1-0; Admission: £13; Programme: 60pp, £3; Attendance: 1557.

I've driven past the town of Brackley numerous times. Quite honestly, it's a ground I should've done years ago. Somehow its always passed me by.

However, with Brackley Town sitting second and Gateshead top, there really wasn't a better time to go and get it done. So, with the club on the cusp of National League football, I thought I would see what St James Park was like today since the clubs rise through the ranks from its Hellenic League days in the seventies.

The club itself can be traced back to 1890 when the likes of Tottenham Hotspur came to visit. However, the club dropped down and played for a number of years at local level in the Oxfordshire League, the North Bucks League and the Banbury & District.

The club made the move to St James Park in 1974 which enabled them to move on up to the Hellenic League and then the United Counties League. They struggled to make ends meet but kept going and moved back to the Hellenic in 1994. After winning the league in 96/97 ground improvements were made in preparation for a move up to the Southern League. This only served to completely overstretch the club to breaking point resulting in a quick return back to the Hellenic once again.

Brackley Town recovered and have kicked on since those dark days. They have managed to build on serious investment made into the club, one which is now on the brink of the top-flight of non-league football.

St James Park has seen steady development. It's even faced setback when the clubhouse burnt down fairly recently. Now rebuilt it's truly excellent and from a ground development perspective, the new clubhouse with its sizeable overhang has only enhanced the ground further. That side of the ground still has the original main stand which somehow avoided the fire whilst two other sides of the ground see a selection of kit stands ensuring the gradings are met. The kit stands are as follows: two at the cricket pitch end (both standing); two over the far side and both seated, and a curious structure sat outside the ground in the middle that looks like a stand in the making. The south bank with its caged 3G to the rear, has cover over the central section allowing for a good, sized terrace. The ground is probably as big as it's going to get with its capacity at just over 4000. The seats could be increased however from the current 600 to whatever is needed next.

The game pitted two teams going directly at each other for the title. A 0-0 was probably the most likely outcome and it did look very much like that until the keeper for Gateshead gave away a soft penalty and, as it proved, the three points. It could've been a point a piece which would've done the Heed nicely for their long trip back up to the north east.

contributed (via Brian Buck) on 03/04/22

TT No.147: Keith Aslan - Saturday 2nd April 2022; **WIMBOURNE TOWN v Dorchester Town**; Pitching-In Southern League Premier South; Kick Off: 15.01; Result: 0-1; Admission: £7 for the elderly; Programme: £2.50p; Official Attendance: 508 (including 90 away & 4 neutral: not quite so official)

Not really match fit today, I'm still recovering from an operation as medical science once again pushed back the boundaries to keep me going for a bit longer. The sensible option today would have been to stay local, but 'sensible' is a road I only travel down when all other avenues are closed. So Wimbourne it is then.

Not the easiest ground to get to for the carless. Plenty of buses from outside Bournemouth station which all go a somewhat circuitous route to Wimbourne, with New Cuthbury out on the eastern outskirts of town, around a 30-minute walk from the bus stop. On the subject of buses, the one back was brand new state of the art with tables on the top deck. Worth letting a few pass by just to travel on one of these. Can't remember anything about the old ground or even where it was. That's why I like to get a programme to bring the memories flooding back. At least they would have done if I'd been able to find the old programme among many thousands of others. This is what happens when you have a filing system that is a bit non-existent.

A strange set up getting into the ground. You have to buy your ticket before entering. So far so normal. But all they give you is a bog standard 'Ivy series' effort without even a number on it which you show on entry to a semi-interested gateman. As all the tickets are the same you could just show the same one at every match and save yourself a fortune. The ground, obviously a new build, has everything you could want. Covered terracing running the length of both ends, with two seated contributions from Mr. Atcost along the near touchline. A large bar and a couple of food outlets complete the picture. Don't understand why the pitch is grass when they've built a plastic one next door for training purposes. Wimbourne started life at New Cuthbury only doing awful on-line programmes but have now graduated to proper paper, and todays was a good effort. It contained an interview with someone who calls himself a 'match day music co-ordinator'. How many clubs have got one of those? He chooses the pre-match entertainment, and not to put too fine a point on it, his taste in music sucks.

While everything is hunky dory off the pitch, the football side is still a work in progress with Wimbourne bottom of the league and certs for relegation. Today's derby, the Magpies v the Magpies, could have gone either way with a first half goal from Dorchester giving them the points. Wimbourne weren't at all bad and a rapid return to the Premier Division is to be anticipated (at least by me).

contributed on 03/04/22

TT No.146: Brian Buck - Saturday 26th March 2022; **South Dulwich v Agenda;** Bromley & South London League John Cooper Premier Division; Venue: played at the Griffin Sports Ground, 12 Dulwich Village; Result: 2-3; Attendance: 15 approx.

As far as I can recall, this was my first ever game in this league, although I have visited many of the grounds in it, as a goodly number of former Kent County League sides now play in this league. I travelled here by train and the nearest station to the ground is North Dulwich, about a five-minute walk away. It's immediately to the east of Herne Hill Velodrome which is next door and is, as I recall, where a team called St Andrews used to play. I didn't investigate this further as my relationship with cyclists, especially when I'm driving, is not a happy one these days! But I had other things on my mind, things like could I sit down somewhere to eat my sandwiches and wash them down with a pint or two? I soon found out that I could as in this generous sized complex they had one of those large pre-second world war clubhouses, which are two a penny at many sports grounds in South London.

Then it was time for the match to start and this was one of three matches taking place here, with the other two being far enough away to have no impact on this match, which took place on the most enclosed of the three. The clubhouse and other buildings were behind one goal. The fenced off velodrome was behind the other goal and gardens to housing featured along one side with the other side being open.

This was the hosts last game (out of 14) in this 8-team league this season and it seems that they may avoid relegation, whilst visitors Agenda are in with a shout of winning it after getting promoted at the end of last season. The fact that this Division is called the John Cooper Premier Division interested me. I met John a few years back when I visited Bromleians, who play at the John Cooper Sports Ground. Aged 92 then, these days he is their club president.

As for the game, Agenda took the lead after just 80 seconds after the ball was forced home following a knock back from a free kick. For a while it seemed that Dulwich were going to get thrashed, but they slowly worked their way back into the match and managed to equalise on 36 minutes, when the ball was glanced home following a deep free kick and it may have gone in off a defender. Dulwich then took the lead three minutes later when another deep free kick went over the wall and bounced into the net thus deceiving the keeper who was guarding the other post. At the end he had to ask permission to give me his name and the situation was made more interesting when later *Full Time* suggested that this was his first game for the club.

In the second half Dulwich hung on well for what would have been a deserved win, but they didn't get it because on 85 minutes they firstly conceded a spot kick, given for hand ball and then four minutes later they gave away a soft goal when

their keeper overcommitted himself and the ball was lobbed into an unguarded net. Overall, a decent game and I'll be back for more in this league in due course.

contributed on 29/03/22

TT No.145: Steve Hardy - Saturday 26th March 2022; **Lightwater United v Cranleigh**; Surrey County Intermediate league (Western) Premier Division; Result: 1-1; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance 18 H/C.

A blazing hot day, for a change, and a visit to Lightwater United who play at Lightwater Leisure Centre in the middle of the lovely Lightwater Country Park. The park was heaving at 2pm on a Saturday, with families making the most of the lovely weather to get out in some fresh air.

The Leisure Centre has a grass rugby pitch (where Farnham Rugby were training today), and a grass football pitch next to it (where my match was being played). There is also a small 3G pitch in a cage and a group of 5-a-side pitches also in a cage near the car park.

Visitors Cranleigh arrived in 3rd spot and were by far the better side throughout. They had loads of breaks and chances, but a combination of fine goal keeping saves and bad finishing restricted them to just one second half goal. Lightwater, on the other hand offered very little, and were content to hoof the ball out to touch at every opportunity. They too scored in the second half in a game which the Cranleigh manager described as frustrating. In theory, Cranleigh could still win the league as they have a good, few games in hand on leaders Keens Park Rangers. In practice though it is unlikely, as Rangers have a big enough lead to lose a couple of games and still win it.

Not a game that will live long in the memory, but good for the old shorts to get a first airing of the year.

contributed on 28/03/22

TT No.144: Craig Dabbs - Saturday 26th March 20022; **Denaby Main v Sheffield Medics**; Sheffield & Hallamshire County Senior League Division One; Venue: Tickhill Square; Result: 4-0; Admission: Free; Programme: 16pp, £1; Attendance: 57.

I think two words are key here, history and regeneration. Denaby Main FC is very much in coal mining country with Denaby Main Colliery opening for business in 1863, with the village developing around it. This colliery closed in 1968 although the other adjacent colliery, Cadeby Main, lasted until 1987, having opened in 1893. The housing stock, well the terraced one's at least, were replaced with more modern semi-detached properties as the village adjusted to life without the mines.

One other institute within the village was Denaby United FC who were formed in 1895. They established themselves as a senior team within the non-league game playing in the Midland League and, in more modern times, the Northern Counties (East) League having the likes of Mel Sterland and Imre Varadi in their ranks. The club, also made a couple of appearances in the FA Cup First Round with one such

tie against Southport in 1927 attracting 5,200 into Tickhill Square. Sadly, all this came to an end, when in 2001 they were informed by the Miners Welfare Trust that they could only play at Tickhill Square until the end of the 2001/02 season which they did, and with no home, subsequently folded.

The club reappeared several years later in 2011. Tickhill Square by now had lost its main stand, destroyed by fire in 2005 and, with the ground unavailable, they played out of Old Road in Conisbrough and have since settled there, now plying their trade in the Doncaster League.

Meanwhile Tickhill Square wasn't lost and is slowly being restored by new club Denaby Main who were formed in 2012. As you walk around the ground you notice many scars from its past. You can see bits of cut off metal in the corners where the floodlights once stood; a raised area with steps leading to a concrete base perhaps where some building or cover once sat (at the end where you enter), and over to the right and on the changing room/clubhouse side is one of two new stands. The remains of posts suggest another structure once stood here. The opposite side sees the other main stand nestled towards the corner where St Albans RC Church overlooks the ground. Alongside and behind the dugouts is a concrete base where the beautiful old stand stood until vandals set it ablaze. The whole site drips with history but Main's tenure sees a new beginning and one that seems bright and hopeful with the prospect of Northern Counties (East) Football maybe returning in the not so distance future. Certainly, all the right signs and noises are being made.

On the pitch, it's pretty much the same. The club are in the box seat with games in hand to potentially take the title, or at least be in the frame for promotion into the top-flight of the league at the end of the season.

Earlier in the week there was some doubt over today's game. The Medics were having difficulty in getting a team on the pitch but fortunately they managed to fulfil the fixture and, to give them credit, they frustrated Main early on. However, as the game wore on, Sheffield Medics wore out and Denaby eventually ran out comfortable winners in the end.

Tickhill Square is slowly getting back to its former vibrant self, thanks to a very friendly team of staff who made us feel more than welcome throughout the day. If you get chance to make a visit, it's so worth it.

contributed (via Brian Buck) on 27/03/22

TT No.143: Brian Buck - Saturday 19th March 2022; Beacon Hill Rovers v Wakering Sports; Prokit UK Essex Olympian League Division 1; Venue: played at Wickham Bishops Sports Ground, Great Totham Road; Result: 1-2; Attendance: 10 approx.

Today I took my wife with me, dropping her off at relatives in Chelmsford before driving 20 minutes further on to this pleasant recreation ground, which is a few miles southeast of Witham. This was a sunny day, warm if you stood out of the chilly wind.

The club have their own clubhouse and bar here and also sell hot coffees for £2, justified perhaps by the cost of the electricity used to make the machine to heat up the water, which took ages! There were two games taking place here as the hosts' reserves also had a game on the adjacent pitch. More spectators seemed to be watching that one rather than the first team game, but many tried to watch both.

Nothing much happened in 'my' game until the 14th minute when I was suddenly hit by the ball in the face. I saw it too late to get out of the way, but I did manage to turn my head so that it only hit me in the jaw and neck. The power of it nearly felled me, but although I wobbled a bit, I managed to stay on my feet and one player did ask me if I was alright. Of course, I could have fallen to the floor, lay there motionless for three minutes, had my faced wiped by someone with a wet sponge, before getting up slowly before demanding that the perpetrator was either sent off or castrated at the very least! But I don't like to make a fuss, unlike the visiting keeper did on 72 minutes when he did fall to the floor with a fake injury, convincing the young ref enough to book a home player, for his only serious mistake of the game.

Anyway, before then, on 24 minutes, the hosts complained about the honesty of the visiting lino, to which they were told that he was nervous and that this was his first time! The first half was keenly contested, but it finished with just one goal attempt from either side. That was created by the visitors. Possession had been even, but Wakering did more with the ball when they had it. They were challenging for promotion whilst Rovers were trying to avoid relegation. They were doing quite well until the 64th minute, when from a breakaway in that phase of the game the ball was mis-controlled by a defender allowing the scorer to beat the keeper in a one on one. But Rovers fought back and on 75 minutes they equalized, with a stunning effort from at least 30 yards out, which seemed to take the keeper by surprise. This goal gave them confidence and the game, which hadn't been great up until now, suddenly came to life. A draw would have been a fair result but on 90(+1) minutes Wakering took the points when from a deep free kick; the ball was played back across goal and finished off from close range at the far post.

contributed on 22/03/22

TT No.142: Brian Buck - Saturday 12th March 2022; Robertsbridge United v Northiam 75; East Sussex League Premier Division; Result: 2-3; Attendance: 25 approx.

A largely trouble-free day on the trains today saw me visit yet another different league on a Saturday, although my connection at London Bridge on the way home was cancelled, which will mean that one of my forthcoming trips will eventually become just a little cheaper!

I arrived at Robertsbridge station in good time and immediately noticed that the Rother Valley Railway starts from here. Eventually it seeks to fully link up Bodiam station and thus complete the restoration of the whole of the 14 miles long line to Tenterden, which is already completed and operational. Having studied my

Ordnance Survey map earlier, I decided to take a short cut along a footpath which should have brought me out right by the ground. But although I did get there this way eventually, this was a big mistake, as not only did I nearly ruin my shoes walking through a lot of mud, I had failed to take into account a rather deep tributary stream leading into the nearby River Rother and as such had to walk a bit further on before I found a bridge across it to lead me back, under the railway bridge and to the ground which was next to it.

The ground wasn't quite as good as the aerial photography suggested. The pitch was turned round 90 degrees to what the pictures showed and as such ran east to west, rather than north south. They had a tea bar here, but it was smaller than the gent's toilets I visited. Nonetheless it served hot food and beverages and without exception all those I spoke to were pleasant and helpful. However, the pitch looked as though it hadn't seen a mower since the late summer and wasn't conducive to good quality football, which was a bonus for today's players, some of whom were in the autumn of their careers. One of them was said to be 51, but no one said if this was his age or waist measurement!

This was a match between two sides in danger of relegation and to be honest it showed. But despite this, in between the jovial sledging, the sides produced a watchable encounter. The hosts had to play one of their two strikers in goal today and early on this looked to be working, especially as they took the lead on 34 minutes after which their other striker did a cartwheel to celebrate his goal. At this point it was deserved, but Northiam kept pressing, and they then also deserved their equalizer, on the stroke of half time. The second half saw the game quickly slip away from the hosts, especially after the visitors took the lead on 62 minutes. Robertsbridge then brought their striker out of goal, but he wasn't effective on the pitch and worse still his replacement was a nervous ninny who looked like he had never used his hands to catch a ball before. In fact, for the visitors third goal on 87 minutes went straight through him as he tried to gather it! But the final score-line was made to look more respectable when the hosts scored from the spot, following an undisputed foul, on 90(+8) minutes. Afterwards I walked back to the station by roads, passing the Robertsbridge Club on the way and did it in under 15 minutes and more quickly than I did on my outward journey! Overall, a nice ground, but probably better to visit it when the trees are fully in leaf and eventually when you can watch the steam trains pass by while the game is in progress!

contributed on 15/03/22

TT No.141: Craig Dabbs - Saturday 12th March 2022; Long Melford v March Town United; Eastern Counties League Premier Division; Venue: Stoneylands Stadium; Result: 1-3; Admission: £8; Programme: 24pp, free; Attendance: 103.

Near to Sudbury and just over ten miles from Bury St Edmunds is the village of Long Melford. I'm told its football club, formed in 1868, is the tenth oldest in the country.

The club have been at their current, modest, Stoneylands Stadium since 1948 with the Cock and Bell PH providing changing rooms until 1959 when a new set was constructed on the site. They still partially exist because work is nearing completion on the new clubhouse and changing rooms you can see behind the main stand. Although not quite finished yet, the new facility is open and is the only bit of the ground that doesn't belong to the club. Named The Melford, it belongs to a newly set up *Long Melford Community Sports Trust* who will be taking any profits from its use. How that benefits the Football Club directly I'm not sure but looking around the ground it's quite clear to me that money isn't exactly in abundance. Sure, it's well maintained but the lack of advertising, not only in the programme (why do they give it away?) but more telling is the lack of pitch-side advertising. Talking of pitch-side I noticed that the post and rail over on the dugout side was being propped up by metal steaks along its length perhaps owing to the fact that this side is closed to spectators despite a few ignoring the notices.

The other bit of cover aside from the 100-seater kit stand on the clubhouse side is a wooden cover at the far end of the ground that I assure you is far sturdier than it looks.

Yes, it needs a bit more TLC but at the same time it does have charm about it and the staff that run it are warm and welcoming, making for an enjoyable afternoon.

The match saw Long Melford really needing points to avoid the drop against a high-flying March side who to be honest have a bit too much to do to gain major honours. The Villagers gave an excellent account of themselves but fell short overall despite plenty of effort. On the other hand, The Hares did look sharp and every bit a top five team but were made to work hard for the three points.

A good day out in Suffolk then.

contributed (via Brian Buck) on 13/03/22

TT No.140: Keith Aslan - Saturday 26th March 2022; **LEIGH RAMBLERS v Rayleigh; Essex Olympian Premier; Kick Off: 13.59; Result: 1-1; Admission: Free; Programme: On-line! Attendance: 52 (39 home, 9 away & 4 neutral)**

E-programmes are the work of the devil and without being too harsh, clubs that do them should be wiped from the face of the earth. But there are mitigating circumstances for Leigh Ramblers. With programmes as rare in the Essex Olympian as laughs in 'Mrs. Browns Boys', the alternative to Leigh's on-line programme would be - nothing. I still find it bizarre that somebody should take the trouble to produce as good a 16-page programme as you're likely to see, and then leave it languishing on a computer where hardly anyone will read it and at a total disconnect to the football match it's supposed to enhance. My visit today was thanks to a fellow hopper whose son has the ability to paperize it. I've never seen the point of having children, a waste of time and money, but one would be useful now to print off e-programmes for me. Perhaps I could adopt?

Leigh-on-Sea is the station you want for this one, plenty of trains from London, with the ground a 30-minute walk away nearly all uphill. A bit less coming back as, no surprises here, it's mostly downhill. There are no buses. It's a pleasant walk through a town populated by people who have enough money to be able to afford not to live in Southend. The places along here, Leigh, Westcliffe, Southend, all have added the suffix of 'on-sea' to dupe tourists. None of them are anywhere near the sea, they are all on the River Thames, a quite blatant deception as you can see the Kent Coast a couple of miles away on the opposite bank. On a warm sunny day like today the Sheerness Oil Refinery was looking at it's very best!

Belfair's Park was a hive of activity, as well as the main match, two Southend Combination games were taking place on adjacent pitches. If you stood in the right place, you could tick off three pitches at once, but that would be silly. I'll have to come back for the other two, ha! ha! Above the changing rooms is the clubhouse with a covered veranda offering a raised view of the match. You won't get wet here. There would have been the lunchtime football showing on TV if there had been any, but if an in depth debrief of the previous night's U21 International against Andorra is what you're after, *Sky Sports* was the channel for you. I would imagine it would have got pretty frisky in here around 4 o'clock with all the games finishing at the same time. The pitch is surrounded by a Day-Glo yellow rope but no dugouts, with the subs. enjoying the spring sunshine.

Coming into the game Leigh were four off the bottom while Rayleigh were in second place, 4 points behind the leaders with one game in hand, and as such, this wasn't the result they were looking for. 1-0 down at half time, Leigh came back strongly in the second period and were well worth their point. The combined ages of the three officials were somewhat less than my own.

A stress free local(ish) trip with C2C on its best behaviour and the early kick off meant I was home in plenty of time to see '*Killing Eve*'.

contributed on 27/03/22

TT No.139: Jon T Green - Saturday 19th March 2022; LAKENHEATH CASUALS v. Hempnall Reserves; Central and South Norfolk League - Division Two; Venue: Lakenheath Pavilion; Result: 5-2; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 14 h/c

Lakenheath is a town of two teams - Lakenheath FC and Lakenheath Casuals. The former who, after a rise through the leagues, now reside in the Premier Division of the Eastern Counties League and whose well-appointed ground The Nest is an absolute must see, especially in the Autumn when the trees on the surrounding steep slopes are a riot of colour. Casuals meanwhile ply their trade at the Lakenheath Pavilion; a facility built in 2010 and close enough to the nearby airbase for the roar of jet engines to be heard. The Pavilion site is also home to the cricket club and comes complete with underfloor heating in the changing rooms; a luxury which may well be unique for a club operating at this level.

Every match has a pivotal moment and with the score at 2-1 the home side attempted to play out from the back following a goal kick. A Lakenheath defender mis-controlled the ball and it fell invitingly to Hempnall's centre forward Daniel Mann who steadied himself before rolling the ball agonisingly wide of the upright. A goal at that stage, when the visitors were enjoying their best spell of the game, might have made it a very different result but within two minutes it was 3-1 and Casuals were on their way to a comfortable victory.

Lakenheath began the day in third place and, whilst only three points behind Yaxham, the league leaders, have four games in hand and are yet to be beaten this season. Hempnall sit a further two places below their hosts and, having lost 4-0 to Casuals in January, today looks like it could be tough work for them. The afternoon is beautifully sunny but the wind cutting across the pitch is cold enough to remind us that Spring might be on the horizon, but it hasn't yet reached this corner of Suffolk.

Hempnall start the match in confident mood and are desperately unlucky to find themselves a goal behind after just seven minutes: Ben Nolan receives the ball on the right and makes strides into the box, when he's tackled the ball skids loose into the path of Tom Bristley who makes no mistake in finding the net. Nolan might then have added a second but could only drag his left foot shot wide of the target. The diminutive Ryan Cullabine is having a great game on the right flank for Hempnall and with Jamie Keane working hard in midfield the visitors are looking far from inferior. Nevertheless, it's still something of a surprise when they equalise against a side who have only conceded in one of their last six matches; a deep cross to the far post is expertly controlled by Keane who takes a step inside before beating Harry Harding with an angled shot. Parity was only maintained for two minutes as, from a Jack Moss corner, Conor Boyle found both time and space to steer his header beyond Ryan Macavley. With four minutes of the half remaining Nolan, stealing in at the far post, hooked home Clive Boucheron's cross to give the home side a two-goal cushion.

The second half began with Macavley shanking a goal kick out of the ground and towards the river, an act which caused plenty of frantic activity before a precious, and costly, match ball was swept away on the fast-flowing current. With just over an hour played the game as a contest was effectively over; first Nolan struck a thunder free kick from some distance which fairly flew into the net and then, just a minute later Boucheron, moving onto a through pass, neatly lobbed the on-rushing 'keeper. On as a substitute, Jordan Kemp went close to adding a sixth, only a sprawling dive from Macavley denying him. Credit must go to Hempnall as, despite the game being lost, they continued to push forward wherever possible and were rewarded with a consolation goal four minutes from time; Daniel Mann showed strength and a quick burst of pace as he created room on the right flank. Cutting infield, he unselfishly drew the defence before presenting Ryan Cullabine with the simplest of scoring opportunities.

The afternoon couldn't pass without mention of the referee Mr. Stephen Davill who was officiating at his 900th game. In conversation prior to the match, Stephen said that next year was likely to be last season. I expressed disappointment that he wouldn't make 1000 games in the middle, he thought for a moment and with a sly

smile suggested that perhaps he could manage a little longer... When the milestone day does arrive, it's hoped the Suffolk FA will mark his achievement as a true servant of our game.

contributed on 24/03/22

TT No.138: Keith Aslan - Saturday 19th March 2022; **BRICKFIELD v Rhostyllen**; Ardal North West; Kick Off: 14.30; Result: 5-2; Admission & programme: £2; Attendance: 58 (41 home, 16 away & 1 neutral)

With *Avanti* just about the only rail company that's bothering to run trains this weekend, it was a trip to facemask country for the big Wrexham derby. Wrexham is on a short list of four for the prestigious honour of being named 'U.K. City of Culture 2025' and there is a palpable excitement about the place. And if anybody is questioning Wrexham's cultural heritage, previous holders of the title are Londonderry, Hull and Coventry. What the town can boast of is having the shortest distance between two stations on the National Rail Network. I travelled the 96 second journey between General and Central just to say I've done it. It would have been far quicker to walk.

It's a 22-minute walk from the station, although you could shave a bit off that time with two fully functioning knees, and if football grounds are your bag, you'll love this one. A seated stand behind the near goal, with another longer one at the other end. For part of the game, I sat in number 408 suggesting the seats were acquired from a larger ground. Another stand along the touchline completes the furniture, all Atcost free, with the dugouts a heady mixture of brick and Perspex. One of the best set ups at this level with even a television gantry for when the League of Wales comes calling. The clubhouse was showing the rugby international as Wales somehow managed to lose to Italy. Rounding off the facilities is the cheapest burger van in the world run by the chairman's missus. Bacon and sausage baps were among the highlights, washed down with a can of coke for 50p.

No taking the knee or *Respect* handshakes in Wales, which makes them neither racist or disrespectful, and here the linesmen don't bother to recheck the goal nets before the start of the second half. In spite of this lack of scrutiny, we got through the match without them falling down. The game kicked off punctually, and what a game it was. At the start of play Brickfield were second from bottom and when Rhostyllen went 2-0 up in the first 12 minutes it was looking ominous for the home side. In the middle of the first half what can best be described as a semi-fracas broke out. Brickfield's only punishment was a booking for their keeper who ran half the length of the pitch to join in, only to find it was all over by the time he got there with nobody to fight. I presume he was yellow carded for being a total prat. But after a discussion with the linesman, the ref sent off a Rhostyllen player, and that proved to be a gamechanger. The 'Bricks' took over the match and had made it 2-2 by the break. Second half was all Brickfield, three more goals, two metalwork strikes, and a shot cleared off the line meant a very busy afternoon for Connor Keys in the away goal. Was he named after the football club? The win lifted Brickfield three places up the table, never was a victory more deserved. Big surprises towards the end when the game was temporarily halted by a punch up among the crowd involving 15 or 20 of the local youth (and some not so youthful).

Don't expect any aggro. in the Ardal League. Tensions spilling over in a local derby, or just too much to drink? The latter I suspect.

Picked up some Millwall supporters at Stafford on the train back, all very sedate compared with the shenanigans at Brickfield. And *Avanti* excelled themselves with everything running to time. A good day all round.

contributed on 20/03/22

TT No.137: Jon T Green - Tuesday 15th March 2022; WORMLEY ROVERS v. Newbury Forest; Eastern Counties - Division One South; Venue: Wormley Playing Fields, Church Lane; Result: 2-1; Admission: £5; Programme: Online only; Attendance: 28

On a warm Spring evening I was treated to the nostalgic sight of a few young lads kicking a ball around on the pitches behind Wormley's ground. Dusk was falling but there was just enough light left in the day to silhouette the trees around the edge of the park and, more importantly, just enough to still see the ball. One youngster confidently called out to his mates that he was going to hit the crossbar. His friends duly positioned themselves behind the goal and when I saw him place the ball on the 18-yard line I joined in their belief that he had no chance. Five seconds later the sound of leather against wood (or more likely plastic) told me that the young marksman had hit his target and confirmed what I already knew, namely that I couldn't spot talent even when it was right in front of me.

Like so many other clubs today, Wormley have a thriving youth set up with youngsters of both sexes starting as early as four - this seems a somewhat tender age to understand zonal marking but maybe I am mistaken. The supply of talent certainly seems to be working with the Rovers now playing at their highest ever level of football. Originally formed in 1921 and playing on land donated by local horticultural company Joseph Rochford & Sons, they reformed in 1947 before moving to their current Church Lane home in 1954. Wormley joined the Hertfordshire Senior County League in 1975 and remained there until becoming part of the inaugural Eastern Counties Division One South at the start of this season. Off the field, ground upgrades have tracked those on the pitches with a fixed rail being installed in 1990. Floodlights followed four years later and brick dugouts two seasons after that. 2020 saw the building of a 75-seater main stand (four rows of red plastic seats) with the previous cover being moved to behind the far goal. This is one of those quintessential non-league stands built of red and black corrugated iron under a flat roof. What's holding it all together is a little unclear but on a wet evening it would at least provide some shelter. A large clubhouse and cafe are situated immediately to your left as you pass through the entrance block. The remaining side of the ground is backed by the youth team pitches but is out of bounds for spectators.

Wormley have instigated a crowdfunding scheme to help with future ground upgrades and tonight's visit of Newbury Forest sees new floodlights being switched on for the first time. Forest are also a new team at this level but haven't found life easy and languish towards the bottom of the table, Rovers sit comfortably in seventh place and look firm favourites for another three points. Despite some

excellent work from the fleet-footed Herman Mwanza, Rovers are by far the more accomplished of the two teams, they have plenty of pace and movement when in possession and press well as a team when their opponents have it. This high press leads directly to the opening goal as centre forward Cabhan Clarke steals the ball from Forest's right back before curling a delightful shot beyond visiting 'keeper Israel Arode. There is a footballing truism that teams play in the image of their manager, and this is certainly true of Wormley; there was nothing but praise and encouragement coming from the technical area and the players responded by playing in a well-controlled and highly watchable style. With six minutes of the first half remaining, Rovers doubled their advantage as Mason Oakley whipped in a free kick which Louis Offer guided into the far corner. The second half was something of a strange affair; littered with bookings (although it was far from a dirty game) with Forest upping their game whilst looking unlikely to score - unlikely that is until the last few moments. With 90 minutes played they reduced the arrears as Brandon Burgess sent a low drive through a crowd of players and beyond the unsighted Reece Grundy. Five minutes additional time was signalled and for the first time Rovers looked distinctly edgy; following a rash of foul challenges Forest were awarded a central free kick twenty yards out. Aron Meshi saw his shot deflect off the wall and it looked to be heading into the net until Grundy plunged to his left to push the ball around the upright. It was a quality finish to what had been a hugely enjoyable contest.

contributed on 18/03/22

TT No.136: Keith Aslan - Saturday 12th March 2022; **DENMEAD v Fleetlands.**
Hampshire League. Kick Off: 15.01. Result: 2 - 1. Admission: free. Programme: £2.
Attendance: 60 (45 home - 3 away - 12 neutral)

On Thursday morning a pristine paper copy of the Cove Rangers v Q.O.S. programme dropped through my letter box, so I was still on a high as I set off on my outing to Hampshire League leaders; Denmead. The ground is a 26-minute walk from Havant station, there are plenty of buses but with shortish walks either end, the dodgy knee workout is probably a marginally quicker option. Met up with a fellow hopper at Waterloo who had just been on the recently opened tube line to Battersea Power Station station. This is something I will get round to doing and when I asked him what it was like, the only description he could muster was 'It's very new'. There's nothing like painting a picture!

For the second week running programmes were scarce due to the infestation of groundhoppers. But again, I think everybody who wanted a copy achieved their aim. Twenty pages, glossy cover, a labour of love for the editor, Simon Strickland, who is also the secretary. It contained the all-important player profile which featured full back Josh Elmes. As well as learning his favourite food is Tikka Masala, in an exciting new category, his favourite cartoon character is 'Quagmire' which is a new one on me.

Somewhat ironically for a ground called 'Front Lawn' the pitch is plastic. While artificial surfaces are undoubtedly the way forward, why do they all have to be surrounded by a green mesh fence? There is a viewing area, but I found myself gazing wistfully at the adjacent grass pitch. This may, or may not, have been the

location of Havant's ground in the distant past, nobody seemed quite sure. Hot and cold drinks were available at the on-site 'cafe' which was a comfortable place to chill out while waiting for the kick off. There were a couple of sausage rolls too if you got there early enough. Nearby is a fairly large shopping centre which has seen better days, but plenty of eating houses for me to enjoy a pre-match meal. Also, a Greggs which I didn't manage to find, the only blemish on an otherwise perfect day.

47 must be Denmead's lucky number. Having gone a goal down they equalized in the 47th minute of the first half and scored the winner in the 47th minute of the match. It's a two-horse race between them and Moneyfields Reserves for the league title. Reserve teams can't go up to the Wessex League and ground grading means neither can Denmead. Fleetlands, who are fourth, still think they can.

I shall be getting on to the Guinness Book of Records. Arrived on Platform 7 at Waterloo at 18.46 and caught the 19.12 from Platform 11 at St. Pancras. A magnificent achievement rounding off a magnificent day.

contributed on 13/03/22

TT No.135: Jon T Green - Saturday 5th March 2022; PRESTWICH HEYS v. Burscough; North West Counties League - Premier Division; Venue: Adie Moran Park; Result: 1-1; Admission: £7; Programme: £2; Attendance: 156

With the excellent 'Exit Gates' feature in *Groundtastic* magazine showing that the Main Stand at Prestwich Heys is due for replacement, and with hop matches available on the days before and after, a visit to Prestwich Heys seemed the perfect choice for the Saturday afternoon. The ground is named in honour of ex-chairman and manager Adie Moran who tragically died on the eve of the 2007/08 season whilst on holiday in Sri Lanka. Adie was just 43. The ground which bears his name sits only a few yards from the M60 with the constant drone of fast-moving traffic being a background accompaniment to a game here. It's a pleasant but reasonably basic venue. In addition to the Main Stand there is only a small, covered area to the immediate right of the turnstiles - the rest of the ground is flat uncovered terracing. The seated stand is bright red and boxy with the club's name boldly emblazoned in white lettering around its fascia; there are a modest two rows of seats inside but, in common with a number of constructions of this type, it has a wonderful home-spun feel to it and one which, I fear, might not be replicated by its modern successor.

The club were formed in February 1938 under the name of Heys Old Boys AFC and, despite the war time conditions, won their first trophy in 1943 as they claimed the Prestwich and Whitefield League Woodward Shield. Progress was gradually made as they advanced through the Bury Amateur League into the South East Lancashire League where they won the championship three times in the early 1960's. 1964 saw the club's name change to the present Prestwich Heys. The FA Amateur Cup brought national recognition for the team as they reached the quarter-finals in 1969/70 where they were beaten by eventual winners Enfield. The following season saw them claim all four available trophies from the Lancashire Combination

but sadly this was proved to be the high point as Heys gradually slipped back down into the Cheshire County League before joining the newly formed North West Counties League in 1982. Ground grading issues at their Grimshaws home saw demotion to the Manchester Football League where they won the First Division title in 1998; three years later they moved to the present ground just over the border into the Whitefield district. A hat-trick of Premier Division titles followed, beginning in 2004, before a treble of league and two cups saw them finally return to the North West Counties League in 2016. Restructuring of the competition following two truncated years sees Prestwich playing this season in the Premier Division, their highest ever level.

It's not been an easy season for Heys and with only one win in the last eight games they came into this game still needing a couple of points to be mathematically certain of staying up. Burscough arrived sitting comfortably in sixth place but some way adrift of the top two. On a chilly but sunny afternoon it turned out to be a game of two halves with the home side dominating the opening period. On a pitch which was clearly still suffering from the effects of the recent heavy rainfall Heys adapted best to the conditions with centre-forward Jack Coop first seeing his lob over Joe Mason hit the angle of post and crossbar before the 'keeper repelled him with a scrambling save. Coop wasn't to be denied for long though and, with six minutes of the half remaining, he cleverly pulled the ball down before sliding it beneath Mason. Whatever manager Paul Bowes said to his charges at half time clearly did the trick as Burscough re-emerged looking a different side; Conor Christiansen went close with a curling effort whilst substitute George Lomax was an influential addition up front. With the game becoming increasingly niggly Thomas Williams looked to have equalised only to see his header strike the inside of a post and bounce away to safety. As the tackles continued to fly in it was no surprise that referee Mr. Ian Claridge would eventually have to show red; Heys' James Dwyer being the recipient for a reckless challenge on Christiansen. With the visitors' Nathan Salisbury shooting over, when perhaps he should have hit the target, an equaliser looked on the cards and it duly arrived on 79 minutes as centre-back Mitchell Kinsella darted in front of his marker to head in Daniel Brady's free-kick. In the end a draw was a fair result and with scores elsewhere going in Heys' favour a point proved enough to maintain their Premier Division place for next season.

contributed on 09/03/22

TT No.134: Brian Buck - Saturday 5th March 2022; Sheringham v Debenham LC; Thurlow Nunn League First Division North; Venue: played at The Nest, Norwich City Community Sports Foundation, Holt Road, Hellesdon, Norwich; Result: 5-2; Attendance: 50.

With rain in East Anglia casting doubt as to whether my intended match would be on, I played a 3G card today and headed off to Norwich. This was I believe, the fourth game Sheringham have played here since part of their usual pitch at Sheringham had become damaged by either rooks or crows, dependent on what you read or who you listen to, which have been searching for what are known

locally as chafer grubs, which hang out under the surface of the pitch. Even more bizarrely they are trying to deter them by spreading garlic granules on the pitch! They hope to have the situation resolved soon, but in the meantime, they are playing home games here, but one of them, a county cup match, was played on one of the railed off outside pitches.

Finding the ground was easy. It's about 20 miles south of Sheringham, as the crow flies, but coming from out from Norwich, soon after you see Norwich Airport on your right, there is a turning to The Nest on your left and after a few hundred yards and after passing a few railed off pitches (also on your left), you soon see the signposted drive to the ground and its associated buildings, including a café. On your right is where Norfolk County Cricket is played and maybe also where Anglian Windows once played in the Anglian Combination.

The ground is named The Nest to acknowledge the name of the ground Norwich City used to play at before they moved to Carrow Road in 1935. It is slightly unusual in that although it has no stand as such, there is a covered overhang from the café and dressing rooms, which stretch for about half the length of the pitch and underneath it there is a single row of about 50 seats with space behind them for spectators to stand and watch. Think Colney Heath, but not for too long!

As for the game, it turned out to be a decent one. The hosts are doing well this season and if they continue to do so, then they could end up getting promoted. The visitors were in the lower regions of the league though. The game was well reffed by an older, experienced looking official, who smiled a lot, which was a good sign that he was enjoying himself. But the teams gave him very little trouble. Sheringham took the lead on 6 minutes with a 25 yarder, with Denham equalising on 14 minutes with a similar goal. Then with just 32 seconds played in the new half the visitors took the lead after the scorer wriggled his way through the home defence before shooting home from a narrow angle. But on 49 minutes Sheringham equalised themselves, with the scorer claiming that it was down to wearing his right boots. His side then went back into the lead on 61 minutes before two late goals, within a minute of each other, in the last ten minutes sealed all the points, which had been in a bit of doubt until the fourth goal went in, thus ending a day which went better than I expected, especially as I also saw some helicopters take off from the airport and one of them flew over the pitch whilst the game was in progress.

contributed on 08/03/22

TT No.133: Keith Aslan - Saturday 5th March 2022; SPORTING HACKNEY v Cricklewood Wanderers; Anagram Records Trophy; Kick Off: 11.43; Result: 1-0; Admission & Programme: Free; Attendance: 17 (4 home, 3 away & 10 neutral)

Having spent a large chunk of my life on a train over the past week I was looking for something local(ish) today and with Hackney's game changing venue at 48 hours' notice, this fitted the bill perfectly. And a morning kick-off to boot.

Leyton Sports ground is steeped in history. County Cricket has featured here, and as a fellow hopper and Arsenal supporter excitedly told me, Arsenal played two league games here in the 19th century when their ground was closed due to crowd trouble. Unsurprisingly no traces remain of an ex-league ground. This was the home of Middlesex League side Leyton County and is currently used by a number of Essex Alliance League teams, with one of them playing in the afternoon. The place is dominated by the Grade 2 listed Victorian Pavilion which is going to be restored when the money becomes available. So not for a while then! Nearest station is Leyton Midland Road on a line that doesn't go anywhere meaningful, but Leyton tube stop is a 15-minute walk away. Not an option today with the Central Line shut due to the ubiquitous engineering works. This is London, so tons of buses with the 97 providing a door-to-door service every 8 minutes from Stratford International. The ground is located in Waltham Forest which was bizarrely named 'London Borough of Culture 2019'. I can only assume whoever bestowed this honour on it has never been to the place. At least you won't go hungry or thirsty here with the ground surrounded by cafes and coffee houses.

Hackney have ceased paper production but did a one off for this match. I assume it's because it's a cup game. It used to be compulsory to issue in the Anagram Trophy, but these days mandatory programme production seems to be a thing of the past (with the Gloucester County League a notable exception). Today's was a basic eight pager, although only four had anything on them. But it contained everything you could want with the history of the two clubs being of particular interest. A very small photocopy run meant the large hopper quotient were scrambling for programmes, but there seemed to be just enough to go round with the officials unknowingly giving theirs up!

On the upside this was one of the cleanest matches you will see, played in a good spirit with barely a foul worthy of the name. On the downside it was a load of cack with the only shot on target being the goal 15 minutes from the end, a piece of skill out of keeping with the rest of the game. Lots of honest endeavour which was matched by a complete lack of ability.

After the match the professional hoppers made their way to various locations for the second match of the day. Being an amateur it was straight home for me with a short bus ride to Stratford International and a comfortable hour relaxing on HS1 (HS1 good; HS2 waste of money). Groundhopping doesn't get less stressful than this.

contributed on 05/03/22

TT No.132: Keith Aslan - Tuesday 1st March 2022; **COVE RANGERS** v Queen of the South; SPFL Cup Semi-Final; Kick Off: 19.29; Result: 0-1; Admission: £7 for ancients; Programme: an online abomination (Team sheet acquired); Attendance: 1728 (1676 home, 50 away & 2 neutral)

I would normally take sanctions against a non-issuing club like Cove Rangers and boycott their games, but with a visit from Mr. G. Reaper getting closer I don't want to shuffle off this mortal coil without having completed the Scottish League, so the

Aberdeen club got a visit from me they didn't deserve. How can you do a 48-page programme and just leave it on a computer. Shameful.

Previous visits to the far north have been easy. Just get up and go. But in these complicated times this excursion required computer skills I don't really have. Match ticket must be purchased on-line. Accommodation likewise. Flying would be the easiest option but Alan Turing would have been stumped by the airline website. So, I was up at silly o'clock on Tuesday morning with a joyful eight-and-a-half-hour train journey to look forward to. Stopped off at Edinburgh for lunch at that well known Scottish fast-food chain; McDonalds. No matter how many times I cross the Forth Bridge it never loses its wow factor, surely the eighth wonder of the world. A magnificent feat of Victorian engineering, unlike the next bridge along the line over the River Tay. This one collapsed while a train was crossing, killing 75 people. You can still see the foundations of the original bridge. It was immortalized in William McGonnall's famous poem, '*The Tay Bridge Disaster*' which ends with the lines 'For the stronger we our bridges build, the less chance we have of being killed'. How true. Booked into my accommodation around four, right opposite the station

Aberdeen doesn't appear to have altered very much since my last visit, a very austere place and is nicknamed 'The Granite City' for good reason. The ground is on the south-side with the buses leaving from round the corner from the station. I would reckon it would take around an hour and a quarter to walk, but I wasn't going to put it to the test.

The ground has one main stand with the changing rooms and offices underneath, the opposite side housing three smaller Atcost stands, with one seated. Smallish, but does the job. A steward kindly went into the club offices and got me a team sheet. They wouldn't let me in because I wasn't wearing a face-mask. The game was being shown live on BBC Alba with some major work undertaken by the scaffolders to build camera positions. The day had been warm and sunny, but the temperatures had dropped away to sub-freezing by the time the match started. Us southern softies aren't used to the cold weather. One of the joys of visiting Scotland are all the football grounds serve Scotch Pies which are the most delicious food known to man when draped in brown sauce. The ones here were well up to standard.

This was a match between top of League One and bottom of the championship and was settled by a goal after 64 seconds (timing courtesy of the Daily Record). It was an intriguing contest with the football being of a considerably higher standard than I am used to watching. Queen of the South appropriately played in pink and their fans added much to the occasion and they took over one of the Atcost stands, festooned it in flags and kept up a non-stop barrage of support for their team, with a football rattle in there somewhere. They caused no trouble and much kudos to them for making just about the longest journey in Scottish football. I've never known a match up here kick off late. No respect handshakes, the referee and two captains make straight to the centre circle for the toss up while the linesmen check the nets, and off we go. English football could learn something here.

Got back to my hotel and watched the extra time of Middlesbrough v Tottenham, a result to gladden the heart, before drifting off into a contented slumber knowing I've only got Kelty Hearts to go to complete my dream. Set off early the next day and arrived back at my country dacha around five in the evening. That's the easy bit done, now comes the hard part, trying to find somebody to print out a 48-page programme.

contributed on 02/03/22

TT No.131: Jon T Green - Saturday 26th February 2022; WORSBROUGH BRIDGE ATHLETIC v. Armthorpe Welfare; Northern Counties East League - Division One; Venue: Park Road; Result: 0-3; Admission: £5; Programme: £1; Attendance: 100

Expectation can be a dangerous sentiment but if Park Road is on your "must see" list then you will not be disappointed. Arriving by car, the first view of the ground is through a thicket of trees as the road sweeps downhill into the village. Ahead of you is the main stand, a beautiful brick construction, complete with ornate white steelwork along the roof fascia; inside there is a mixture of wooden benches and backless red seats. To the left there is a sloping grass bank which extends around the corner flag and towards the turnstiles. At the rear of this banking is the large function room of the Worsbrough Sports and Development Association - this is totally unconnected to the football club and was shut at the time of the match. Opposite the main stand, and a few yards from the fast-flowing River Dove, is a single step of terracing complete with one crush barrier. To its right is a fine covered terrace with red barriers standing boldly out against the white-washed breeze block walls. The far end of the ground backs onto the cricket pitch and is out of bounds for spectators. The final corner houses the Rotary Community Pavilion which contains both a small clubhouse along with the changing room facilities. Despite the close proximity of a busy road the ground retains a wonderfully rural feel and with some delightful walks close by, it's a great place to spend an hour or so before going to the game.

Founded in 1923 the club played in local Barnsley League football under the auspices of Worsbrough Bridge St. James, Athletic and Miners Welfare until they joined the Sheffield Association League in 1961. League championships were won in 1965/66 and 1969/70 before they moved to the Yorkshire League where, as a member club, they reached the final of the Sheffield Senior Cup in 1972 where they lost to Worksop Town at Rotherham United's Millmoor ground. With the merger of the Yorkshire and Midland Leagues in 1982, Worsbrough became founder members of the Northern Counties East League where they competed in Division Two South. After various league structural re-organisations, Bridge won promotion to Division One in 1986 where they still find themselves today. The club's name reverted to Athletic in 2006.

With both teams sitting in upper mid table, albeit with only the slimmest of play-off chances, this looked on paper an even contest. However, as the saying goes, the game isn't played on paper with the visitors running out comfortable winners as they extended their unbeaten run to five matches. The writing was on the wall as early as the third minute after Adam Baskerville saw his attempt twice blocked by home 'keeper Ross Pritchard before Rhys Plater finally found the net. Athletic

responded well with Harley Holt firing just wide and Elliot Wilson heading against the crossbar when he found himself unmarked following a free kick. Armthorpe doubled their advantage with the flame haired Plater once more involved; the striker delivering a perfect cross from a free kick which Conner Williamson converted with a stooping back post header. The second period rather disintegrated into a succession of fouls/bookings and substitutions with the home side being unable to build up a proper head of steam. If the contest wasn't already over, it certainly was with 20 minutes remaining as Jack Shaw capitalised upon some serious indecision in Athletic's defence to drill home a third.

As a postscript a huge "thank you" must be given to the host of volunteers who helped make this game possible. With the lower end of the pitch under water at the beginning of the week, supporters rallied round and transformed something akin to a small lake into a playable surface. If you ever wanted an example of what a football club means to the local community then look no further...

contributed on 02/03/22

TT No.130: Brian Buck - Saturday 26th February 2022; Larkfield & New Hythe v Kent Football United; Southern Counties East League Division 1; Result: 2-0; Attendance: 85.

Back on the trains today and to get here I caught what I believe is known as the *Javelin* train from St Pancras International, which pointed me in the right direction. I then changed trains at Stroud, alighting at New Hythe, from where it was an unhurried 20 minutes' walk to the ground. Don't make the mistake of going into the nearby Leisure Centre though, but instead carry on for a few yards until you reach New Hythe Lane, and the ground can be found on your right down the bottom of this short road.

We arrived here shortly after 1.30pm and already the place was a hive of activity. Soon we got chatting to a club official who updated us on the club's future plans, which consist mainly of doubling their seating and standing capacity when it looks like they are going to get promoted up to Step 5 level. Then we hit the bar in the clubhouse and to my horror it featured Leeds v Spurs on the TV. Spurs usually lose when I watch them on the TV, but they were already 3-0 up when we joined the action. It was also good that my companion for the day was 'made' to watch this as he supports the other lot in North London!

Then it was time to watch the match. The layout of the ground is good and it's clean and tidy. I sat in the seats by the halfway line, but there was also some standing accommodation on the far side of the pitch. Larkfield is a club which has risen quickly through the leagues and, until now, had escaped my attention, but in coming here today I believe that I have now visited every Step 6 league club in the South of England.

Today's visitors play at what was formerly known as Dartford Glentworth and when I visited their ground, on Tuesday 22nd April 1980, they were beaten 6-0 by Cray Wanderers in a Kent County League Division 1 match. Today's game was largely a

friction-free contest. After an even start the hosts gradually took control of the match and by the end of it, they could have scored many more goals than the two they did get. They took the lead on 20 minutes with a bullet like direct free kick from about 30 yards out, which kept low and gave the keeper no chance, even though he was wearing a hat to protect him from the sun. The second goal arrived on 41 minutes via a shot from the edge of the area, which the keeper did well to get a hand to before it ended up in the net. The second half wasn't quite so entertaining. Kent offered little and their two big central defenders swallowed up most of what Larkfield threw at them. The game finished shortly before 4.55pm, which with a hurried walk, allowed us to catch the 5.12pm train back to Strood with a couple of minutes to spare. Nice day out here.

contributed on 01/03/22

TT No.129: Craig Dabbs - Saturday 26th February 2022; **Riseley Sports v Biggleswade Reserves**; Bedfordshire County League Britannia Cup Quarter Final; Venue: The Riseley Playing Field; Result: 0-1; Admission: Free; Programme: 8pp, free; Attendance: 25

There's a small plaque, quite faded, on the wall of the Village Hall that states that The Riseley Playing Field was opened by the Lord Luke of Pavenham TD.MA.DL.JP, Chairman of the National Playing Fields Association on the 20th September 1952.

The venue behind the Village Hall in Gold Street, for which it's more commonly known, is a basic facility in the shape of a roped off pitch where a small, seated area of cover (a shelter) behind the goal offers some protection in inclement weather at pitch-side.

Should Riseley Sports wish, over time, to progress up through the pyramid, I don't believe it can be achieved here, as pleasant as the setting is, it's right in the middle of the village surrounded by homes which surely would make any proposed development impossible.

This however probably isn't a concern for the club, as I do believe that for now the club are quite content at this level and it's the right fit for them although second from bottom and the relegation battle that goes with it is naturally a headache they don't want.

The match, a distraction from the league, and a chance for some silverware, saw Sports take on Biggleswade Reserves who sit fifth in the Premier Division with four games in hand on current leaders Elstow Abbey. It was a tough test but one I can say Riseley Sports rose to. Sports more than matched the visitors and deserved at least the draw after 90 mins and a chance to go through via penalties. The referee, who had a decent game, denied Riseley one near the end. After pointing to the spot, the decision had been reversed seemingly by the time I eventually got up to the other end to take a picture. It was after consultation with the club linesman, well I think that's what happened anyway.

I came away having watched a decent game played in a lovely setting and with the bonus of a programme. Although it is available online, the club are kind enough to print a handful off on request. All in all, a thoroughly enjoyable the afternoon.

contributed (via Brian Buck) on 27/02/22

TT No.128: Keith Aslan - Saturday 26th February 2022; CARDIFF MET. UNIVERSITY v The New Saints; J.D. Cymru Premier Division; Venue: played at Dragon Park; Kick Off: 12.47; Result: 1-1; Admission: Old people's rate £3 including a free biscuit; Programme: £2. Attendance: 64 (42 home, 18 away & 4 neutral)

Having missed out on my footie fix last week I wanted to go somewhere special today but ended up in Newport. Due to stormy weather, there weren't any trains last Saturday, much like any other weekend down here but this time there were no replacement buses.

Wales is still in the grip of a politically orchestrated pandemic panic. Wearing a piece of cloth over your face remains compulsory, even though Covid rates are no lower (or higher) than in England. Compliance here is much stronger and it was noticeable that people were keeping their distance from me on the bus, but this might not necessarily have been face mask related. The bus timetable has been decimated since my last visit down here and what was a 15-minute service is now hourly. All part of Drakeford's scheme to encourage people to stay at home. Newport's bus station has undergone a bit of a makeover with the cafe being replaced by a 'Debenhams'. And who doesn't want to top up their wardrobe while waiting for a bus?

With Cardiff Met's ground out of action due to storm damage today presented a rare opportunity to tick off Dragon Park at the grandiosely named 'Newport International Sports Village' It's about an hour's walk from the station, but you can catch one of the buses that are still running which I had to pay for as my bus pass (which I got six years after everybody else) doesn't work in Wales. I can't think of anywhere else where three football grounds are so close together with Liswerry, Newport County's old ground and Dragon Park all within 200 yards of each other. There is also a Velodrome, swimming pool and leisure centre, the latter containing a food station which supplied me with a belated breakfast.

Outside the ground is a very impressive life-sized sculpture of a Dragon which was being much photographed. I say life size, but I don't actually know how big a dragon is. Inside spectator facilities are limited to the Atcost stand running along the touchline. Could get a bit cosy with a big crowd, not a problem with today's paltry attendance. Opposite is a large building with a viewing balcony where the chosen ones were watching the game. The one Portaloo was well patronized by the groundhopping fraternity. As well as free biccy's on entry, free cartons of juice were doled out at half time by the nice young lady on the gate. Cardiff Mets paper credentials are second to none and the award-winning programme was a credit to the club and the editor.

This was the last weekend before the League of Wales splits into two divisions, not that it affected today's match with Cardiff comfortably in the bottom half and TNS

top of the league by 21 points. The Saints had much the better of the match with a missed penalty and some good work by the home keeper keeping the score down to 1-0. They were looking comfortable, but football being what it is, Cardiff snatched an equalizer in the 93rd of the 90 minutes.

I was intrigued as to how Cardiff's nickname, The Archers, came about. But the programme explained all. Physical Education Colleges adopt an Olympic Emblem by which they are recognised. Brunel is 'The Javelin Thrower', Loughborough is the 'Torch bearer' and Leeds is 'Discobolus', that's Discus to you. Groundhopping is a real education.

A Welsh hopper who I hadn't seen for years kindly gave me a lift back to the station, and all in all a great day out, so it would be churlish to mention that the train back to London was 27 minutes late. Hey ho.

contributed on 27/02/22

TT No.127: Brian Buck - Saturday 19th February 2022; Cambridge Ambassadors v Eaton Socon 'A'; Cambridgeshire County League Kershaw Division 3B; Venue: played at Trumpington Community College, Lime Avenue, off Long Road, Cambridge; Result: 1-5; Attendance: 10.

Today was a day most Groundhoppers dread, as after a dry start, we had two hours plus of heavy rain, starting late morning. After being given the go ahead I set off for my chosen game as at that stage it seemed likely that we would only get showery rain with the occasional heavy burst. But by the time I reached Huntingdon it had become very heavy, to the point that it would beat all but the very best drained pitches.

Unfortunately, my intended venue wasn't one of these and shortly after midday the dreaded phone call came through. At this point I was at a loss as to what to do. So, much to the surprise of my wife, I returned home to work out Plan B. Then I remembered the 3G pitch at Trumpington College. I had heard that because they don't have a spectator viewing area inside the cage you had to watch the game from outside it, and this had, up until now, put me off going. But any port in a storm and so I went for it. I was lucky that I had time to get there because this was a 3pm kick off, because they have lights here, but they were not needed today.

Further good fortune followed when it stopped raining shortly before kick-off and so most of the game was played in bright sunshine with the easing wind behind my back. I did have a slight problem though as on my arrival, some 45 minutes before kick-off there seemed to be no one around and no one warming up, but then I noticed a door open and a very polite young man sitting at a desk confirmed that the game was on and that the players were getting changed. I don't get particularly excited about caged 3G pitches anymore, as they all look the same, so you have to look at their surrounds to pick up things which make them unique. This one was set in blocks of luxury flats, probably very expensive ones at that.

Soon the game started with seven of the spectators inside the cage and three standing on a slightly raised grass mound outside it. Other spectators came and

went. As for the game, it turned out to be quite exciting to watch, especially in the first half when the outcome of the game was unclear. It started and finished without corner flags. They were brought out and positioned, but the wind kept blowing them over. At the start of the match, it looked like the ref was going to get a bit of hassle, but after he spoke to two visiting players the game was played in a much better spirit. Both sides created loads of scoring chances, but the first goal didn't arrive until just before the break when Socon scored with a shot from the corner of the area. In the second half they then quickly won the match. They doubled their lead on 48 minutes and by the 60th minute they were winning 4-0 with the last two goals coming while they were down to 10 men following a sin binning. Ambassadors pulled a goal back on 70 minutes via a diverted direct free kick before Socon claimed a fifth goal in added on time. I enjoyed the match, especially as so many local games either didn't start or were abandoned.

contributed on 22/02/22

TT No.126: Craig Dabbs - Saturday 19th February 2022; Denmead v Sway; Hampshire Premier League Senior Division; Venue: Front Lawn Community Hub Enclosure; Result: 2-1; Admission: Free; Programme: 20pp, £2; Attendance: 18.

Following on from my midweek trip to the County Ground in Letchworth my attention turned to Saturday. Braintree Town v Hungerford Town was the original plan but trying to find out about programmes was basically impossible so the offer of a seat to United Services Portsmouth was, to be honest, a more appealing option. As it was Braintree Town did get back to me on Friday evening, but plans were now in place, and I was more than happy with the Portsmouth option.

Most of us will know that Friday wasn't exactly great weather-wise with Storm Eunice creating havoc and sadly taking a couple of lives as well, Saturday was still going to be windy but also wet, it was a case of just how bad.

Games started to fall, as did more snow in the north, but the signs were positive from US Portsmouth with no inspection planned despite what was clearly heavy rain on the way down and, more importantly, in Portsmouth itself. We arrived, parked up and just as we were about to walk in, the AFC Stoneham players were walking out with the words "*swimming pool*" mentioned. The Portsmouth traffic (which hadn't been kind to us on the way in) and time was against us. I found that two local games were being played on 3G and set the Sat-Nav for a trip to Havant.

Readers by now know my stringent requirements for gathering matchday paper. I sent, what I considered a completely pointless, text message to the secretary of our chosen match, to ask if they were issuing. All I can say, it was a good job I was sitting down when the answers of 'Yes' and '£2' came back. What a result!

We rolled into the car park at Front Lawn with thirty minutes to spare and were instantly made to feel most welcome. The club I think had produced nine programmes with our car snapping up more than half that amount. With the rain now abating, the programmes secure and a much-needed coffee inside me, I went to take some photos and find out a bit about Denmead FC who prior to today I confess I hadn't heard of.

Front Lawn is a cage with a spectator area down one side. Gosport Borough and Havant & Waterlooville both train on it and it's also shared with Harvester FC, another club in the Hampshire League.

Denmead FC themselves pre-date the Second World War having originated in the 1930's. Playing locally throughout their existence, they have in recent years been focused on youth over senior football. The club currently are having a successful time in the top-flight of the Hampshire League and are knocking on the Wessex League door having applied for promotion.

There is a ground back in the village which is a few miles away but there isn't any prospect of gaining the required grading for the next step, so talks have been taking place with the Hampshire FA with a view to extending the cage to make it two sided and also adding cover for fifty spectators. The club are awaiting an answer. As I said earlier, the welcome was warm, and this extended further with the Chairman requesting a photograph of our party for the next programme and they were genuinely delighted that we were there. So were we, considering the weather conditions.

Sway were the visitors this afternoon and they made a good fist of it. The first half wasn't a classic with both sides cancelling each other out. Denmead opened the scoring with a goal just before half time. The second forty-five was much better to watch as Sway continuing to ask questions, but overall Denmead were the better side mirroring their respective league position.

A very good day out in the end and one which could have turned out very differently.

contributed (via Brian Buck) on 20/02/22

TT No.125: Brian Buck - Saturday 12th February 2022; **Southwater v Charlwood**; Southern Combination League Division 2; Result: 2-0; Attendance: 108 (more like about 50 approx!)

I travelled by train to Horsham for this one, thus not needing to change trains on the way. I then caught bus 98 to the ground from outside the station. It runs every 20 minutes. Ask to be dropped off at the village hall. Bus 23 runs every half hour as well and it will also take you most of the way. On the way, both buses stop at the Horsham Park & Ride which I noted for future reference as this is handy for the new Horsham FC ground, across the road from here and which I have yet to visit.

After I alighted from the bus, I walked around the new housing estate which was in the process of being built on the site of Southwater's former wooden clubhouse and cricket ground. Soon you come to their smart new one and initially I headed towards the pavilion, which seems to have been built at the same time as the new cricket ground, perhaps a year or so earlier.

Here I soon bumped into another Groundhopper who kindly informed me that a paper programme had been issued for today's game. I would have never known

about this had he told me. I soon found the ‘seller’ who said that the club are going to issue for the rest of the season as an experiment, but apparently it is compulsory to issue in this league and many clubs do on-line programmes only. Today though, no effort was made to sell them.

After a couple of pints, I then made my way to the pitch and to get to it you have to cross the old Horsham to Shoreham railway line. Don’t worry about getting run over by a train though. The line was closed on 7 March 1966 and is now a nature walk for ramblers called the Downs Link! There were two pitches here and I was told that they don’t waterlog. In the event of heavy rain, the water simply drains away after half an hour! Games were taking place on both of these pitches. A rope separated them, but it ran closer to the second pitch than it did to the main pitch. Hence spectators stood on whichever side of the rope they chose. Luckily the secondary game didn’t have a proper ref so the whistle blowing in that game by his replacement was kept to a minimum.

Anyway, with limited viewing behind both goals all spectators for both games stood here, and it was a bit too cozy for my liking. The game was watchable, but as it wore on, so the petulant behaviour of both sides gave the excellent ref plenty to do. The formbook said that the well-placed visitors were the favourites to win this one. But it was the hosts who took the lead on 31 minutes, behind my back, as I was doing the crowd count. In the second half the ref, who had been patient with the players in the first period, started to get his cards out, with a flurry of them as the game drew to a close and, by the end, he’d booked three from the hosts and four from the visitors. In amongst these cards on 90(+7) minutes Southwater got a second goal when the visiting keeper was beaten by a 40-yard lob. This was not a match for the purists and with cramped viewing conditions, I can’t say that I enjoyed it as much as I would have liked to. Perhaps I’ll go back to the one man and his dog games on Saturday’s! However, I was grateful to my Groundhopping friend who gave me a lift back to Horsham Station afterwards, thus shaving half an hour off my return journey home.

contributed on 15/02/22

TT No.124: Craig Dabbs - Saturday 12th February 2022; Willington v Heaton Stannington; Northern League Division Two; Venue: Hall Lane; Result: 2-1; Admission: £5; Programme: 32pp, £1; Attendance: 86.

Most people outside of County Durham won’t have heard of Willington, (indeed some within won’t of either) but this former mining village near Crook has within it a real gem in Willington AFC.

Formed in 1906, the club moved to Hall Lane in 1911 and joined the Northern League. The club quickly established themselves as a major force in the North-East winning the league for the first time in 1913/14, then once more in 1925/26, and again in 1929/30. The club lost out to Bishop Auckland in the 1938/39 Amateur Cup Final played at Sunderland’s former Roker Park home. However, they got their revenge triumphing 4-0 against Bishop Auckland in the 1949/50 final at Wembley in front of 88,000.

Hall Lane's main stand, a wonderful structure with the club's name boldly set out across its front, is the focal point of the ground. What you also notice aside from the two covered stands at either end as well as the small amounts of terracing that remain, is the large grass banks that surround the pitch. They would've been covered in spoil from the nearby pits and it's this large expanse that would allow for big crowds like the 10,000, present for the Amateur Cup tie against Bromley in 1953.

It's worth noting that Willington's name has been pulled out of the bag in the FA Cup First Round on three occasions: the last in 1973/74 when they took Blackburn Rovers to a replay which Rovers won 6-1.

Sadly though, the struggles came and their tenure in the Northern League ended in 2005 with relegation to the Wearside League where they stayed until 2013 when promotion was gained back to familiar territory.

These days the club are in Division Two and at the wrong end of it I'm afraid. They are having a tough time right now with a number of players missing so much so that there was only one substitute on the bench and that was a goalkeeper. If you had to put a song title to the game it would've been '*Against All Odds*' because with that in mind they were up against top of the table Heaton Stannington who, let's be honest, probably thought they would be having a straightforward day at the office. However, Willington were having none of it and worked hard throughout on what was a difficult surface (owing to the fact that it gets much use because Durham City groundshare here). The pitch shouldn't be used as an excuse though, as it was the same for both teams and it just wasn't conducive for a decent passing game. In truth, Willington just showed so much desire to get the three points, and because of that, deservedly won the match as a result.

So then, an excellent day, lovely club and people, superb ground, what more could you want, I wish them well.

contributed (via Brian Buck) on 13/02/22

TT No.123: Steve Hardy - Saturday 12th February 2022; Venue: The Hub, Aigburth, Liverpool, Merseyside.

Match One - Alumni Reserves v Old Xavarians C; Liverpool Old Boys League - Division 3; Kick-Off: 1.15pm; Result: 4-1; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance 1 h/c.

Match Two - South Liverpool 3rds Neston Nomads; West Cheshire League - Division 3; Kick-Off: 3.15pm; Result: 3-2; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 8 h/c.

After a footie free couple of months, my depression relented enough to give me a pass out today. My plan was to visit the new home of South Liverpool FC on the banks of the river Mersey in Aigburth. The Hub is in fact identical to a good, few others I have visited in Liverpool, Sheffield and Stoneham over the years consisting of three 4G pitches in cages, reached by using a QR app in reception.

I had intended to watch a couple of games but that changed upon arrival when I spotted that my first planned game had disappeared from the schedule. There were still several other games to choose from though, so I started at 1.15pm with **Alumni Reserves** on pitch 3. An excellent game which got a bit fractious in the second half as visitors Old Xavarians C took exception to the referee booking and sin-binning their players for nasty looking fouls. 1-1 at half time, but Alumni deservedly took the lead early in the second half and never looked back.

South Liverpool Reserves had been my second choice next, but they decided not to play on pitch 1 which is the new home of South Liverpool, and started on pitch 2, much to the annoyance of a good few hoppers who had travelled from far and wide, like me, to see the first team pitch in action.

Luckily, another **South Liverpool** side were warming up on the **main pitch**, so we all tramped in to see their **3rd team** entertain Neston Nomads and beat them 3-2.

I was quite proud of myself for managing the inevitable cock ups that happened during the day. First one being my train arriving at Liverpool South Parkway station, but the doors not opening to let everybody off. This meant going on to Lime Street and having to get another train back out. My second problem was self-inflicted as I got on the wrong bus after the match, ending up in Sefton, and meaning I missed my train home.

Not overly excited about the new South Liverpool pitch, I must say. You can walk round 3 sides of it, and there are 2 pieces of cover. A small stand behind one goal, and a covered section along one side, but it is really a soulless place to watch football in. Still, if it means SL can continue to grow, then so be it.

contributed on 13/02/22

TT No.122: Keith Aslan - Saturday 12th February 2022; **780 JLC** v Dinnington; Buckingham Insurance Challenge Cup Round 2; Kick Off: 14.04; Result: 2-4; Admission: Free. Programme: £2; Attendance: 34 (28 home, 2 away & 4 neutral)

I enjoyed myself so much last week that I decided to take in some more Central Midlands League action today with the enigmatically named 780 JLC who ply their trade in the Nottingham Division 1 North, although somebody needs to brush up on their geography with the match taking place over 100 miles from Nottingham.

The ground is a 25-minute walk from Scunthorpe station on a large college playing field that contains two other pitches, and if picturesque grounds are your bag, it's probably best to give this one a miss. It certainly didn't look at its best today, continuous drizzle, overcast and windy with a rope half-heartedly strung along half of one touchline. But joy of joys, a little tearoom provided respite from the conditions, with hot drinks and sweeties served by the manager's mother. The all-important paper was also obtained from within. What's with the unusual name I hear you ask. JLC stands for John Leggott College where the match was played, and the manager/founder was born in 1978 with the zero added on because it's the shape of a football. I'm not so sure about the last bit.

Let's talk programmes. 24 glossy pages which if turned upside down and back to front, incorporates another prog. for the morning's youth team match. Given this was played on a different piece of grass, the serious hopper (who can't get a girlfriend) could gather two new ticks, both with a programme. I missed out there, thankfully. The manager was waxing lyrical about the match, saying how good it is to be back playing after Covid (don't speak too soon), and he ended the homily with 'enjoy what could be a rollercoaster of an afternoon'. He wasn't wrong there.

Ah, the magic of the cup. The first half went to form with the higher graded Dinnington two up at the interval. Must have been a pretty inspirational team talk in the home dressing room with the 780's giving it a real go in the second half. In the first 35 minutes thereof, they hit the metalwork twice, missed a penalty and scored a couple of goals to equalize. Alas Dinnington got two more goals late doors to give a rather unfair look to the score line. But well done to the home side for making an entertaining game of it.

Thanks go to the 25% of hopper(s) with a car who kindly gave the other 75% a lift back to the station that enabled us to get an hour earlier train, which was accomplished with just a couple of minutes to spare. Would have been a far less stressful connection if the referee could have somehow found a way of starting the match on time. Unlike last week the trains all behaved themselves and I got home 4 hours before Broadstairs was excommunicated from the rest of the railway network due to the obligatory Sunday 'engineering works'.

contributed on 13/02/22

TT No.121: Jon T Green - Tuesday 8th February 2022; AFC NORTH KILWORTH v. Blaby & Whetstone Athletic; Leicestershire Senior League - League Cup 2nd Round; Venue: South Kilworth Road; Result: 6-1; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 82.

To say that it's been a monumental season for North Kilworth is something of an understatement; 18 straight league victories have seen them find the net a colossal 89 times with just 9 conceded at the other end. It's no wonder then that a solitary point from their remaining two fixtures will see them proclaimed champions of Division Two.

Following their formation in the early 1920's, the club competed in Junior football; initially joining the Lutterworth League before, in 1952, moving onto the Market Harborough League. They remained there for a quarter of a century but, when the league changed to a Sunday competition, they transferred to the Mutual League where they won promotion from Division Three at their first attempt. 1987/88 saw Kilworth make the step up to Senior football in the Leicestershire League winning promotion to the Premier Division in 1991/92 as runners-up. The following year they attained their highest placing as they finished seventh. Life in the top league continued for just four years before relegation back to Division One, they remained there until 2005/06 when they withdrew from the league after gaining only one point from 30 games. Now in the Leicester and District Football League, Kilworth yo-yoed between its three divisions before re-joining the Senior League in

2020/21; they lost all seven games, in what was an abandoned season, but took the enforced break to re-organise the playing staff with a slew of arrivals and departures. Although the league campaign was not completed, Kilworth did reach the final of the Covid Restart Trophy where they were beaten 4-1 by Northfield Emerald in front of 350 fans at Quorn FC.

In 1980 the club had the foresight to purchase seven acres of land on the South Kilworth Road and, three years later, saw the opening of clubhouse and changing room facilities. The ground is still relatively undeveloped with the small, seated stand (currently off limits to spectators as it serves as a combined dug out and technical area), being replaced by a new construction, the perimeter railing will also be upgraded during the summer. May 2021 saw them receive a £39,000 pitch maintenance grant which the ground staff from Leicester City will assist them with over the next few seasons.

Tonight's cup tie sees them pitted against Blaby and Whetstone from the Premier Division having seen off Rugby Borough (also of the Premier) on penalties in the opening round. Blaby progressed to this stage with a remarkable 13-12 shootout win following a two all draw with Earl Shilton Albion. Chatting to the home team manager an hour or so before kick-off, he said "they aren't going to fancy coming here tonight. It's a real David v. Goliath game". The question as to, who was the gallant young David, and who was the giant, was answered in the first few minutes as Kilworth simply blew Blaby away; Reece Hookway forced a diving save from Harry Johnson after just twenty seconds. Jake Smith went close with a towering header before Hookway opened the scoring as he drilled home a shot from outside of the box. Blaby desperately tried to steady the ship, and for a period they did so, and one began to wonder whether their higher division experience might yet tell.

It was a fleeting moment though as Kilworth out muscled their opponents all over the pitch; Blaby's defenders in particular were vocal about the physicality, but referee Mr. Ellis Hewins had the game perfectly under control and allowed play to continue wherever possible. There was a sense of inevitability about a second goal, and it duly arrived on 24 minutes, the hugely impressive Hookway struck the bar and, when Blaby failed to clear, Harry Parker smashed in the rebound from a tight angle. Kilworth added two more in quick succession early in the second period; first Parker unselfishly played in Joe Williams who coolly drew the 'keeper before sending his shot beyond two covering defenders and then, following a free kick on the right, Hookway peeled off his marker and powered a close-range header into the net. With a little over 15 minutes remaining, Hookway completed his hat-trick with a right foot shot which fizzed inside the bottom corner. Rather surprisingly Blaby then scored; Harry Straw, who had looked lively as a second half substitute, turned beautifully in midfield and Jake Smith did the rest via a well-placed cross shot. There was just time for Kilworth to add a sixth as Steve O'Connell had the simplest of tap-ins to close out a resounding victory and to prove that on this occasion Goliath was simply too strong for David.

contributed on 10/02/22

TT No.120: Brian Buck - Saturday 5th February 2022; Ingoldisthorpe v Weeting Saxon; North West Norfolk League Division 2; Result: 9-0; Attendance: 25 approx.

Today I decided to tick off another new ground in this well-organised league and Ingoldisthorpe was easy to get to by public transport. Situated roughly halfway between King's Lynn and Hunstanton I travelled by train from Cambridge North and then caught a bus from the nearby bus station, which run every 15 minutes with the journey taking roughly half an hour. Just asked to be dropped off at The Pond. The bus stop is right next to the ground and is separated by a wall. You could actually watch the game from here if you wanted to!

The hosts, although not top of the league at present, will most likely soon be, as at the time of writing they have won all their 12 league games so far. The club, like a lot of teams in this league, have their own social club and today it was open early as there was a hive of activity because some league officials came to present the club with a 'team of the month' award. I was halfway through a pint or two when they arrived and I had met one of them before, at 'Finals Day', at Heacham a few years back. Just before the start of the game I had my picture taken with them which later did the rounds on *Twitter*!

The hosts committee and volunteers were very welcoming and helped to make my day most enjoyable. They were looking forward to staging their Bingo evening later on! However, under the surface in one corner of the pitch I expect that there were some with headaches, as a few molehills had to be flattened when the pitch was prepared. The ground blended in well with the nearby housing and with it being enclosed by a shallow wall on two sides it was quite a picturesque place to watch football.

As for the game, as a contest, it was soon over, as by the 11th minute the hosts were winning 3-0 with the second goal taking a massive deflection as it deceived the keeper. The goals kept flying in and soon you could see why Ingoldisthorpe are probably champions elect. They had four or five very good, athletic looking young players in their side and by half time the score had reached 7-0. After the break and with there being no danger whatsoever of losing Ingoldisthorpe brought on some of their squad players to give them a run out. When the eighth goal went in on 47 minutes I thought that we would still get another barrage of goals, but despite trying, things calmed down on that front, with the final goal coming on 82 minutes.

Weeting accepted their hammering with good grace and there was no moaning and groaning from them at all. I do wish that other sides would behave in the same way. Ingoldisthorpe behaved impeccably as well. There was hardly a foul in the whole game. The ref had little to do, which is why he did speak to a couple of players during the match. I don't think that they had done much wrong. It was just that he was getting bored and wanted to have someone to talk to! After saying my farewells and despite being offered to share the hosts' hospitality afterwards, I caught the first bus back to King's Lynn. Then while I waited for my train, I could hear the crowd noise from the nearby King's Lynn Town v Weymouth game (3-0). Then after I alighted at Cambridge North I could hear the crowd noise from the Cambridge United v Luton Town FA Cup match (0-3), which had kicked off at 5.30pm! This was a strange feeling, not to be inside a nearby ground when there was a game going on! Thus ended a great day out!

contributed on 08/02/22

TT No.119: Jon T Green - Friday 4th February 2022; BEDLINGTON TERRIERS v. Horden Community Welfare; Northern League Division Two; Venue: Doctor Pit Welfare Park; Result: 1-1; Admission: £5; Programme: No; Attendance: 94.

There are few better things in football than a game under lights, coupled with the bonus of watching another in the Northern League and a Friday night trip to Northumberland seemed like the perfect start to the weekend.

As with most teams in this part of the country, Terriers have a long and storied history: founded as Bedlington Mechanics in 1949 they entered the Northumberland Miners Welfare League winning the championship in 1951/52. Playing briefly in the Northern Combination they claimed the title in 1955 before joining the Northern Alliance the following season. The club disbanded in 1963 but were back in the Northern Alliance just two years later, this time playing under the banner of Bedlington Colliery Welfare. The late 60's and early 70's were a fruitful era as they achieved a League and Cup double in 1967, a further League Cup victory in 1970 as well as three runners-up spots in the championship. Welfare remained in the Northern Alliance until a one-year sojourn to the Tyneside Amateur League in 1980 where they competed as Bedlington United. Back in the Northern Alliance the name was once again changed, this time to the current Terriers moniker before the club became founder members of the new Division Two of the Northern League in 1982. Promotion and relegation followed but, having won the Division Two title in 1993/94, they embarked upon the most successive spell in their history: a Cup double in 1995 (League and Northumberland Senior) before a run of five consecutive League championships began in 1997/98.

All of this paled into insignificance given the achievements of the 1998/99 campaign when, having beaten Colchester United 4-1 in front of a record crowd of 2,400, they lost 2-0 to Scunthorpe United in the Second Round of the FA Cup. The FA Vase was to prove equally exciting as Terriers reached Wembley only to be beaten by a single goal against Tiverton Town. By the mid Noughties the club, now suffering from severe financial difficulties, was rescued by an unlikely source; the wife of US billionaire, the aptly titled Robert E. Rich Jr, discovered ancestral links to the town and so, in that terribly understated American way, Rich bought the title of Lord Bedlington and gifted the club a new £30,000 electronic scoreboard and financed the laying of a new pitch. He also paid for the team to travel to New York State where they played a friendly match against FC Buffalo for the self-styled Lord Bedlington Cup.

Life hasn't been quite as exciting since those heady days with the Terriers finding themselves back in the Northern League Second Division since 2016. The current season sees them lying 17th (out of 21) but, since the beginning of the New Year, a fine win against Newcastle University in the Northumberland Senior Cup was rather tempered by a home defeat to struggling Washington before things got back on track last time out with a 3-1 victory at Blyth Town. Howden arrived at Welfare Park sitting ninth in the standings after a run of three consecutive victories.

The ground, named after the Doctor colliery which closed in 1968, is a thing of beauty, even despite some pretty horrendous recent windstorm damage which has caused the flattening of a fair chunk of the perimeter fencing. Notwithstanding the huge electronic scoreboard (off for this match) two sides of the ground are narrow flat standing only, with the area adjacent to the impressive double storey clubhouse having a small, covered section. Along the remaining side are a hospitality suite, tea bar and a Main Stand which is made up of three distinct sections; those at either end are seated whilst the middle one is terraced. What really sets the whole ensemble apart is the liberal use of red and white painted stripes; either vertical or horizontal the whole area has been painstakingly decorated and the effect is simply stunning.

During the pre-match warm-up one of the visiting coaching staff wondered if they were going to put the floodlights on and maybe he had a point because, despite there being ten pylons, some parts of the pitch can best be described as less than fully illuminated. The same coach also gathered his players around him to explain the next drill "now listen properly because I know that one or two of you are a bit thick"; his exact words were somewhat more colourful, but you get the jist. The drill itself was so complex that "thick" or not it would have taken a degree in scientific movement to understand what was required. In the end the players simply donned three different colour bibs and passed the ball to each other - this seemed to keep the coach happy!!! On the theme of colours, Horden turned out in what was officially described as lavender shirts - now call me a bluff old traditionalist but football kits should be proper colours (red, blue, yellow, green etc.) not something which has a dictionary definition of "a pale blue with a hint of mauve"...

Onto the game itself which saw Horden look much the better of the two teams in the first half. Lavender bedecked or not they controlled the game for long periods, were comfortable on the ball with plenty of intelligent running and movement off it. The only meaningful chance of the 45 minutes fell to their left winger, Liam Wright, who cut inside before firing wide with a low shot. The second period began with the visitors still looking the more likely to open the scoring; Oliver Hotchkiss curling his effort just wide from outside of the penalty area. In two teams containing plenty of quality Hotchkiss was the standout player - in just one example he controlled a high ball perfectly on his left instep before transferring it to his right and delivering a perfectly weighted cross field pass. Despite the presence of Hotchkiss, Terriers took the lead on 56 minutes; James Wilson and Keelan Nellis combined to win a corner and when the centre came in it was nodded back across goal where centre-half Ben Shepherd guided his header beyond Paul Griffith. For the first time Horden lost their composure as the game became increasingly scrappy and Bedlington might have put the match out of reach, but Nellis could only find the side netting when well placed. With a couple of minutes remaining the visitors forced an equaliser; Terriers lost possession midway inside their own half and with their central defence now exposed, Wright was able to make quick progress forward before driving his shot past Nathan Harker into the bottom corner. As the crowd filed out into the chilly evening air one home fan sagely commented "it's gutting to concede so late but they were a canny side...." how right he was....

contributed on 08/02/22

TT No.118: Craig Dabbs - Saturday 5th February 2022; **Walton & Hersham v Beckenham Town**; Combined Counties League Premier Division South; Venue: Elmbridge Xcel Sports Hub; Result: 0-1; Admission: £8; Programme: 24pp, £2; Attendance: 353.

One of my small regrets in groundhopping was missing out on a visit to Walton & Hersham's former Stompond Lane ground. No matter how hard you try though you can't do them all as they say. Since leaving Stompond Lane in 2017 the former Amateur Cup winners (72/73) have found themselves in a 50/50 share with Walton Casuals at Elmbridge Xcel Sports Hub in September of that year.

The hub cost £18.25 million and took a little over a year to construct. The whole site is split into two sections with the Xcel Leisure Centre the other side of the car park along with a 3g pitch alongside it known as Xcel 3. The Sports Hub itself in addition to the main pitch has one external grass pitch along with another all-weather pitch.

The main pitch has ample amounts of flat hardstanding all around with a concrete base ready, I suspect, for a stand to be lifted in at some point behind the dugouts. There is a large stand on the one side which has three hundred seats and is double sided owing to the Athletics Stadium next door. Upstairs is a large function room and refreshment area offering good views of both the Football and the Athletics.

So, whilst it does lack character to some extent, there's no doubt, on the face of it, that it's an excellent facility that will serve to community and the two clubs for years to come. And yes, I will go back to do Casuals at some point.

Today though was about the top two in the league. With both teams on 53 points, Beckenham have the, oh so slight, upper hand with a couple of games still to play. It had all the ingredients of being a good game and it did explode into life fairly early on with Beckenham getting an early goal. After this it became at times scrappy but with enough in it to keep you entertained. Naturally as the game wore on the Swans became increasingly desperate and with it there was some desperate defending by Beckenham for the last twenty minutes. This was how the game concluded without any home reply.

contributed (via Brian Buck) on 06/02/22

TT No.117: Craig Dabbs - Tuesday 1st February 2022; **Swallownest v Selby Town**; Northern Counties (East) League Division One; Venue: Swallownest Miners Welfare; Result: 2-2; Admission: £5; Programme: 24pp, £1; Attendance: 108.

A rare midweek trip out to the village of Swallownest near Sheffield. The club play at the Miners Welfare and have self-styled it the Swall Siro Stadium, not that there's any Italian flare on show here at all!

The ground is very much a work in progress. It's currently two and a half sided for spectators with no access at the far end which has Sheffield as it's backdrop. From the dugouts down towards this end (behind the main stand) it is also restricted.

No kit stands here, or at least I don't think so, as the main stand could be a very well disguised one. It's situated on the left-hand side from where you enter with around seventy seats within. Two further areas of cover are provided at the Rotherham Road end, one a small terrace with a wheelchair ramp which is a nice touch and the other a small homemade stand with four rows of bench seating boosting the seating capacity to meet the requirements of the league.

The club crest has 1959 within it which is a nod to an earlier version of the club that once played in the Yorkshire League in the 60's. The present club is much newer, starting out as Aston FC in 2006 playing in the South Yorkshire Amateur League and progressing quickly into the Sheffield & Hallamshire County Senior League as Swallownest Miners Welfare FC. The name was then changed to Swallownest in 2015/16 and from there they gained promotion to their current level in 2017.

The club as it stands right now are having a difficult season and are in the relegation zone, staring the County League in the face. So, on a blustery night and not without a minor scare (when a bank of lights failed before kick-off and fixed quite quickly thankfully), they faced promotion hopefuls Selby Town.

Selby took control early on and went one nil up. I think they became rather complacent after that and the game quickly petered into a rather dull contest with little happening until the second half when clearly a much hungrier Swallownest, desperate for the points, took charge and went 2-1 ahead. With only six minutes of normal time left the visitors responded and their blushes were saved when they were awarded a soft penalty near the end. It was hard on Swallownest who deserved the victory. The result didn't help either side much in their respective objectives.

A nice evening out spent in good company.

contributed (via Brian Buck) on 06/02/22

TT No.116: Keith Aslan - Saturday 5th February 2022; SJR Worksop v Collingham; Central Midlands League Premier Division North; Kick Off: 14.05; Result: 3-2; Admission: £3; Programme: £1.50p; Attendance: 29 (23 home, 2 away & 4 neutral)

Regular readers will know I tried to do this one before Christmas and getting as far as Retford before the sweeties at AFC Bentley woke up and decided they all had Covid, or as it used to be called, a hangover. Had another go in the new year that was stymied by a frozen pitch, with fortunately a bit more warning this time. As my Mum always used to say: 'If at first you don't succeed, try, try again' (although possibly not the best advice if I had been looking at a career in bomb disposal). Today the planets all aligned with weather, opposition and trains running meant it was third time lucky.

Nice little set up here, a 22-minute walk from the station, just up the road from Worksop Town. Fully railed, a bar, and a hatch with hot and cold beverages and sausage rolls on offer. For a full meal you could do worse than the adjacent ASDA cafe. Worksop's twitter feed advertised the bar would be open from half twelve. It wasn't. Also, they made a big thing about the ability to pay admittance by card. The young lady on the gate couldn't get the machine to work and after a couple of minutes playing with the thing it was a mutual decision that paying by cash was the way forward. The transaction with actual money took a few seconds. The old ways are usually the best.

A five-minute late start was due to running repairs required on one of the goal-nets. Why do officials wait until the game is due to start before checking them? The home side were 2-0 up at the break aided by a weird penalty. The onrushing forward stubbed his toe on a divot, fell over and was as surprised as everybody else to be rewarded by a spot kick. Justice was done when the keeper saved it. Justice was quickly undone when the ref. ordered a re-kick because the goalie was off his line. No mistake this time, but in view of where the keeper was situated when the second penalty kick was taken, I don't think he is a very quick learner. Collingham fought back in the second half to make it 2-2 before Worksop got an 89th minute winner.

A mere two and a half hours late getting home. Apocalypse at Stevenage. Rail Privatization: Gateway to the Third World.

contributed on 06/02/22

TT No.115: Brian Buck - Saturday 29th January 2022; Southgate Olympic v Forza; Amateur Football Combination Division 1 North; Result: 2-2; Attendance: 7.

Today I took to the trains, changing at Stevenage, before alighting at Winchmore Hill station. From here it was a casual, unhurried 20 minutes' walk to the Clowes Sports Ground, Barrowell Green, where the club have been playing their home games since the mid-1960's and today I talked to two survivors who remember those days.

The club was formed on 23rd June 1933, and they own the clubhouse, but not the ground, which I believe belongs to Enfield Council. They also share the facilities with Northampton Exiles Cricket Club and in total there are four football pitches and two cricket squares here. Rather surprisingly, given today's attendance, the club run five teams, with the fifths at home today on an adjacent pitch.

Anyway, the clubhouse was open before the game, so I had a chance to sit down and eat my sandwiches before the start. As for the opposition, I had never heard of them before, but on enquiring, it seems that they were formed about four years ago and rather being an 'Old Boys' team they are primarily an Italian based side and I was told that loosely translated their Forza name means 'Let's Go' in Italian!

As for the game, it was truly awful. The home sides manager's coaching ability was worse than a parent at a youth match. His utterances were loud, and he offered

his players no constructive encouragement and little praise. I moved away from him eventually. They were expected to beat a side who had drawn five and lost five of their league matches. Nonetheless, this was a game where the players were so inept that goals simply would have to come. On 27 minutes Forza took the lead when confusion between the home keeper and one of his defenders saw the ball get rolled into an empty net. I say ‘keeper’ but to me his only qualification to be one was the fact that he was wearing a Spurs tracksuit top! On 38 minutes the hosts equalised from a 25-yard free kick, when the ball found its way to the scorer after it bounced off the head of a player standing in the wall. But on 42 minutes Forza went back into the lead when the ball was clipped over the keeper from about 30 yards out. Around about this time the ref was getting all kinds of verbal abuse from the players, some of which would have seen red cards produced by other refs, which was out of contrast with games I used to watch in this league when the old ‘Corinthian’ spirit used to prevail. To be honest, he wasn’t great, but he was just doing his best, trying to keep the peace and to enjoy himself at the same time. On 57 minutes the home manager surprisingly brought himself on. He was even less fit than those he had been castigating and was making the same mistakes as them. However, the team seemed much calmer now and on 68 minutes they got the equaliser through a header with the keeper AWOL.

By the end, I nominated myself as ‘man of the match’ as I did a couple of nice one touch flicks when the ball came to me off the pitch. The home official, who missed the equaliser, because he was retrieving a lost ball, seemed a tad embarrassed that ‘his’ team didn’t perform today. Players out injured of course! And I felt sorry for the ref who near enough walked off the pitch without handshakes moments after he blew the final whistle. But I did shake his hand as I started to make my way home. I left, happy to get in a new ground, maybe, but sometimes the way the game is played is more important, so overall the day wasn’t quite so enjoyable.

contributed on 04/02/22

TT No.114: Keith Aslan - Saturday 29th January 2022; WYRLEY UNITED v FC Darlaston; West Midlands League Div. 1; Kick-off: 13.57! Result: 0-1; Admission: £1.50p for old people; Programme: £1.50p; Attendance: 63 (52 home, 8 away & 3 neutral).

Back in the distant past I saw another Wyrley team play at a ground 100 yards up the road from here and at the time I said to myself ‘one day I will return to do this one’. Today was that day. The ground I had done is now home to Sikh Hunters. Wyrley United is not to be confused with Wyrley, Great Wyrley or Wyrley Rangers, but can be confused with Wyrley Juniors whose signage is all around the ground and also on the team’s shirts. The programme and the league call them ‘United’ so you can take your choice.

Bloxwich North is the station for this one and is a pleasant 22-minute stroll along the Wyrley & Essenden Canal with the towpath bringing you right out into the ground. Going by road will take twice as long but the canal-side option is most

definitely not to be undertaken in the dark. A cracking rural set up, fully railed with plenty of seats dotted around, but no cover. A large function room supplied hot and cold food and drink.

It had gone under my radar, admittedly not a great depth, but United are soon to be moving to a new ground, opposite where Great Wyrley now play (or did when I saw them). Photos in the programme show that much progress is being made with the move taking place 'sooner rather than later'. Still, plenty of opportunity to tick this one off with 7 of United's next 9 games being at home.

The journey from Birmingham was shared with a number of supporters going to the Bescot Stadium for Aston Villas women's cup game with Chelsea, while half a mile further up the line you pass a large 'Morrisons' or as it was called when I went there, Walsall Football Club. The trains today all ran perfectly which is how it should be most of the time, but it isn't. During the week the train companies were whingeing that passenger numbers were down, and they were going to attract more 'customers' by offering free teas and coffees. Like that's going to make a difference. Lowering the fares might though?

In his programme notes the Wyrley captain said he expected an easy victory today, probably not the brightest thing he's ever written. The match was pretty even in the first half, but the home side dominated the second. Such is the way of things FC Darlaston (not to be confused with Darlaston 1884) broke away and scored the only goal of the game in the 93rd of the 90 minutes. As soon as the referee blew the final whistle, I turned tail and limped back along the canal. I heard much agitated whistle blowing in the distance suggesting I missed a post-match fracas. The game will live in the memory due to the Darlaston trainer who must be one of the very few people I could beat in a race. If he moved any slower, he would stop completely and on the two occasions he was called into what could loosely be described as 'action' he received ironic applause from the crowd when he finally reached the stricken player who would have either already recovered or died of old age.

West Bromwich Albion season ticket holders were admitted to this game for just a £1, but the only Albion supporters I saw were on Euston Station making a nuisance of themselves on their way to Millwall.

contributed on 30/01/22

TT No.113: Brian Buck - Saturday 22nd January 2022; Glen Villa v Leicester Nirvana Red Star; Leicestershire County League Premier Cup Group Stage; Result: 0-1; Attendance: 15 approx.

This neat and tidy little ground took about 90 minutes to get to from home and could be found in Great Glen, which is just off the A6, 10 miles from Market Harborough and 6 miles from Leicester. I arrived here about half an hour before kick-off and the first person I bumped into was the ref. We agreed that the car park was more spacious than it looked on the aerial maps. Although he was young looking it turned out that he was a policeman and as soon as I found that out, I tried to draw him away from looking at my car too closely! After having a lengthy

chat with him I found the home manager who was also very welcoming and indeed, on the day, everyone was.

There is a village hall here and the club have their own bar which opened after the game finished with the thirsty home fans queuing to get in. As there are only ten clubs in the top division of this league and all clubs are close to completing their league programme, the league has introduced a cup competition, which is being played on a group basis to give the clubs more games. The pitch was roped off on three sides, but ever the rebel, I stood on the un-rope fourth side. From here I could see that the pitch sloped up and down and from side to side, but not that severely. One disadvantage of standing on this side of the pitch was that there was a public footpath behind the fence and during the afternoon lots of people passed by me, either just out for a walk or exercising their dogs. Some stopped for a chat and one bloke asked me if I was a scout! At this level, I wondered why!

The game was keenly contested, and the football was of a decent standard. However, the ref was handicapped by the biasness of his lino's especially the home one in the first half. But he was convincing enough to persuade the ref to disallow a Nirvana goal for offside on 22 minutes. I suspect that the visitors were Leicester Nirvana Reserves in disguise and in the first half they were well on top, creating at least seven scoring chances to one. They also got the only goal of the game, on 42 minutes when the scorer lifted the ball over the quickly advancing keeper, just before he clattered into him inside the area. Had he missed then I suspect that a penalty kick may have been awarded. The second half saw the home lino replaced and Glen Villa make a game of it, by throwing more men forward. As the half wore on, so they almost camped in front of the Nirvana goal and had the game gone on for another half an hour at the end Glen Villa would have probably won it as the visitors tired. But perhaps by the end the visitors did deserve their win. They were a noisy excitable lot, but they seemed to enjoy themselves here, as I did.

contributed on 25/01/22

TT No.112: Brian Buck - Friday 21st January 2022; Peterborough North End v Whittlesey Athletic; Thurlow Nunn League First Division North; Venue: played at Peterborough Sports; Result: 2-4; Attendance: 178.

Since my last visit here, a couple of years ago now, there have been some changes to the ground. Gone is the old clubhouse, which is being turned into a car park. The new one is in the north east corner of the ground and you have to walk round it to gain entrance to the playing arena. Once inside it you soon see a new stand, which complements the existing one on the other side of the pitch. I noted that in the programme one of my *Travellers Tales* appeared, which was news to me!

Anyway, I watched the game in the company of some good friends and also saw a few groundhoppers I knew, one of whom was my Hamilton Academical colleague who had travelled down from Scotland to watch the match. The hosts were originally known as Peterborough Sports Reserves before becoming Peterborough Sports Academy. They then merged with Bretton North End to become Peterborough North End Sports, before dropping the Sports bit. These days they

are a separate club to Peterborough Sports, but the two clubs still have strong links with each other.

This game had been 'talked up' in the days preceding the match and indeed we did witness a decent, sometimes feisty encounter. The visitors took the lead on 25 minutes from the spot. There was minimal contact, and the 'fouled' player exaggerated his fall. On 33 minutes the hosts had a player sent off for making a dangerous challenge. Despite protestations from the hosts, it looked fairly awful from where I was sitting. The lead was doubled on 42 minutes when a hard shot went in off a defender standing on the line. It was effectively game over on 51 minutes when Whittlesey claimed their third goal. On 73 minutes North End pulled a goal back, before Whittlesey got another one to make sure two minutes later. In added on time North End scored from the spot kick themselves and there seemed to be even less contact made this time around. Overall, a good game on a cold night.

contributed on 25/01/22

TT No.111: Jon T Green - Saturday 22nd January 2022; SALTDEAN UNITED v. Eastbourne Town; Southern Combination League Premier Division; Venue: Hill Park; Result: 1-2; Admission: £5; Programme: £1; Attendance: 120 h/c

By historical standards, Saltdean United are something of a new club having been formed in 1966 by a group inspired by the World Cup win. Life began in the Brighton Saturday League before, having purchased Hill Park, they joined division three of the Sussex County League in 1984. The championship, and along with it, promotion to division two, was clinched in 1988/89; seven years later saw another championship title which earned the Tigers a place in the top league. With floodlights installed and a new clubhouse erected, things looked promising for the club, but the noughties saw them suffer two relegations to see them back in the third division. In 2011 Saltdean arrested the slide and, after steady improvement, 2017 saw them once again in the top-flight of the league, now known as the Southern Combination. A year on they lifted the League Challenge Cup defeating Uckfield Town 3-1 in the final played at Hassocks FC.

Hill Park, situated just over a mile from the sea front is an absolute beauty. Approached down a pot-holed, tree lined lane you arrive at a simple gated entrance (no turnstile block here), on the right are a series of brick buildings; Cafe Seven (serving a wide range of keenly priced refreshments), the clubhouse, complete with a 3D tiger head team badge, and further along the changing rooms; between these and the pitch is a row of high mature trees. On the near side of the ground there is a modern seated stand along with uncovered standing along the rail. The real beauty however lies on the far side where a red and black painted stand has been built into the side of the hill. Made of brick, rusting metal and corrugated iron it contains a few rows of basic benches with room for standing at the back. It's a spectacular view of the sweeping countryside from here and even better if you climb up further behind the stand to where there is a secondary pitch. On a warm, sunny day this has to be one of the most idyllic locations in which to watch a game. Saltdean are a progressive club though with plans already afoot to build a replacement two storey clubhouse and install a new stand. Whilst

the need to improve and modernise is wholly understandable, it's hoped that this won't be done at the expense of the ground's wonderful character.

With the home side occupying third place in the table the visitors from Eastbourne Town arrived eight points and four positions adrift of them. On a freshly prepared but wet pitch United began the livelier, with the rangy Harry Shooman seeing plenty of the ball on the left wing. It was from a Shooman centre that Alfie Peacock had the first chance of the game as his shot back across goal was deflected away for a corner. At the other end, centre forward Louis Veneti set up his captain Simon Johnson, who's well hit drive forced James Broadbent into his first save of the afternoon. Shooman and Peacock continued to be a dangerous combination with the latter seeing his effort parried away by Chris Winterton in Town's goal. With the half drawing to a close, Eastbourne came more into the match as Harvey Greig almost made a telling connection following a free kick.

If the first half ended well for the visitors, it started even better as they took the lead after just six minutes; United failed to clear Arron Hopkinson's corner and Aaron Capon was on hand to find the net with a sharp left foot finish. With the game becoming slightly scrappy Capon moved onto a clever through pass and lifted the ball over the on-rushing Winterton. With covering defenders close-by, it's perhaps debatable as to whether Capon would have scored, but referee Mr. Harry Wood really had no choice but to dismiss the 'keeper after he wiped out the Eastbourne man. With a little less than 15 minutes remaining Hopkinson and Veneti combined down the right before the former found the bottom corner from the edge of the area. It looked like the game was over, but Saltdean weren't finished and battled back; Peacock received a pass wide right, and cutting back inside, drifted past three yellow shirted defenders before driving a low shot beyond Winterton's despairing dive. In the end it wasn't to be enough as, although Peacock had another late chance, his shot-cum-cross drifted harmlessly wide.

This was another highly enjoyable, competitive, well officiated match and if you're a fan of traditional football ground architecture then get this glorious venue on your must visit list right now...

contributed on 25/01/22

TT No.110: Craig Dabbs - Saturday 22nd January 2022; New Bohemians v Handsworth Reserves; Sheffield & Hallamshire County Senior League Division One; Venue: St George's Park Sheffield Graves; Result: 0-10; Admission: Free; Programme: 8pp, free; Attendance: 23.

I will attempt, if I can, to attend any club at this level bothering to issue a programme. So today, I found myself in the south of the Steel City watching nominal step eight in a caged venue that was helped by having a spectator area down one side.

St George's Park Sheffield Graves is one of three St George's Park's within Sheffield. This particular one was the first set up in the country by the FA as a Parklife Grassroot Football Hub aimed to address poor facilities in grassroots football. The

site was opened in 2016 by Tracey Crouch MP in the presence of the FA Chief Executive Martin Glenn and other dignitaries.

The site has two full-sized artificial pitches and a natural grass pitch further out. This game took place on pitch two with pitch one in use for Sheffield City v Swinton Athletic Reserves in a Division Two fixture.

New Bohemians have been around since 2006 and were set up by Richard Cobb. Richard spent time living in Prague and started to support Bohemians 1905 and when he returned home, he set up this club, initially I think as a seven a side team that grew into a full eleven and now, they have various age sides in place.

New Bohemians to be fair aren't having a great season, struggling a little bit at the wrong end of the table. Today they met a Handsworth Reserves team at the other end of the Division One. Once it got going (delayed after the referee visited one of the other St George sites by mistake), Handsworth settled in fairly quickly and dominated the game. It wasn't that New Bohemians were hopeless - they do look like they can play a bit and their goalkeeper was brilliant preventing a much bigger defeat (easily the man of the match). It was just a case of Handsworth being just too good.

I know SGP Graves isn't the best place in the world to take a game in but a trip here shouldn't be dismissed and the welcome was warm and friendly. I just wish they would perhaps charge for the programme or try taking a collection rather than giving things away.

contributed (via Brian Buck) on 23/01/22

TT No.109: Keith Aslan - Saturday 22nd January 2022; CARDIFF DRACONIANS v Garden Village; Ardal League Southern; Kick Off: 14.01; Result: 2-1; Admission: Free for the elderly (£4 for normal people); Programme: £1; Attendance: 88 (74 home. 8 away & 6 neutral).

Doesn't matter where I went today, Network Rail were going to make it as difficult as possible, and I plumped for some Ardal action in Drakeford's domain. A deviation around Wiltshire's hotspots added 1 hour 10 minutes onto the journey to Cardiff with the train going down being totally rammed. The guard/train manager apologised for the overcrowding which he said was due to a rugby match in Bath. And there was I thinking it was due to cutting out more than half of the trains. It wouldn't have mattered how many people were wearing bits of cloth over their faces, the 09.32 to Swansea was a Covid Super-spreader. Another sign of the country sinking into the abyss came at Paddington where the two McDonalds have been replaced by a brand new one across the road where you can only make your order from a machine. The nice young lady who did it for me said how easy it is. I found going up to the counter and telling a human being what I wanted was even easier.

Although only 3 miles west of the City Centre this ground isn't particularly easy to reach. Llandaf and Danescourt are the nearest Gorsaf's, but both are over 20

minutes' walk away. Plenty of buses, but no stops particularly close by either. When you reach the ground it's a step back in time. The club were only allowed to use one dressing room due to Covid (I really don't get that one) so the home team changed in the tea-room with the refreshments being sold and consumed outside. Luckily the weather was OK, I wouldn't have fancied it if it had been raining. On entering the ground your name and telephone number is taken for track and trace. Quite happy to do it but I did say we stopped this over the border many months ago (primarily because it didn't work). Man on gate said it doesn't matter because nobody would contact me anyway as I lived in England! What happened to 'We're all in this together?

I'm used to getting a small reduction on admission prices due to my great age but here OAP's get in free. Man on the gate did suggest I make a donation. Why not just charge in the first place? Lots of helpers here, always a good sign, with friendliness being the keynote. I was presented with a free unasked for club badge and both the officials and supporters created a really nice atmosphere. The stand was a welcome haven to rest my dodgy knees but wherever you sat in it a bit of the pitch was obscured. The refreshments were top of the range with the coffee being the best I've tasted at a football ground, and I got well stuck into the cheese and onion rolls. A good programme rounded off a perfect matchday experience.

First football since Wales came out of lockdown, and, surprise, surprise, Covid rates remained just as high as in non-lockdowned England. Last Saturday it would have been against the law for 88 people to attend a game of football, and today's newly released crowd was treated to a fulsomely feisty match with 7 bookings and 1 sending off. The mayhem was admirably controlled by the referee of whom the lady behind me in the stand opined was 'a bit of a hotty'. No man who wears a pony-tail should ever be described thus. The upshot of all the fun and excitement was Cardiff Draconians remain top of the league.

Missed my train back from Cardiff due to a bus not turning up and all in all one of my more stressful trips. The bit in the middle made it all worthwhile.

contributed on 23/01/22

TT No.108: *Brian Buck* - Saturday 15th January 2022; **Ludgershall United v AW FC;** Aylesbury & District League Division 1; Venue: played at Ashendon Playing Fields; Result: 1-3; Attendance: 7.

These days on Saturday's I try and do a new ground in a different league each week and today I decided to grace the Aylesbury & District League with my presence. So, after finding a ground I hadn't been to in this league, I end up here. First of all, it should be pointed out that Ludgershall United should not be confused with the similarly named Ludgershall Sports, whom I visited on 28 March 2005 for a Sydenhams Wessex League Division 3 match when they lost 6-0 to Farnborough North End (attendance: 45 approx) which is in Wiltshire. Today I was in the Buckinghamshire version.

I wondered why they don't play in Ludgershall, which is about 5 miles northwest of Ashendon as the crow (or possibly kite in this area) flies. Firstly, I asked the ref

about this. He told me that he thought that they had a pitch in the village but later on the hosts manager, wearing his Spurs coat, told me that they didn't have one and had been playing at Ashendon for at least 15 years.

What a ground this is and, in normal conditions, it must be one of the most scenic grounds in England. Situated on top of a hill there were panoramic views to be had stretching for miles. I only wish that I had not come here on this misty day as in sunny conditions, the views would have been spectacular. I stood mainly on the south side and behind the goal to my right was a church and there was a raised reservoir behind the other goal. The pitch sloped severely from west to east, and also, from north to south. You got the full benefit of this from where I was standing, as you could compare the wooden pavilion, built on level ground, with the sloping pitch. Also, in parts and depending on where you stand, there is a danger you might find yourself falling off the narrow playing area, as the pitch slopes away quickly in parts.

Then, out of curiosity I asked what the AW stood for in the visitor's name and was told that it stands for Aston Wendover, which seems to be a non-existent place between Aston Clinton and Wendover. I was just relieved that they weren't an abbreviation of Anglian Windows! Anyway, in the first half Ludgershall kicked downhill and after AW started brightly, they soon became the better side. At the break the ref told me that he thought that AW would win because they never give up. He was to be proved right but for a long while it was looking like a nil-nil draw. Eventually he gave AW a spot kick for a foul, but the perpetrator seemed to get neither the ball nor the attacker in his tackle. The resultant kick was successful, and the lead was doubled six minutes later when a shot seemed to go through the keeper from about 15 yards out. By now the legs of some of the home players were tiring as they struggled to get up the slope, but on 88 minutes they also got given and converted, a spot kick, awarded for a trip. Then, just as I was waiting in the corner of the pitch to make my getaway, AW scored a third goal from a narrow angle giving them a deserved win. Today I witnessed some good honest football from both sides and if you haven't already visited this ground, then I do recommend that you do so, if only to take in the stunning views.

contributed on 21/01/22

TT No.107: Jon T Green - Saturday 15th January 2022; CROMER YOUTH OLD BOYS RESERVES v Dersingham Rovers Reserves; Norfolk Intermediate Cup Second Round; Venue: Bodham Playing Fields; Result: 3-10; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 4

Cromer Youth Old Boys (CYOB) are one of those club's whose first and reserve/development teams play at differing venues. The senior outfit, who are members of the Anglian Combination, groundshare at Cromer Town's Cabbell Park whilst the reserve and development sides are resident at Bodham Playing Fields, just a few short miles along the main coast road. Bodham is fairly easily reached by public transport with three or four Saturday morning train services from Norwich to Cromer and Sheringham, from either of those you can catch a Holt bound bus which stops a couple of minutes' walk from the ground. Alternatively, you can take the bus directly from Norwich city centre, the ride is around 90 minutes, and, like

the trains, there are three or four departures which will get you there in time for kick off. Bodham has a pub but if you are looking for a cheap breakfast or a fish and chip lunch then the options are much better in either Sheringham or Cromer.

Today it's the Second Round of the Norfolk Intermediate Cup as CYOB welcome Dersingham Rovers Reserves to the Playing Fields. Dersingham are fourth in the top division of the North West Norfolk League but with only five wins from 14 outings that might be a somewhat misleading stat. CYOB defeated Wymondham Town Reserves 2-1 in the opening round but their league form has been poor with their only victories coming against the bottom two clubs in the North East Norfolk League First Division. The ground, as the name suggests, is simply a playing field with no spectator facilities; however, it is a very pleasant rural venue even on a chilly Winter's afternoon. The players, quite rightly, fare a little better as they have the use of a smart, white-washed changing room block adjacent to the car park.

On many occasions I've walked away from a game thinking that had XYZ team taken their chances they could have reached double figures, well today Dersingham did exactly that. Not that there was any early sign of what was to come as Cromer started the more lively; Kane Waldron reacted quickest after nine minutes to hammer home his shot after the initial strike had struck the post. The home team were holding a very high line which proved to be a flawed tactic as time and time again Rovers' speedy forward line exposed the space in behind their back four. CYOB held the lead for two minutes before Curtis Sharpe, just back from an ACL injury, sprinted clear only to be felled by the on rushing 'keeper. The referee deemed that a fair, if unsuccessful, attempt to play the ball had been made and decided not to brandish a card. Conor McQuaid stepped up to equalise but only after his spot kick had been well parried. Things then went from bad to worse for the hosts as Dersingham added a further five goals before the break including a clinical quick-fire hat-trick from Sharpe; Obie Howe and Harvey Hughes adding the others. The second half began in much the same vein as the first had ended; Sharpe and Jack Bolderstone netted twice within the first few minutes before Hughes' scored his second, and Rovers' ninth, with a superb long-range effort from somewhere close to the centre circle. Immense credit must go to CYOB though as, despite the score-line, they continued to work hard and were rewarded on the hour as centre-forward Shane Nixon scored with a superbly struck half-volley. Bolderstone took his team's tally to 10 as he drifted in from the right before finding the roof of the net; Cromer still wouldn't lay down as Jacob Di-Lella scored an absolute beauty with a perfect lofted right footer from all of 35 yards.

Although not the most competitive of games it was played in an excellent spirit with special mentions going to Dersingham's manager who took time out from patrolling the touchline to answer my questions and also to referee Mr. Nigel Evans; 76 years young and still going strong after an officiating career stretching back over 30 years. Nigel took time to chat during half time and said that only an upcoming knee replacement operation would end his days in the middle. If you ever wanted proof of people's love of this great game, then you could have no better example - more power to your elbow (or maybe that should be knee) Mr. Evans.

contributed on 18/01/22

TT No.106: Keith Aslan - Saturday 15th January 2022; YELVERTON v Heacham; Anglian Combination Premier; Kick Off: 13.29; Result 2-3; Admission: Free; Programme: 50p; Attendance: 40 (18 home, 20 away & 2 neutral).

Not the easiest ground to get to by public transport. Plenty of buses make the 12-minute journey from Norwich, but it's a fair walk from the railway station to the bus stop, while at the other end Yelverton has no buses at all and according to '*Traveline*' the bus stop is at the end of the lane followed by a 20-minute walk. According to the bus driver the stop doesn't exist and the nearest dropping off point is outside the garden centre, almost another mile further up the road. So that makes it a good three quarters of an hour walk. Don't believe everything you read on '*Traveline*'. It's all worth it when you arrive at this dinky little hamlet which contains a village hall, an olde worlde church next to the ground, and nothing else.

A typical village club with hot drinks on sale, and a long time before kick-off, the bacon rolls got going. Yum-yum, the only hot food for miles around. Prior to the match I had an uplifting chat with the personable 16 (sixteen) year old linesman. He's been officiating for three years and is full of enthusiasm. Let's hope it lasts, football desperately needs people like him. There must have been a good 40-year age gap between the two linos. This was the referee's first match in over two months due to postponements, Covid, and most tragic of all, he got married.

The club histories in the programme show similar upward trajectories for both teams. In 2011 Yelverton were in the Norwich Business Houses League before entering Division 6 of the Anglian Comb. and going through the divisions to end up in the Premier this season. Heacham's rise was even quicker, in 2016 they were plying their trade in the North West Norfolk League and have been promoted every year since, a record they will be maintaining with Eastern Counties football coming to the village next season. New stands, floodlights and everything a ground grader could desire are in, or nearly in, place. There is obviously some money here.

Yelverton were formed in 1947 and their first ever game was against the 'Prisoners of War'. This gives me an idea for a screenplay for the sequel to 'Escape to Victory', this time from the German point of view. Given that in '47 Jerry was much better off in a P.O.W. Camp over here than he would have been back in the Fatherland, I'd call it 'Escape to Victory 2, this time we aren't going anywhere' with the Germans having to win the match against Yelverton to stop them being repatriated. I see Henning Wehn in the lead role as wisecracking German Goalkeeper Bert Trautman. But I digress.

Another cracker of a match, but when Heacham, (playing record played 16 won 16), scored on 5 minutes the result looked to be a foregone conclusion. Not so, Yelverton equalized, twice, to make it two all at the break. A sending off for each side with Heacham's red card as a result of a hideous tackle that Graeme Souness would have been proud to call his own. Second half could have gone either way, although it was obvious which team wanted victory and which team was happy with a draw. On the 88th minute Heacham got the winner to maintain their 100%

record. Highlight for me was the referee awarding a proper drop ball near the end. It must be years since I've seen one of those.

A gloriously early kick off with trains and buses all doing what they are supposed to do meant an early return back my country dacha after another fine day out in a place I wouldn't have known existed were it not for this wonderful hobby.

contributed on 16/01/22

TT No.105: Jon T Green - Saturday 8th January 2022; FRENFORD v Halstead Town; Eastern Counties League First Division South; Venue: The Jack Carter Centre; Result: 2-0; Admission: £5; Programme: £1; Attendance: 73

Legacy has become a much over-used word in the world of sport but what has been achieved in this part of metropolitan Essex falls squarely into that category. It was in 1928 that founder, Jack Carter, leaving a Sunday morning religious service, noticed a group of youngsters aimlessly kicking a ball around. He thought that there must be something more structured for them to do and so set up a boy's club which met once a week at the Friends Meeting House in Ilford. Just two years later Jack's fledgling idea had blossomed into a sports and social club offering a programme of physical and spiritual activities for boys aged between 12 and 18. 1936 saw the adoption of the name Frenford (an amalgam of Friend and Ilford) and, with the club ever expanding, they moved to Cleveland School, Ilford in 1940 where they remained for the next 35 years.

It had always been Carter's ambition for the club to have its own facility and in 1975 his dream came true when they moved into a building on the High Road in Seven Kings. Sadly Carter, now the proud holder of a British Empire Medal, passed away in 1995 a few years before seeing the club relocate to the Pavilion in Barkingside. 2010 saw the final journey for Frenford as they moved once again, this time to the aptly named Jack Carter Centre back in Ilford. With over 2,000 young boys and girls now attending the club, the current facility is a hugely impressive one and contains a large sports hall, changing rooms, a cafe and an upstairs bar - the view from the balcony looks out across the various grass pitches and to the left the artificial surface of the first team. The ground consists of two prefabricated, identical red seated stands; one named in honour of Sir Jack Petchey, the other Eddie Fowles. These are positioned either side of the halfway line on the same side of the pitch as the dugouts. There is spectator access behind both goals but none to the far side of the ground.

On the pitch the club has also come a very long way; the men's senior team began play in 1942 later joining the Ilford and District Football League where they were champions in 1975/76 before moving to Division Two of the Essex Intermediate League in 1995. Promotion was achieved at the first time of asking and Frenford went on to finish runners-up on three occasions before finding themselves moved to the Premier Division in what had now become the renamed Essex Olympian League. A league championship was claimed in 2011/12, a title which they retained the following year along with a double of Senior and Senior Challenge Cups. More cup success followed before Frenford became members of the newly formed Southern section of the Eastern Counties First Division in 2018.

Halstead Town arrived as league leaders, but their advantage was a narrow one over Ipswich Wanderers and Buckhurst Hill who have respectively six and seven games in hand; Frenford were undefeated in their last seven outings and hadn't tasted defeat since late October. The visitors began the brighter with Jordan Blackwell's speedy wing play causing the hosts some anxious moments before another Jordan, this time blonde centre-forward, Palmer going close with a header. There had been signs of a Frenford revival as Taylor Tombides forced Jack Cherry in Town's goal to spoon away a cross shot. The opening goal arrived on 23 minutes when, following a free kick, Tombides found his way to the by-line before setting up Raheem Gray for a close-range finish at the back post. Frenford might have gone in at the break two up, but Sam Cross failed to find the net with an unmarked header.

On a soaking wet day, the rain which had abated during the first half returned in full force during the second with only the hardiest of supporters not seeking the shelter of the stands. If the weather was worsening, then so was Halstead's afternoon as just six minutes after the restart they conceded a second; there seemed to be no danger as Town took a throw in their own half but when Owen James won the ball, he made rapid progress down the right wing before floating in a centre which drifted over Cherry dropping into the far corner. Gray went close to adding a third, striking the post, as Frenford threatened to run riot. Halstead steadied the ship with Palmer having his appeals for a penalty correctly turned down, and Alfie Clear forcing Luis Silva into a smothering save. Special mention must go to home captain Lewis Bartrip who marshalled his back line superbly all afternoon, the only blot on an otherwise perfect display was a post-match altercation with a visiting fan. Having stood next to the man for the first half I do have some sympathy with Bartrip and perhaps it was a timely reminder that supporters cannot hand out abuse for 90 minutes without the player being entitled to have his say.....

The win lifts Frenford to within sight of a play-off place in what is shaping up to be a very competitive second half of the season. Jack Carter looking down on his club would be rightly proud of his legacy...

v2 contributed on 11/01/22

TT No.104: Brian Buck - Saturday 8th January 2022; Potton United v Cogenhoe United; uhlsport United Counties League Premier Division South; Result: 2-1; Attendance: 125.

Today was a day all groundhoppers dread. Heavy morning rain meant that unless you headed to 3G territory, you couldn't be certain if your intended (or even back up games) were on or off. Of course, I could have gone to a 3G (cage) match, just for the sake of ticking off a new ground, but as I grow older, unless they come with covered accommodation, these types of ground no longer really appeal to me, especially if I'm going to get soaked in the process.

So, I settled for my local club, Potton United who tweeted soon after 11am that their game was on. It made sense to come here, especially as I am a season ticket holder. These days it's still a fine rural ground, despite being enhanced not only by

the smells from the sewage farm on the far side of the pitch, but in a perverse way, some of the new housing development, which is gradually creeping up behind the main stand and that already in situ on the other side of the road behind the clubhouse.

As for the game, apart from one loose tackle, it was played out in a good spirit and was well handled by the ref who made sure it stayed that way. The match was just over a minute old when fears of an abandonment entered everyone's mind when we had a cloudburst. It soon stopped and much of the game was played out in rain free conditions. The first half belonged mainly to Potton, but Cogenhoe were exceptionally dangerous on the break and on 28 minutes, following one of them, they took the lead from a corner after the home keeper couldn't get to the ball because the six-yard box was crowded out with players from both sides. The ball was forced home from close range.

If the visitors were in control of their actions in the first half, they threw the game away after the break as it took Potton just 19 seconds to equalise. Potton had a long-range effort, but it took a wicked deflection off of the Cogenhoe scorer and wrong footed his keeper. With the visitors now creating less chances, Potton got what would be the winning goal from the spot on 71 minutes following an obvious trip. Three minutes later, in a comic incident, a Potton player got injured and someone shouted for the ball to be put out. The Potton player obliged but from at least 40 yards away he managed to kick the ball, so that it bounced off the injured player's head!

Overall, a decent win for the hosts, who whilst not exactly troubling the top teams in the league they are starting to pull in the fans and in my time of watching them play here (over 35 years now), I don't think that they have ever had so many crowds in excess of 100. Just imagine how many people would turn up if they were challenging for the title!

contributed on 10/01/22

TT No.103: Craig Dabbs - Saturday 8th January 2022; Frenford v Halstead Town; Eastern Counties League Division One South; Venue: The Drive; Result: 2-0; Admission: £5; Programme: 12pp, £1; Attendance: 73

Steady progress is being made here in this corner of North East London. Frenford FC as they are now known after dropping the Senior from their title, are developing steadily both on and off the pitch and are now sitting in a comfortable position in their respective step six league.

The Drive is the name of the Football Ground that sits within the grounds of the Frenford Clubs with the main building named after its founder Jack Carter.

Started in 1928, Jack Carter noticed some boys kicking a ball about and decided to teach them chess and draughts. From this humble start, a Sports & Social Club was in place just two years later for boys between the ages of 12-18. By 1941 the club was now also open to girls and it steadily grew and moved around the area until arriving at a new purpose-built centre off The Drive in Ilford in 2010. These day's it

caters for football, cricket, basketball, netball and table tennis, amongst other sports. In addition to that and evident when you walk in the centre, there is a foodbank for the local community, in full swing.

The Football section has been in operation since 1942 and they have progressed through local football, through the Essex Olympian League and into the Eastern Counties League for 2019.

Facilities at the Drive (at that time) weren't really suitable for the club's new level in the pyramid and so, whilst they played at Bowers & Pitsea FC, the current home got the makeover needed and a new 3G pitch was installed complete with two seated stands and a new pay hut and tea bar. There is still evidence of the old set up as some of the old post and rail still remains.

The new ground isn't an oil painting, but it is perfect for the clubs needs and, of course, the surface means it can get used throughout the day (every day if so wished) by Frenford Clubs and the local community.

The match saw high flying Halstead Town arrive who were now in second, following Ipswich Wanderers gaining a win on Friday evening, take on Frenford who sat in ninth. The early exchanges saw Frenford fare slightly better, but Halstead grew quickly into the game and the suggestion was they would kick on and probably win it. However, Frenford's first goal came against the run of play a little and this seemed to knock the stuffing out of the visitors. The weather deteriorated as the game wore on with Halstead doing much the same as the weather - it was a bad day at the office, but Frenford won't mind that a bit.

v2 contributed (via Brian Buck) on 09/01/22

TT No.102: Craig Dabbs - Monday 3rd January 2022; **Retford v Selby Town**; Northern Counties East League Division One; Venue: The Rail Ground; Result: 2-2; Admission: £5; Programme: 24pp, £1; Attendance: 227

The town of Retford in Nottinghamshire has two senior clubs these days. However, this hasn't always been the case with Retford United once the only senior club, having played in the Northern Premier League. Fortunes changed as they so often do in football and four things have happened that have changed the footballing landscape in the town. Retford FC came into being in 2015, set up for local players and playing out of United's Cannon Park. Retford FC moved into The Rail Ground in 2017, whilst Retford United were on a downward spiral that saw them relegated into step seven football a year later. The two clubs were now in separate grounds and on a more level playing field. The fourth, well United continue in the Central Midlands League, whilst Retford FC gained promotion to the NCEL in 2019 and are now the senior club in town.

The Rail Ground is simply named as such because it sits right alongside the East Coast mainline which is rather busy. Prior to Retford moving in, it was used by Retford Rail FC who competed at this level at one point, they dissolved in 1992. The ground was basic with few facilities and Retford deserve praise for building the ground up to its current level since moving in, in 2017.

Since the early days of railing the Rail and building changing rooms, the club have erected from scratch four separate stands one of which has since been taken down because it was unsafe (it will be re-built) laid hard standing, converted some shipping containers into a committee room and erected lights. Mercifully they haven't gone down the kit stand route.

The match saw two teams nicely placed in Division One, 7th v 5th looking of course to push on. They played out a tight contest that looked Retford's early on until Selby had other ideas. The game wore on and Retford started to stamp a little more authority on it, only for a wonderful low strike from the edge of the box that meant it finished in a fair 2-2 draw.

It will be interesting to see what else they do here. I can see straight away more seating is required; they have that already but just need to build something for it to go into, which I have no doubt they will, and it won't take long, I'm sure. As for the other Retford, Cannon Park's a decent venue and is deserving of higher-level football not that I'm knocking the excellent Central Midlands League. So I do hope that Retford United can get back and the town can have some derby day's which is what this festive season is all about.

contributed (via Brian Buck) on 09/01/22

TT No.101: Keith Aslan - Saturday 8th January 2022; MILTON KEYNES COLLEGE FOOTBALL ACADEMY v Rushden & Higham; SSML Gladwish Challenge Trophy round 2; Kick Off: 15.01; Result: 4-0; Admission: Free. Programme: £1; Attendance: 42 (26 home, 8 away & 8 neutral)

What could be worse than watching football in a 3g cage. Watching football outside it. But I'd had many reports of the situation here and was mentally psyched up to spend the afternoon peering at my footy through a chain link fence. There were too many plus points to this one not to give it a go. With trains being cancelled at the last moment these days, at least there are plenty of alternatives to Milton Keynes. The ground is about as close to the station as it's possible to get without playing on the platforms, so no bus action required. Relatively close to home it enabled me to enjoy a leisurely pre. match dins. at my favourite Euston trattoria. And I met up with some old workmates, although sixteen years since I retired, they all remember me. I don't know if that's a good thing or not. And the plastic meant the game was always going to be on in spite of large quantities of wet stuff falling from the sky. The clincher was the college were issuing their third ever programme.

M.K. Academy play on what was the old hockey stadium where M.K. Dons started life. For those who worry about such things, there is no overlap. The old pitch used to be where the large Aldi store is now behind the goal. Useful to get a bit of shopping, there aren't any Aldi's in Broadstairs, it's more of a Waitrose kind of town. Just three minutes' walk from the station, there is a welcoming clubhouse which was showing the lunchtime football. No food, but you don't need it with a vast array of gob filling emporiums just around the corner. If I had a pound for

every time I've been to Milton Keynes I'd have enough money to pay my electricity bill. The city comes in for a lot of unfair stick. Take time to have a little wander, it really is a great place.

I saw the Academy on their previous ground which was actually in the college. A fabulous set up and proper ground, unlike the current location. I am totally at a loss to understand this ground grading farce. Clubs are forced to erect large stands for crowds of a couple of dozen, but here in the South Midlands League spectators aren't even allowed in the ground. All very strange. The 42 supporters had their noses pressed up against a chain link fence which was a pity as the Academy produced a performance worthy of a clearer viewpoint. A big thankyou to God who stopped the rain for the duration of the match.

Milton Keynes were bigging up the opposition pre match. Higher division, won their last game 8-1, important match, etcetera. Rushden didn't live up to the billing, Milton Keynes totally dominated proceedings and were 3-0 at half time with the first coming direct from a corner. They played some really good stuff, especially considering they were all students, so had only just got out of bed. The one aspect where they were second best was in whingeing, apparently all of the goals should have been disallowed and Rushden gathered the lion's share of myriad bookings, most of which were for dissent.

The game was accompanied by 24 pages of glossy goodness, the last time I visited the club the programme was done by the students, and I suspect this one also. Today completed the Spartan League for me. With so many clubs no longer issuing, league completism is now a thing of the past, so yet another plus. Watching the match through a chain link fence is a price worth paying.

contributed on 09/01/22

TT No.100: Brian Buck - Wednesday 5th January 2022; London Lions v Enfield Borough; Cherry Red Records Combined Counties League Division 1; Result: 5-1; Attendance: 50.

This was my first visit here since 13 July 2013, when I saw a pre-season friendly on the adjacent 3G pitch between Potter Bar Town and Wingate & Finchley (result: 2-4; attendance: 30 approx). But my first ever visit here was on 11 April 1989 when the ground belonged to Laing Sports and that evening, they were beaten by ICL Letchworth in a Herts Senior County League Supplementary Cup Group A match, (result: 2-1; attendance: 20 approx).

Eventually it became known as the Maccabi London Sports Ground and eventually London Lions moved in. But previously they were known as MALEX and I saw them play at the Royal Masonic School at The Avenue, Bushey on 22 August 1995. Since my last visit the ground has been upgraded and tonight, I sat in their lovely 200-seater stand. The club continues to improve the complex and they have loads of other pitches, which they are still adding to, to cater for their many youth teams.

Tonight, they were in good form, and they took the lead on 3 minutes after the visiting keeper raced out of his area to take out an attacker. He could have been

sent off for this but was only shown a yellow card. But he was beaten by the resultant 25-yard direct free kick. They scored again on 15 minutes after the ref awarded the goal even though his assistant didn't notice that the ball had crossed the line. Four minutes later Borough pulled a goal back after the ball deflected into the path of the scorer. Then on 25 minutes Lions scored their third goal when the scorer was played in and slid the ball home just before the keeper clattered into him. The latter was lucky not to get a second yellow card for this and perhaps the fact that the goal was scored saved him from an early bath.

Up to this point Borough had been as lively as the Lions, but soon their 'playmaker' limped off the pitch after having been fouled sufficiently enough for his assailant to be yellow carded and they were never quite as effective for the remainder of the game. On 69 minutes, Lions made it 4-1 with a simple looking diving header at the far post and claimed their final goal four minutes later from about 15 yards out, to bring to a close a very enjoyable evening, even though it was freezing cold.

contributed on 07/01/22

TT No.99: Craig Dabbs - Saturday 1st January 2022; Tilbury v Aveley; Isthmian League North Division; Venue: Chadfields; Result: 1-1; Admission: £10; Programme: 40pp, £1; Admission: 402.

First of all, a Happy New Year to you all! Chadfields is on borrowed time. Permission for a new ground has been granted and it will be built behind the open terrace at the end opposite the clubhouse. The new ground looks smart, having seen the plans, and will certainly allow for progression for the Dockers.

Chadfields, prior to the Second World War was a Greyhound Stadium and Tilbury were playing at The Orient Field so named because it was owned by a director of Leyton Orient FC. The owners were keen for Tilbury FC to become a nursery club for Leyton Orient, however Tilbury (who were formed in 1889) were adamant that their independence was to be maintained and the decision was taken to reject the proposal, despite the fact that, this course of action would mean the loss of the right to play at the Orient Ground.

The club reacted quickly and moved onto Chadfields for the 1948/49 season, and it was in 1949 that Chadfields record attendance of 5,500 was set for an FA Cup tie against Gorleston.

That cup run, along with the sale of the goalkeeper to Southend United, enabled Tilbury to purchase the ground. Throughout the 50's and 60's development of the site continued with the current concrete main stand arriving in 1970, which in itself provides an excellent elevated view owing to the fact that the changing rooms and boardroom are housed underneath.

The latest change happened in 1995 when an additional seated stand appeared opposite, as a section of existing cover was removed to allow for this, with the two remaining areas of covered terracing still in situ and flanking the stand either side.

The rest of the ground is a mixture of open terracing of which there's quite a bit and flat hard standing which along with the large gap from the touchline to the post and rail, gives the clue that something else was staged here in the past and of course as previously mentioned that was for greyhound racing.

The match was a local derby with the visitors Aveley making the short journey over to Tilbury. The hosts are 14th and in need of points to keep away from the relegation zone, whilst Aveley are 3rd and are in the promotion hunt and early exchanges including Aveley's goal reflected the table. However as in many other local derbies form does go out of the window and Tilbury grew into the game and more than matched Aveley, eventually gaining the equaliser towards the end, a fair result in a scrappy but absorbing contest.

contributed (via Brian Buck) on 03/01/22

TT No.98: Craig Dabbs - Monday 27th December 2021; Horsham v Lewes; Isthmian League Premier Division; Venue: The Hop Oast Stadium; Result: 1-3; Admission: £11; Programme: 48pp, £2.50; Attendance: 1284.

Less than ten minutes after the final whistle had blown, I found myself parking up on the park and ride over the road from The Hop Oast Stadium. You can't park at the ground but it's only a short five-minute signposted walk away.

As I mentioned earlier, I last saw Horsham at their excellent former Queen Street home right next door to YMCA as part of a double that day.

The new ground is a little out of town, on the southern edge in an area called Hop Oast which, prior to the opening of the new ground, was best known as the location for Horsham tip!

The club had been homeless since moving out of Queen Street in 2008, with the Hornets sharing at Worthing, YMCA and Lancing during the eleven years this took to come to fruition.

The new set up is quite smart with cover on all four sides with the main stand and the one area of cover behind the far goal of the kit variety (coming from *Stadium Solutions* is, in my opinion, a far superior product to others that are on the market. The other two kit stands, that occupy either end of the side opposite, are both from *Arena*. The end where the clubhouse is has a small area of cover bolted onto its front and offers a good, raised area to take the game in.

Lewes provided the opposition today in another slightly less local derby. It was well attended and for much of the game the four-figure crowd was treated to an excellent contest where Horsham looked good value, but Lewes looked sharp up front. For all the world I felt Horsham would get an equaliser and the draw, perhaps even kick on and get a late, late winner, but it wasn't to be with the Rooks sealing a late one of their own killing off the match.

contributed (via Brian Buck) on 03/01/22

TT No.97: Craig Dabbs - Monday 27th December 2021; Broadbridge Heath v Horsham YMCA; Southern Combination Premier Division; Venue: High Wood Hill Sports Ground; Result: 1-0; Admission: £7; Programme: 32pp, £1; Attendance: 211

The alarm went off at 05:30 for a 07:00 start and quite honestly, I was giving some serious consideration to ditching this game owing to a poor weather forecast and just doing the second match of my planned double at Horsham which would be on, bar an absolute deluge of monumental proportions or more likely Covid.

I took the chance and rolled into the car park just before half nine, it was raining, and I was even less convinced at this point. The Bears former ground was in front of me and was looking rather sodden and although better than that their new ground, was still quite wet with small amounts of standing water in places. The referee and one of the assistants were out on the pitch with the ball and they were giving the pitch a right old going over before coming in and declaring that providing there wasn't any significant rain before the 11:00 kick-off, we would be good to go.

High Wood Hill Sports Ground isn't going to win any awards, it's functional with two kit stands, one seated over the far side from the clubhouse (which is excellent) and one to the right providing standing for around fifty. The pitch slopes gently from the clubhouse side downwards towards the stand and the whole facility has been home to the club since 2019.

The club in fact have never really moved far, from 1979 until 1987 they played on Wickhurst Lane which is now a Tesco and is the supermarket you drive through to get to the leisure centre where the Athletics Track is, and where you park for the new ground next door.

The match was a local derby against Horsham YMCA who were the first part of a double I did when Horsham were on their former Queen Street home some years ago.

Broadbridge Heath is a village that lies just to the west of Horsham and is separated by the A24 which is clearly visible from the ground. YMCA can be no more than say two miles away.

Broadbridge Heath were slightly the better side throughout which reflected in the league table; YMCA however were by no means a distant second best and had numerous chances in a contest that was played out in tricky conditions and looked like it was going to finish as a decent 0-0, but some late pressure from the Bears five minutes from time and virtually with the last kick of the game put paid to that, a little harsh on the visitors but that's how it goes sometimes isn't it?

contributed (via Brian Buck) on 03/01/21

TT No.96: Brian Buck - Saturday 1st January 2022; Hertford Town v Waltham Abbey; Pitching In Southern League Division 1 Central; Result: 2-1; Attendance: 325.

Today the game plan was to pick out a game, not too far away, yet somewhere where I don't get to that often. Also, if possible, it had to be done by public transport! So, I put all these details into the computer, and it came up with Hertford Town, which was good as it gave me a chance to look at their new 3G pitch. The other advantage of getting here by train was that we could have a look around the lovely town centre, and tick off a few pubs as well.

So, after alighting the train at Hertford North, at 12.40 pm, we did just that. We left enough time to get to the ground of course and it was great to see a stream of people making their way to the game, walking down West Street to the ground, along with us. I imagine this was how it was in the good old days. Once inside the ground I met up with my friend Norman, who I rarely see these days and as the game progressed, we mulled over old times, going back to the 1960's and he updated me with what is going on around the Cheshunt area, where he still lives, and I used to.

The new 3G pitch here has enhanced one of the most scenic looking grounds in Hertfordshire. You have to walk down a track which crosses the adjacent River Beane to get to the ground entrance and if you sit in the main stand, you see a towering hill rising above the ground. If you stand on the other side of the pitch, then the railway viaduct rises above you.

As for the game, it was keenly contested, but generally it was played in a good spirit. Hertford took the lead on 3 minutes when a spectacular 30 yards out effort seemed to catch the Abbey keeper off guard. Their second goal came on 24 minutes, this time from 25 yards out. Again, it seemed to take the keeper by surprise, but both goals were hit quickly and were well placed. The second goal came a tad against the run of play and after the break, Abbey played much better. Had Hertford got a third goal it would have been game over, but the next and last one went Abbey's way, and it was a carbon copy of Hertford's second goal, except that this time the hosts keeper didn't look surprised! Gradually play became even and by the end it was all about taking chances. Getting home was fun. We were lucky to catch a late running train, but only to find that our connecting train at Stevenage was cancelled. So, we got back at the original planned time. Overall, a good day out.

contributed on 03/01/22

TT No.95: Brian Buck - Wednesday 29th December 2021; Woodford Town v Redbridge; Essex Senior League Premier Division; Result: 0-0; Attendance: 328.

Tonight, I took advantage of an offered lift to visit the Ashton Stadium, Chigwell Road, Woodford Green. It's not far from Snakes Lane where the original Woodford Town played. It wasn't my first visit to this venue. This evening the game was played inside the eight-lane running track, but a few years ago I saw a pre-season friendly match on one of the outside pitches.

Tonight, the ground was much as was pre-conceived in my mind, but it was cleaner looking than I expected, and the floodlights were good. Also, the fact that the playing arena was some distance from where I was sitting, didn't overly concern

me ether. Other plusses were that the people around me were nice, and it was good to see a cosmopolitan crowd gathered together and all enjoying themselves. The downside was the presence of the noisy Woodford Town band, especially the big drum they had, but in the end, they proved useful, as they became more entertaining than the teams on the pitch. Furthermore, the din from the nearby M11 was a bit annoying, but that was on the far side of the pitch.

I suppose the other thing which grated with me slightly is that Woodford Town claim to be the original team reformed and therefore they have also acclaimed their history as their own. In truth they are Bush Hill Rangers renamed and Goffs Oak before that! But then again, to the Woodford Town people, it's Woodford Town and the club is and has been, part of their local identity, so good luck to them. My first visit to Snakes Lane was on 9 March 1978 versus Barking when they lost 4-1 in a Premier Midweek Floodlit League match and my last and eleventh visit came on 21 November 1985, against Billericay Town, who also won 4-1 in an East Anglian Cup Group 3 1st Round match (attendance: 120 approx).

Tonight, we had the unusual occurrence of the kick-off being delayed, even though the players were ready to start, purely because the ref didn't want to commence proceedings before the big hand on his watch reached the correct kick off time. Then when the game did start, it soon stopped again, as we had an injury in the first minute. The first half was uninspiring, and you soon guessed that this might well turn out to be a nil-nil draw. In this period Woodford started off better, but Redbridge finished the half in the ascendancy. But both sides lacked quality. The second half was marginally better. On 58 minutes Woodford hit the post with a lob and in the closing ten minutes Redbridge finally tried to prove that they were worthy of their second-place position in the league, by creating several scoring chances. If only they had played like this throughout the whole match. As we left at the end the teams had a couple of comings together, in the wrong way! Although the game wasn't good, the evening was ultimately more enjoyable than I expected.

contributed on 03/01/22

TT No.94: Brian Buck - Tuesday 28th December 2021; Letchworth Garden City Eagles v Langford; Spartan South Midlands League Division 1; Result: 2-4; Attendance: 117.

During this Christmas period it seemed that the humble Groundhopper was put through all sorts of purgatory when all they wanted to do was watch a football match. Games were getting called off because of the wet weather and COVID reasons and in some cases the local variant CBA! But this game at Pixmores was on, thanks largely to one the assistant referees who inspected the pitch at 9.30am and decided that it was playable. However, had it been inspected by the ref, who for some bizarre reason, came all the way from Kettering, then it might not have been, as he found a small patch of water somewhere on the pitch. But in the end, he bowed to his colleague's earlier decision, taking into account that both sides want to play. During the game itself it was difficult to see where this 'waterlogged' patch was and had I been a Groundhopper and found the game called off here on my arrival, then I would have been justifiably annoyed.

Thankfully common sense prevailed, but only just. In other news, I was told that a second stand is going to be erected next to the existing one early in the new year.

In the first half the goals flowed, and Langford got the first three of them by the 19th minute. For the first goal the scorer was played in and scored from just inside the area. The second was a snap placed shot from the edge of the area and the third was a long-range effort which deflected in off a defender. But two minutes later Eagles pulled a goal back, via a header from a cross from the right and then on the stroke of half time they reduced the arrears further from the spot following a foul. But for me the Eagles' player went down before the tackle arrived. The scorer took an amazingly long run up and some of us wondered if the ball would end up in the nearby Herts FA County Ground! It didn't, of course. The second half was still good, but quieter by comparison. As the heavy pitch began to take its toll on the players Eagles tried to find an equaliser, but it wouldn't come, especially after Langford scored their fourth goal on 65 minutes when the ball was curled over and beyond the keeper from the corner of the area.

contributed on 03/01/22

TT No.93: Brian Buck - Monday 27th December 2021; Ware v Hertford Town;
Pitching In Southern League Division 1 Central; Result: 1-1; Attendance:
547 (looked a lot more!).

With the rain arriving much earlier than I expected today, it was a tricky decision to decide where to go to avoid finding a game called off shortly before I arrived there and that was without even a thought about COVID problems. So, I took the decision to play the 3G card at Ware.

For about the first time ever here there was a queue to get into the ground, but as I arrived early, I was unaffected by this and furthermore I was able to sit somewhere near where I normally do when I come here. But soon after the game started, I was out of my seat and into the bar to ask the nice man to turn off the music which hadn't been turned off when the game commenced. He quickly obliged.

I can't remember ever seeing so many people in the ground as there were here today and this helped make a decent game look even better, as the players put in a keen performance. Both sides created scoring chances early on, but then they seemed to run out of ideas. However, Ware seemed to have a bit more possession. One strange thing which didn't happen was that as it got dark towards the end of the half, the lights weren't switched on. However, at the break they were and immediately a problem surfaced. A lot of the bulbs didn't illuminate. The patient ref seemed to be told that they would come on if he waited, but they didn't. Then they were switched off and back on fifteen minutes later. This made no difference either. But after deliberating for some time the ref decided to continue, partly to give the crowd some reward for turning up and their patience and possibly so I didn't have to record a nil-draw in my records had he abandoned the match.

So finally, we got underway again at around 4.30pm, about forty minutes after the first half had ended. This half was a bit feistier. Ware took the lead on 64 minutes

after a headed knock back was headed home from close range. But it was Hertford who were the better side in this period, and they deserved their equaliser on 81 minutes after the ball was followed up when a shot from a free kick was spilled by the keeper. There was just time for some handbags five minutes later, but there were no more goals to see.

contributed on 03/01/22

TT No.92: Jon T Green - Tuesday 28th December 2021; **KIRBY MUXLOE v. Hinckley AFC; United Counties League Division One; Venue: Ratby Lane; Result: 2-7; Admission: £6; Programme: Online for this game but the club have suggested that printed copies might be available for other matches; Attendance: 286.**

Like them or loathe them but on days like today a 3G/4G (or whatever number G we are now up to) pitch, is a total lifesaver. With the weather having been a touch on the moist (biblically wet is perhaps a more accurate description) side for the proceeding 48 hours a guaranteed fixture (Covid call offs notwithstanding) was just what the Christmas Doctor ordered and, with a very healthy crowd of nearly 300 gathered at this small Leicestershire village, clearly locals and hoppers were of the same opinion.

Founded in 1910, and following the end of World War Two, the club returned to the Leicester Mutual League before, a number of years later, joining the Leicester City League. During the early 1970's a new shared clubhouse facility had been built at Ratby Lane for use by both the football and cricket clubs. It was a move that served Kirby well as in 1982 they joined Division One of the Leicestershire Senior League. Floodlights were installed during the 1997/98 season as they finished runners-up to Oadby Town in the Premier Division. 2004 saw them finish in second place again before the title was finally won in 2008. The following season, as a part of the newly formed East Midlands Counties League, they became inaugural champions before immediately being promoted to the Midland Football Alliance. A lateral move to the United Counties League took place in 2016 and, save for one season in the Midland Football League, they have remained there to the present day. 2020 saw a major upgrade of the ground with eight modern floodlights being installed along with a state-of-the-art artificial pitch and new barriers and fencing.

On arrival the ground has that 3G "cage" feel to it, caused no doubt by the archetypal high dark green outer fences. First impressions can be misleading though as inside there is a blue seated covered stand with the letters KMFC picked out nicely in bright yellow. To its right is a further stand; painted in matching dark green it is a breezeblock construction containing a few rows of plastic bucket seats and wooden benches. There are two wide openings at the front with the option for a third. I am sure that readers will correct me if I am wrong, but I do not recall having seen anything like it anywhere else in the country. Aficionados of football architecture will enjoy its quirkiness even though, from a practical point of view, viewing is not easy due to the thickness of the supporting pillars.

The game kicked off at Noon amid the smell of freshly gifted aftershave and with fans still queuing at the turnstiles (now that's an all too rare sight at a non-league

game). Hinckley, top of the table, and boosted by a considerable traveling support were clearly in no mood to bring their hosts any festive cheer and quickly went on the offensive. Centre forward Ryan Harkin forced Alex Smith into a fine stop but the home 'keeper was powerless to keep out Lewis Rankin's curling shot after just eight minutes. Kirby were looking to utilise the wing play of Lucca Watson-Quilter at every opportunity but, with Hinckley's rapid passing game enabling them to dictate play, a second goal was always on the cards. Harkin, using his considerable strength, held off his man before slipping the ball inside to Isa Abraham whose rising shot found the roof of the net. The visitors were completely in charge and went close to extending their lead as Dan Hoskins' quickly taken free-kick, from near the halfway line, only just cleared the cross bar. A third goal duly arrived after 33 minutes as Rankin and Tom Weale combined before Jack Edwards completed the job. With the game seemingly over something strange happened: Kirby scored. Home captain Adam Parry had just served a 10-minute 'Sin-Bin' and was waved back on by referee Mr. Stevenson as the home side sprung a counter-attack; Parry re-joined play on the half-way and, after Matthew Hill had blocked the initial shot, was on hand to convert the rebound. Hinckley cried unfair but as the official rightly pointed out it was at his discretion as to when Parry was allowed back on stating that the ball did not have to go out of play. Clearly incensed, the visitors responded by adding a fourth, Harkin out-muscled Parry and drove home his shot via the foot of the far post. With added time being played Hinckley centre-half Ben Vallance brought down Jude Coates for a clear penalty; Watson-Quilter made no mistake from the spot to leave the half time score at 2-4.

The second period was never going to be as frenetic and when Josh Gunn was dismissed for a heavy challenge the game as a contest was over. On the hour mark Rankin scored the fifth and his second of the afternoon as he finished off a slick passing move. Five became sixth a few minutes later as substitute Charlie Evans had the easiest of tap-ins after Abraham's pace had ripped open Kirby's back line. Abraham continued to torture his full back and it was no surprise as he skipped through before nonchalantly rolling the ball beyond the stranded Smith. Much to their credit the home side didn't give up and Coates warmed the hands of Hill with a stinging drive shortly before the final whistle. In the end this was a comprehensive win for an accomplished Hinckley team who looked destined, at the very least, for the end of season play-offs.

contributed on 31/12/21

TT No.91: Keith Aslan - Tuesday 28th December 2021; **BOSTON UNITED v Brackley Town**; National League North; Kick Off: 15.01; Result: 1-3; Admission: £12 for the senile; Programme: £3 (superb); Attendance: 2138-official, including 46 away-official and 30 neutral-estimated.

It's that unsettling time of the calendar, not quite Christmas and not quite New Year, everything is in limbo with buses and trains doing their own thing and the days of the week merging into one another. Not so this Tuesday with an eagerly anticipated journey to Boston United's new ground. It did not disappoint.

There are apparently buses from the town centre to near the ground on a Saturday, not today though and your best bet is the football shuttle bus, a 6-minute walk from the station, and £1.50p each way. One of the more athletic hopping brethren walked it, journey time approximately 50 minutes. They've built a proper football ground here, although only three sided, two of them are terracing, with the main stand running the length of the near touchline. It goes without saying these days, the sightlines are perfect. You won't have seen floodlights like these before, quite stunning, and whoever designed them should be in line for a Turner Prize. If you buy your ticket from the nice young lady in the ticket office it's cash only, but you can pay on the turnstile, card only. Although an out-of-town ground it is surrounded by everything you need. A Costa Coffee, a Greggs and a Burger King. I frequented the latter two, chalking up a new Greggs tick. I don't tick off Burger King's, that would just be sad!

The programme is one of the best outside the football league with oodles of reading to keep me occupied on the journey home. Puts to shame the increasing number of clubs that can't be bothered to do one. Shane Byrne was the subject of the player profile. Favourite Meal: Nando's. Favourite chocolate: Boost. Favourite Fruit: Apple. I learnt so much.

I'm not a fan of the National League which is badly run in the extreme. They made a complete hash of dealing with Covid, and as was mentioned in the programme, Boston are forced to have Unibet adverts plastered around their ground as League sponsors even though the league won't let anyone connected with the club have anything to do with them. The centre piece of their draconian ground grading is that all stadiums must have four sides. When Oxford United came down into the league they weren't going to upset a team with gates of six thousand and although still on the books, the four-sided rule has never been heard of again. And let's not forget this is the League who thought Bishops Stortford was in the north of England.

Today's attendance was a record for the new stadium, Covid kept the crowds down when it opened. And you certainly can't accuse the Brackley contingent of being glory hunters. With the team at the top of the league, their supporters wouldn't even have filled a coach.

I've been lucky with some cracking games of late, and here was another one. It isn't difficult to see why Brackley are top of the table. 2-0 up at half time, they had the chance to put the game to bed with a second half penalty. They missed it and Boston went down the other end, got a penalty of their own and scored, setting the game up for a pulsating climax with Boston throwing everything at the opposition goal until the 92nd minute when Brackley broke away to score a third signalling a mass exodus from the ground. All good stuff.

A super day out with the trains all behaving themselves. And a little quirk, on Boston station there is a fully operational telephone box. I can't remember the last time I came across one of those.

contributed on 29/12/21

TT No.90: Brian Buck - Saturday 18th December 2021; Wimborne Town v Gosport Borough; Pitching In Southern League Premier South; Result: 2-1; Attendance: 380.

Today it was time to re-complete the Southern League. I saw Wimborne play at their old Cuthbury ground on Wednesday 8 November 1989, when they lost 1-0 to AFC Totton in a Medisport Wessex League match (attendance: 75 approx). By then I was coming to the end of my ‘mad’ years and on the previous night I was on the Wirral to visit Vauxhall GM (Vauxhall Motors these days) getting home in the early hours of the following morning.

Today I was fortunate enough to be offered a lift to the hosts New Cuthbury ground, which is about a mile or so to the east of Wimborne Minster town centre. We arrived early enough to have a quick slurp in my driver’s chosen pub, and this was the first time I have ever had a pint of rhubarb cider, which had a wonderful moreish taste. We then had a look around the lovely town centre, but not the Minster itself, which was closed today. We then returned to the ground, where we opted to park in a nearby side street to avoid paying to park in the club’s car park.

The ground is tacked on to the back of a new housing estate, which blended in with the older houses and football ground better than some of my other recent new ground visits. While we waited for the match to start, we holed out in the club’s spacious clubhouse and as the non-driver today, I took the opportunity to have another pint. Then it was time for the game. The Southern League has two top divisions, namely the Central and South divisions. The likes of Hitchin Town play in the Central Division and Wimborne play in the South Division, where they are currently bottom of the league. At the start of the game, it was still sunny, but this had disappeared well before half time. As it grew darker the lights became more effective, but in my opinion, there weren’t enough of them to equally illuminate the pitch, which I found rather strange for a new ground.

As for the game, Gosport, in the play-off positions, were fancied to win this match with something to spare and initially although they looked to be the better side, they didn’t force home their advantage. Wimborne weren’t brilliant, but they stuck to their task and on 27 minutes they took the lead after a defender slipped (fouled according to the Gosport bench) and the ball was slipped to the scorer who finished off from close range. Immediately Wimborne displayed a more confident approach to their game and on 52 minutes they were rewarded again. Moments earlier someone from the Gosport bench was booked and then Wimborne scored a goal, similar in nature to their first goal. But before play restarted a Gosport player was sent off, obviously for severe verbals! Could Wimborne hang on though? On 79 minutes Gosport pulled a goal back by finishing off a deep free kick at the far post, but they couldn’t fashion an equaliser and soon the final whistle went, with the announcer telling everyone that this was Wimborne’s first home league

win of the season. Great stuff to watch and hopefully the hosts' lot will now improve.

contributed on 23/12/21

TT No.89: Steve Hardy - Saturday 18th December 2021; AFC Royal Holloway v Hersham; Surrey Premier County League - Premier Division; Result: 3-2; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance 8 H/C

After plans A and B (CB Hounslow & Singh Sabha Slough) both disappeared, it was a frantic trawl through the local fixtures for a game. Eventually, I decided on Royal Holloway as it was the nearest ground, I needed at 6 miles away from where I was staying.

The Surrey Premier County League was known as the Surrey Elite Intermediate League until this season and promotes into the CoCo League. It has been a long time since I saw a game in the old Surrey League, so I had no idea what to expect. Luckily this game between two lower league clubs was very entertaining indeed.

The Royal Holloway University of London Sports ground is just outside Egham. As you would expect from a University set up, the facilities are first-class. A couple of roped off grass footie pitches, a cricket square, a rugby pitch, a 3G hockey pitch in a cage, plus a plethora of small 5-a-side 3G footie pitches in cages. Not sure if AFC Royal Holloway are a student team, or an outside club who have changed their name to reflect where they play.

Hersham started off in a rush and won a penalty on 10 minutes which was brilliantly saved. After that the harrying style of Holloway forced them into plenty of mistakes and Holloway took full advantage to take the lead themselves on 25 mins, followed by a penalty of their own on 42 mins and a 3rd a minute later.

3-0 at the break, but full credit to Hersham who made a game of it by scoring just after half time. A second followed just after the hour mark and it was game on. It wasn't to be though, and that penalty miss proved crucial.

So once again an excellent afternoon out in Surrey, with very little work for Sarah Satnav, who, nevertheless made hard work of completing a mere 12-mile journey.

contributed on 21/12/21

TT No.88: Keith Aslan - Saturday 18th December 2021; LARKFIELD & NEW HYTHE v Rochester United; Southern Counties East Division 1; Kick Off: 15.00 on the dot; Result: 2-2; Admission: £3 for old people; Programme: £2; Attendance: 109 - official (presumably somebody was in the toilet when I did my headcount as I only made it 108 - 93 home, 14 away & 1 neutral).

I was keeping a visit to the Taray Group Community Stadium up my sleeve for when my motivation is in neutral and a Saturday afternoon without having to leave Kent is called for. Life rarely works out as planned and today's outing to Larkfield was as stressful as it gets, with a 420-mile round trip required to tick off a ground 60 miles up the line from my country dacha. How so, I hear you ask. Well, I'll tell you.

SJR Worksop v AFC Bentley - I checked with the home side on Friday night, a fellow hopper also checked with the Bentley secretary, all good to go with Mr. Bentley saying he would inform my colleague if there was any change. He didn't, not that it would have made any difference given the time the game was postponed. While we were waiting for a connection at Retford, Worksop put on their twitter 'game off' due to Covid at the away side. I get it that a lot of teams don't want to play on the Saturday before Christmas, but Covid gives them a free pass to call games off, no questions asked. Why wait until 3 hours before kick-off? Bentley always knew they weren't going to turn up; they could have cancelled the game the night before at the very latest. The Bentley secretary offered my companion a free pin badge by way of compensation but having spent £44 on train fares that would make it the most expensive badge in history. The kind offer was declined. Come on Bentley, have some consideration for others and give everyone a bit of notice when your players want to spend Saturday afternoon down the pub. An emergency trawl through '*Traveller*' didn't produce any results, so two hacked off hoppers got the next train back to London.

Thanks to some good connections, I had time to get to Larkfield, and with no train timetables or maps to guide me I arrived at the ground at quarter to three fretting over a programme sell out. There wasn't. It's about an eighteen-minute straightforward walk from New Hythe station which is on the Strood to Paddock Wood branch line that was surprisingly well patronised. Clearly much has been done here to comply with ground grading regulations for the South East Counties League. Fencing, barriers, paved walkway, floodlights, and two Atcost stands appearing in the last couple of years. It all looks rather good. The clubhouse has also been refurbished although I'm not so sure about the big screen showing a Christmas film on a channel called 'Trace Xmas'. Normally you would expect a groundswell of opinion to change to the football half times, but nobody bothered today as there wasn't any. I can recommend the Burger Van situated next to the entrance, tasty food and big portions. This club has come a long way in a short time, and I wish them every success for the future.

I've been lucky with some good games lately and here was another one in which neither team deserved to lose. A bit of controversy surrounding Larkfield's second with the keeper prostrate on the edge of his area at the time of the goal. Much protesting from the away side of course, but in my learned opinion, the ref. got it right. The poor old Rochester goalie took a bit of a hammering and was laid out again a few minutes later, this time as a result of a foul for which the perpetrator was rightly red carded. The two Rochester goals were scored by the exotically named Rex Ejimonyoabala. Try saying that on the way back from a Downing Street Christmas party. The Larkfield physio, Donna Powell, added much to the proceedings. A word of advice to the referee, if you've got ambitions of officiating in the Isthmian League, you'll have to do something about your timekeeping.

Train watch: Happiness and joy at Broadstairs station as, for a Christmas treat, *South East Trains* actually ran some trains in the south east. Excited children lined the platform, not knowing when they'd get another chance to see such scenes. Certainly not the following day, back to rail replacement buses on Sunday.

As this will be the last of my fabulous reports before the festive season (or probably even longer!), I'd like to take the opportunity to wish my many fans a Happy Christmas with peace and goodwill to all men except politicians and AFC Bentley. And in these uncertain times always be positive, unless you're waiting for the result of a lateral flow test.

contributed on 19/12/21

TT No.87: Brian Buck - Saturday 11th December 2021; Southam United v Kenilworth Sporting; Coventry Charity Cup Quarter Final; Result: 2-4; Attendance: 75 approx.

I struck lucky here, as after a dry start the weather closed in and we had a wet afternoon. Southam is quite easy to get to and is about ten miles west of Daventry, which itself is not that far from Northampton. These days they no longer play at Banbury Road, where in 1991 and 1994, I saw them win 2-1 on each occasion, firstly against Wythall (att- 40 approx.) and secondly against Kings Norton Ex-Servicemen (att- 70 approx.), both in Midland Combination Division 1 games.

They now play at the Bobby Hancocks Park which I gained entrance to by turning into Kingfisher Drive, off the Banbury Road, just north of where the remains of the old ground still exist. Once you drive through a new, slightly cramped, housing estate you see the new ground ahead of you and park in the more than ample car park. The visitor's coach was already there when I arrived, and it was parked behind the goal and thankfully not in front of it! Bearing in mind the two grounds are only about 13 miles driving distance apart, one wondered why they needed a coach at all. But I suppose if they are fortunate enough to have a Premier League standard coach with their team's name painted on the side of it then they might as well use it!

Being a new ground, Southam's new ground has been built to Step 4 level, although they currently play in the Oxfordshire Senior League at Step 7 level. The clubhouse was open today but no other facilities, apart from the toilets, were in use. They do have spectator viewing from the balcony though and in the first half I sat on one of the 32 padded seats. This elevated position gave me a panoramic view of the countryside and also the preparation work for some new houses, soon to be built on the south side of the ground. I only spent the first half sitting here, because despite there being two separate standing viewing areas on the balcony, some selfish b*****s still managed to partially block my view of proceedings. So, in the second half I joined fellow Groundhoppers Paul Cowburn of the North West Counties League and John (Lollipop Man) Holland from Bolton, who send their best wishes to all who know them. They were sitting in the stand on the opposite side of the pitch.

Despite this being a 2.15pm kick off, the lights were switched on from the start as the weather turned to make it a wet afternoon. In the first half, although exchanges were roughly even, I always felt that Sporting, from Midland League Division 2, had a bit more about them and it was they who took the lead on 18 minutes when a cross was diverted home from close range. But on the stroke of half time Southam levelled matters scoring from about 35 yards out, when the keeper was spotted to be off his line. Then on 54 minutes Southam took the lead when the keeper could only parry a very hard shot and while he was still on the ground it spun over the line behind him. But six minutes later Sporting were level when the ball was followed up after the keeper spilled the ball. As the game now became occasionally feisty, extra time seemed possible, but on 87 minutes a Sporting shot squirmed through the keeper's hands to give them the lead and two minutes later a well-placed header saw them score again to send them through to the next round.

contributed on 17/12/21

TT No.86: Jon T Green - Tuesday 14th December 2021; HARTLEY WINTNEY v. Metropolitan Police; Southern League Premier Division South; Venue: The Memorial Ground; Result: 1-0; Admission: £10; Programme: £2; Attendance: 203.

Sounding a little like the name of the eccentric Colonel in an Agatha Christie thriller, Hartley Wintney, with a population of barely 5,000, must be one of the smallest settlements to support a team at Step Three level. With its large church overlooking a wooded common the roar of traffic along the nearby M3 seems a world away here. As well as the football, the village boasts a cricket club who were founder members of the Hampshire League in 1973 and reputedly play at one of the most beautifully situated venues in the country so it seems like a return visit is already on the cards...

The football club (nicknamed "The Row" after a former hamlet called Hartley Row) were formed in 1897 and joined the Basingstoke League. Home during those formative years was at Causeway Farm (adjacent to the modern-day cricket club) before, in 1953, they moved to their current headquarters at The Memorial Ground. It was also during the 50's that the club colours were changed from their original strip of blue quarters to orange. Having transferred to the Aldershot Senior League the 1970's, saw them win three successive league titles. They moved on again, this time to the Combined Counties League in 1978, where they continued to accumulate silverware with victory in the 1980/81 Aldershot Senior Cup before claiming the league championship the following season. 2015/16 saw Row reach the FA Vase 5th Round for the first time only to be beaten by Hereford in front of a sell-out crowd of 1,300. The Premier Division title was also won in the same year, but the club were denied promotion due to ground grading requirements. With the upgrade works completed, Hartley retained their title and joined the Southern League South East division. Promotion to the Premier was achieved in 2017/18 with 700 fans watching a 1-0 play-off victory over Cambridge City. The current season hasn't proved to be an easy one and without a league win since October, Row find themselves in the relegation zone seven points adrift of safety. By contrast, Met Police arrive in second place, albeit a 2-2 draw at the

weekend against bottom side Wimbourne Town has seen them lose ground on leaders Farnborough Town.

Situated on the outskirts of the village next to a junior school, The Memorial Ground is a relatively modest venue for a club at this level; not that this is to decry the ground in any way because it is more than sufficient for a team who don't often attract gates in excess of 250. The clubhouse is warm, welcoming and spotlessly clean; there is a covered standing area behind one goal and two seated stands along the far touchline. Outside seating on a grassed area in front of the clubhouse would be an ideal place to watch an early season game but on a December night (albeit an unseasonably mild one) the back row of the stand seems a good place to be. It's hard to believe that a week ago parts of the pitch were underwater, but the groundsman tells me that having spent £10,000 on new drainage it recovers quickly and this is certainly true as the two teams walk out onto a fine playing surface. Row are out of the blocks the quickest, and with just seven minutes on the watch, they take the lead. Police are looking ill at ease and when a cross is sent in from the left home captain Sam Argent goes down under a challenge; Jordan Edwards makes no mistake from the spot firing hard and high into the roof of the net. Liam Beach, in goal for Met, keeps up a constant commentary on the game, his deep gravelly voice enlightening teammates, opponents and officials alike as to his view of proceedings. Beach certainly would have had an opinion just after the half hour mark; Row's defence misjudged a high ball but Ollie Knight, running free on goal, failed to hit the target. Met were struggling to get a foothold in the game and their frustration was summed up by captain Jack Mazzone whose constant back chat finally exhausted the patience of referee Mr. Metcalfe. The officials were collectively having a good evening and in particular, Mr. Le Houezec, who ran the line with absolute authority, quickly explaining each and every decision.

The second half began with the visitors looking more-lively, but once again they failed to capitalise on a clear-cut chance; Mazzone played in Liam Ferdinand but his co-striker couldn't find the net as his stinging shot was well blocked by 'keeper Luke Williams on the edge of the box. The only real moment of controversy arrived after an hour when Row full back Ryan Case miscued his clearance and Williams picked up the loose ball. Williams had clearly called to the referee for instructions, so the subsequent free kick caused some consternation amongst the home ranks - luckily for all concerned it came to nothing. With just a few minutes remaining there was no arguing when Sam de St Croix was felled in the area. Mazzone stepped up but Williams flinging himself low to his left pulled off a great save. The miss signalled the end of Met's hopes as Row played out the remaining time in relative comfort to earn a much needed three points. Special mention must be made to Hartley's wide man Kingsley Eshun who put on an imperious performance; his touch, distribution and attitude was first class. One touchline manoeuvre saw him feint to release the ball one way before flicking it another and sprinting past his startled marker; it was a moment of real class and Eshun richly deserved his round of applause as he came off.

Hartley Wintney might not be the biggest or the most storied of Southern League clubs, but they are incredibly hospitable, produce an excellent printed programme

and even issue a paper match ticket - more than enough good reasons to plan a visit here.

contributed on 16/12/21

TT No.85: Jon T Green - Saturday 4th December 2021; OUNDE TOWN v. Holbeach United Reserves; Peterborough and District Football League Premier Division; Venue: Station Road; Result: 3-0; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 14 h/c.

Oundle, on the eastern fringe of Northamptonshire, is one of those towns that I have driven past on more occasions than I care to remember, but until now have never visited. The spire of St.Peter's Church (at over 200 feet the highest in the county) dominates the view above the trees which dip their roots into the waters of the River Nene making it look a quintessentially well-heeled English-shire community. For those who like their beer served with a slice of history The Talbot Hotel is the place to go; the original timbered inn was rebuilt in the early 1600's with stone from nearby Fotheringhay Castle where Mary Queen of Scots was executed in 1587. It is said that the hotel contains the oak staircase which Mary walked down on her final fateful day and that her ghost still haunts the pub. You'll be pleased to know that save for the rustling of a packet of pork scratchings there seemed to be no unusual paranormal activity during my lunchtime visit.

If not quite as old as The Talbot, the football club have been around for a far while as well; listed in the Oundle Almanac Companion (a sort of forerunner to Yellow Pages - remember those?), it mentions the existence of a football club in its 1883 edition. The team began life at Benefield Road and remained there until the mid-1950's when they moved to their current ground in Station Road. It was during this time that Oundle won their first silverware becoming Peterborough and District Football League (PDFL) Division Three (Southern Sections) champions. Although victories in the Peterborough FA Junior Cup (1974/75) and the Northamptonshire FA Area Cup (1991/92) followed, it wasn't until 1997/98 did the team claim their one and only PDFL Premier Division title. As you would expect at this level the ground is pretty basic but with a white rail surrounding half of the pitch and an attractive black and white painted clubhouse at the top end it feels more enclosed than perhaps it actually is.

The current season sees Town sitting mid-table after a run of seven games without defeat has been rudely brought to an end with successive losses against two sides in the top four. Today they face another team in that bracket as Holbeach United Reserves arrive fresh from a 6-2 away win last weekend.

The home team play the first half up the slight slope and although the wind is gusting into their faces the low sun is causing as many problems for their defenders as the Holbeach strikers do. Six majestic red kites circle in pairs overhead and in the first ten minutes they see the visitors block a close-range header before their keeper makes a great save as Town spring the offside trap. A rumour circulates that four of Oundle's regular first teamers have gone to the City Ground to watch Peterborough play Forest but if this is true then their replacements are looking more than capable as a spectacular 20-yard volley goes narrowly wide on the half

hour mark. The pitch is separated from the adjacent supermarket by a tall metal fence which unfortunately is not quite tall enough to prevent a number of balls ending up in the car park. Luckily, a friendly security guard is on hand to throw them back. He seems to be enjoying his time in the fresh air and, in fairness, it's probably a lot more entertaining than chasing pre-Christmas shoplifters up and down the freezer aisle!!! Oundle are also enjoying their afternoon and take the lead on 39 minutes as Archie Pyne drills home a right foot drive. Pyne is a combative forward and has been giving both Holbeach and referee Mr. Gregory plenty to think about during the first half.

The visitors begin the second period more positively and Oundle have to scramble away a driven cross, but Town are looking the more likely to score. They do exactly that with twenty minutes to go as left back Harry McLoughlin drifts inside and finds the bottom corner. Diminutive midfielder-cum-striker Cardin Pierre-Liverpool then adds a third; he finds acres of space in the final third and is able to pick his spot with a crisp low drive. With the sun now rapidly sinking, play finishes in semi-darkness, muddied players head towards the sanctuary of the changing rooms and maybe a swift half in that oh-so-warm clubhouse...

contributed on 15/12/21

TT No.84: Gary Spooner - Saturday 11th December 2021; Barton Town v North Shields; FA Vase Round 3; Kick-Off: 3pm; Result: 2-3; Admission: £6 (or £10 for *The Perfect 10* including programme, and £6 food vouchers); Programme: £2; Attendance: 520 (club record).

A fantastic day out to your home patch on Saturday. Pre-match we went to the Water's Edge. Stunning views of the bridge and a leisurely stroll along the banks of the Humber. Plenty of birds too including curlews spotted.

It was then onto the Easy Buy Stadium and the nice new driveway and car park next to the railway line. Admission was £6, but I chose the '*Perfect Ten*': £10 for admission, programme and £6 worth of food and drink vouchers which turned into two teas, pie and chips and a Mars bar. What a bargain!!! Badges were also available.

A sizeable contingent of North Shields fans was present complete with lots of flags and the atmosphere was buzzing even before kick-off. The ground is excellent with home and away covered standing areas behind the far goal and a large, seated stand along one side.

The game promised to be a cracker and did not disappoint. Fiercely competitive all afternoon with plenty of twists and turns. Shields took the lead after 29 mins only for Barton to hit back 5 minutes later, to leave it one each at half time. The second half saw some good chances for Shields and some great saves from the Barton keeper before Shields regained the lead after 63 minutes straight from a corner. It was now Barton's turn to fight back, and on 73 minutes they were awarded a penalty. Surely a deserved equaliser but no - a great save from the Shields keeper! Then on 77 minutes Shields were awarded a penalty. Surely this

would seal victory but no - another great save from the Barton keeper. Chances came and went, and the minutes ticked away. It was tense. Then on 90 minutes a cross was put over and a cracking header levelled the scores. Home fans going barmy. Away fans stunned. Surely now a penalty shoot-out which given the saves earlier could have lasted a long time! But the drama was not over. In the 94th minute Shields scored the winner. Ecstasy for the away fans, heartbreak for Barton. Seconds later the whistle blew to end a pulsating cup tie watched by a ground record crowd of 520. The magic of the Vase was alive and well in Barton on Saturday!!!!

Footnote: The welcome at Barton was brilliant and the friendliness of all was excellent. Throughout the game both sets of fans drank copious amounts of beer but were mixing together well with no animosity. Excellent atmosphere. Sad to hear then that there were incidents at the end of the game with punches thrown and the North Shields bus window smashed. Mandy and I saw none of this as we had already left by then. Sounds like a few idiots who'd had a few too many and almost certainly wouldn't happen at a "normal" game. Doesn't alter the fact that we had a superb day at a superb club.

contributed on 13/12/21

TT No.83: Keith Aslan - Saturday 11th December 2021; **FISHBOURNE v East Dean; Malcolm Simmonds Cup**; Kick Off: 13.33; Result: 6-4; Admission: Free; Programme: £1; Attendance: 33 (25 home, 2 away & 6 neutral).

Let's start with a thank you to South East Trains. Normally the day begins with a Rail Replacement Bus to Ramsgate, much excitement as today's bus ride was extended along the picturesque A253 to Minster. They might as well just shut the line down through Broadstairs and build houses on the track if they aren't going to run trains on it. Rant over, no more about the appalling railway system we are left with since privatization.

Fishbourne is one stop from Chichester with the ground a six-minute stroll from the station but beware of getting stuck on the wrong side of the level crossing. With the remains of a Roman Villa and a museum, Fishbourne is the ideal place for the historically curious to explore, and I fully intended to top up my knowledge on 'what the Romans did for us?'. However, on arriving at the ground, I settled down in the clubhouse, meals available, and decided drinking Fosters until kick off was a preferable option to antiquarian exploration. Incidentally, a bit of trivia for you. Nobody knows what the Romans called their roads. All the names they are now known by were given to them centuries after the Romans had left.

Besides the welcoming clubhouse, programmes available on the bar, there is just the usual rope round the pitch. Importantly for old people like me, are the wooden benches and tables on the patio offering a perfect pitch side view of proceedings without the additional exertion of having to stand up. There was an overhang that might keep you dry in the wet if the wind was in the right direction. This afternoon it didn't need to be put to the test.

Today's match should have been played last week but was postponed because the Fishbourne goalie got married. It must have been a pretty truncated honeymoon as Warren Boyt was back between the sticks today. If I was the new Mrs. Boyt I might wonder if I'd made the right decision! What a match this was, total domination by the home side but East Dean kept on breaking away and scoring, with at one stage in the second half the dreaded extra time looking to be on the cards. Only East Dean's keeper being on the top of his game, and some pretty rubbishy finishing by the home side kept the match in the balance, and congratulations to both sides for producing 93 minutes of top-class entertainment in one of the best games I've seen this season.

Just when I thought I'd heard every name for a guard (except guard), Southern Trains have come up with a new one and on the journey down to Chichester I was greeted by an 'On Board Supervisor'. Why bother running trains in Kent at weekends when it's much easier thinking up new names for the train staff?

contributed on 12/12/21

TT No.82: Brian Buck - Saturday 4th December 2021; Woodside Adult v Revivalists; Bedfordshire County League Watson Shield Group C; Venue: played at Astral Park Sports & Community Centre, Johnson Drive, Leighton Buzzard; Result: 5-0; Attendance: 8.

Time to recomplete the Beds County League! I travelled to the game with the Chairman of the league, Peter Francis. The ground can be found just off the A505, on the south side of Leighton Buzzard in a relatively new housing estate. As you approach Astral Park, the housing becomes denser towards the end. Without anywhere specific to park, there are cars everywhere and when one comes the other way you need to go onto the pavement to get past them. This makes getting to St Neots Town ground more like driving through a village in comparison!

But once we got to the ground, we faced a problem. There were loads of pitches, all marked out, but no teams to be seen. Peter rang the home secretary to find out what was going on. But as he was a player, he was probably warming up, if they do at this level! Then, just as we were about to leave to go to another game we saw a bloke, holding a football, returning to his car with his son, and after making enquiries we were told that there were some more pitches in the direction he pointed to. So, we then went on what seemed more like a nature ramble and then found these pitches, and more importantly the teams, almost ready to start. These were high up on a raised, exposed level and only later did we find that they backed onto the pitches we first saw on our arrival.

The game was a decent one, considering that both sides play in the bottom division of the league. The ref wasn't given any hassle during the game and later it transpired that both sides gave him top marks. Revivalists are a very squeaky-clean side and in their first season in the league they didn't pick up any yellow cards, despite not winning any of their matches. The Watson Shield is normally a knockout competition, but to give the clubs more games, it is being played on a group basis this season.

The hosts turned out to be a decent side and took the lead on 21 minutes when Gunn shot home from a narrow angle after a blocked shot came to him. The lead was doubled four minutes later following another narrow-angled shot and by half time it was 3-0 after the scorer was left free inside the area. Despite the apparent one-sided look to the game, possession was much more even throughout, but on 71 minutes Revivalists succumbed again when the ball was scrambled home from a corner. Then on 79 minutes the final goal arrived, hit home from the edge of the area to complete the scorers hattrick. Then four minutes later a Revivalists player sustained what seemed to be a serious injury, with no malice causing it. He lay motionless on the pitch for some time, before telling people he couldn't breathe. But being a Revivalist, with help he was eventually able to get up, before slowly walking off the pitch and was clapped off by some Woodside players. The game soon reached its conclusion and would have been completed with the sun still out had a late arriving cloud not got in the way. By now it had turned cold, and we made our way back to the car via a shortcut in the hedge between the two sets of pitches I had found earlier while I was 'watering the horses'!

contributed on 07/12/21

TT No.81: Craig Dabbs - Saturday 4th December 2021; **Enfield Town v Folkestone Invicta**; Isthmian League Premier Division; Venue: Queen Elizabeth II Stadium Result: 2-3; Admission: £11; Programme: 36pp, £2.50; Attendance: 501.

This was my second visit here and was a tidy up job having previously visited three years ago for a CONIFA World Cup match between Northern Cyprus and Tibet.

A few weeks ago, I wrote about Leicester Road and Hinckley AFC and how through a dispute between the two parties you have two clubs that would be better together for the overall good of football in the town. This situation isn't unique. Sadly, you can see it elsewhere with, of course, various different twists on a general theme of division, rather than pulling together as one. Enfield is another case.

Let's start with Enfield FC founded in 1893 and one of the most famous non-league names in this country and a well decorated one at that. The wheels started to come off the wagon in 1999 when the club sold its Southbury Road home. On the back of this, the supporters set up a trust with the aim to take over the running of the club. However, the then Chairman had different ideas and took the money from the sale of the ground, failed to identify a new site and actually owed Enfield FC money. Needless to say, it wasn't a happy ending and with debts owed to the Inland Revenue the club was liquidated.

They quickly reformed as Enfield 1893. However, at this point the new Enfield Town club set up in 2001 by the supporters did make an approach for a merger but this was turned down and what you have now is the "original" club playing in Hertfordshire at Bishop's Stortford in step five and the supporters club thriving at step three with goods crowds in a ground not far from the original home. It's a real shame that the two clubs won't merge and all I can say on this matter is I sincerely hope that further down the line Enfield FC do approach Town seeking that merger

because it will be beneficial for them to do so. Let's make it clear Town do not need them at all, but it would very much be a tidying up exercise so to speak.

Enfield Town then started out in the Essex Senior League moving on up into the Southern League in 2005 and then the following year they moved over to the Isthmian League where they find themselves today. Its two levels up from their starting point and doing well as a club both on and off the field. They started out playing at the old Brimsdown Rovers FC ground and set about working with the council to relocate to the QEII Stadium on Donkey Lane close to the club's former home. The stadium would need restoration work and upgrading. In 2011 the club opened the refurbished stadium with a match against a Tottenham Hotspur XI.

The QEII was originally opened in 1953 after a delay due to the war and was designed as a centrepiece for a larger overall sports area hence the large playing areas found outside that cater for a number of other sports. Its sole purpose was Athletics and the likes of Sebastian Coe, Daley Thompson and Linford Christie used it as a training venue. It features a wonderful building in the Art Deco style that incorporates a seated stand offering an elevated view and a bar area/function room alongside with a balcony to watch the game from. This structure is now grade 2 listed giving it a degree of protection which it very much deserves. The rest of the stadium has been redeveloped, like I said to make it more football friendly. The track was reduced from eight to six lanes and the stands were placed on the inside of the track at either end with a post and rail complete with gates that can be repositioned to allow for Athletics. This brings the action much closer for the supporters unlike many similar tracks where you are a long distance from the pitch. Over the far side is a third kit stand; this one is seated in order to meet grading requirements is in place.

Back over on the main stand side of the stadium are two open raised terraces which have been placed in front of the stand. I have to say that unless you are elevated here up in that stand, the sight lines are poor with the lights and dugouts in the way. Having said that it's a very small issue/trade off as the club has a ground it can call home. I still say to the board of Enfield FC, what were you thinking?

The match itself pitted Town in second against Invicta in sixth and just outside the play offs. On paper it offered much, and it didn't disappoint being close throughout. Enfield looked marginally better and at times it was desperate stuff as Folkestone really had to work hard to hang on to the lead they had built up. In the last twenty minutes or so Town really ratcheted up the pressure and for the few travelling fans it was very much squeaky-bum time as the visitors somehow held on to take the points back to Kent.

contributed (via Brian Buck) on 05/12/21

TT No.80: Keith Aslan - Saturday 4th December 2021; NOTTINGHAM v Holbrook St. Michaels; Central Midlands South Division; Kick Off: 14.07; Result: 0-7; Admission & Programme: Free; Attendance: A paltry eight (4 home, 0 away & 4 neutral).

This season I've spent far more time in Nottingham than is good for me. Not my intended destination today but the fates conspired to send me on another mission to the Lace City, this time to complete all the top divisions of the Central Midlands League. The club play at Melbourne Park, three miles to the north of the station. Plenty of buses to the ground, but with Broadmarsh Bus Station currently shut, finding the right bus stop in the city centre provided stimulating exercise, both mental and physical.

There are a number of pitches here, two railed off with dugouts, and a corrugated metal barrier surrounding the main pitch. The changing room block has a cafe with a tantalizing menu of goodies advertised outside. Closed of course. To everyone's surprise, a young lady arrived just before kick-off and opened a hatch to serve hot drinks and sweeties, but at half time you want to get in early, she didn't hang around. Just impressed they offer this service at all for four supporters. If the weather was bad last week, it was even worse today, freezing wind and just on kick off time a deluge fell from the sky that lasted the whole game. Four sodden members of the travelling fraternity were not happy bunnies, but hey, this is what groundhopping is all about. Although a cover price of a quid, Mr. Nottingham refused to take any money for the programme. This will be the only game that half the crowd will be trying to throw cash at him.

Let us digress for a moment and ponder how the globe's sixth largest economy can run a third-world train service. It's a Saturday so no trains from Broadstairs. It's cut off virtually every weekend now. Why? And East Midlands Trains were running a skeleton service due to a strike. Except there wasn't one. It was cancelled on Thursday and two days just wasn't long enough notice to run a normal service! The few trains they did run were heaving and just got later and later as people couldn't get on or off at the stations. It would make a good training exercise for the S.A.S. to sit them in the middle of a carriage and make them try to force their way off the train at Beeston. Too much for one poor lady who had to go through to Nottingham and get a train back. And of course, our old mate Boris now deems you are breaking the law if you don't wear a piece of cloth over your face. This South African variant is a really cunning virus. It only attacks on public transport and shops. In cafes, coffee shops, pubs, cinemas, theatres, aquariums etc. it leaves you alone and nobody needs to wear a mask. Plenty of police around at St. Pancras and Nottingham stations today and all of them ignoring the mask-less. They've got better things to do, at least I hope they have.

Back to the football and with both teams on the same number of points, I was expecting a close match. Unusually for me, I was wrong, and Nottingham can put this one down to a bad day at the office. With the elements battering spectators, the referee delayed the kick-off for seven minutes for no apparent reason. And, like most of his brethren, he hasn't got his head around the concept of a 45-minute half of football. With the time already approaching 4 o'clock, the rain was raining, the wind was winding, and one team were 6-0 up, he inexplicably played on for another 3 minutes. Just as well he did, in the added time Holbrook scored a vital seventh goal and a player got sent off, presumably for verbals. Oh, what we would have missed if he'd blown up on 90 minutes. According to the rule book time may be added on 'at the referee's discretion'. It isn't compulsory mate.

contributed on 05/12/21

TT No.79: Steve Hardy - Saturday 4th December 2021; Rushall Olympic U21 v Warstone Wanderers Academy; Staffordshire Challenge Cup - Round 2; Result: 11-2; Admission: £1; Programme: No; Attendance 8 h/c

The Staffs Challenge cup is the lowest of the Staffs County Cup competitions, and, as such, you are always going to get a few total mismatches. I must admit, that is why I chose this game as I couldn't see anything else apart from a massive home win.

The game was played in freezing conditions on the main Olympic 3G pitch. Hasn't changed much since my last visit here, although I think the TV gantry on one side is new. The clubhouse was open too which provided hot coffee and a place to thaw out at half time.

What is there to say about the game itself? Well, even when Warstones went into a 2-0 lead after just 13 minutes there was still absolutely no chance of them holding on to it. Olympic led 6-2 at half time and scored another 5 after the break for as easy a win as they will have all season. Credit to Warstones who tried very hard, and never gave up, but the quick, incisive breaks of Olympic were just too much for them to cope with. In fact, with a bit more luck in front of goal, Olympic could have had 20 easily.

Some people don't like scores like this as they want a more interesting match. I love it though, and had I managed to get out of bed earlier I see the match I had pencilled in for a 10.30am start, finished 10-1. That would have meant 24 goals in one day!

Sarah Satnav stayed at home too. No need for her expert advice today so she was able to give her strident voice a rest.

contributed on 05/12/21

TT No.78: Brian Buck - Saturday 27th November 2021; AFC Lynn Napier v Holt United Reserves; Fosters Solicitors Anglian Combination Division 5 North; Venue: played at Leonard Towler Playing Field, Mill Road, Wiggenhall St Germans; Result: 4-2; Attendance 10 approx.

What a day this was! This was not my first-choice match, as it was originally my intention to watch a match in West London, travelling there by public transport. Both sides had told me that the game was on, and I even bought my train ticket. The train was running late though and in the intervening time I received a text telling me that the game was now off as the visitors couldn't raise a side. So, I got a refund on my ticket and headed home, slightly stressed out having to finalise Plan B. Once again, I was told that my game was on and so I drove it and ended up over 100 miles north of my Plan A ground.

Wiggenhall St Germans can be found a few miles west of the A10, halfway between Kings Lynn and Downham Market and it's the most westerly ground in the Anglian

Combination. I arrived here about half an hour or so before kick-off which gave me time to devour my sandwiches and have some coffee, I'd brought with me. Only later did I find out that they also have a very small tea bar with snacks.

This was an exceptionally windy day, with an icy wind blowing, but one side of the pitch was bordered by some leylandii trees, and I was sheltered from much of the wind and rain by standing under them. I was soon joined by a very friendly club official, and we spent much of the game together.

As for the game the hosts had the wind to their backs in the first half and my friend reckoned that they didn't take full advantage of it in this period. But on 34 minutes they did score when the scorer clipped the ball over the outstretched arms of the keeper. My friend then received a phone call which led to him leaving the game for a while and I think he missed most of the remaining goals. At half time the players literally ran off the pitch to get out of the freezing wind. I spoke to the ref who was even colder. Being Portuguese, he was used to much warmer weather and today he had forgotten to bring his gloves!

At the start of the second half Holt equalised direct from a corner on 51 minutes, but seven minutes later Napier retook the lead, after the scorer was played in with a diagonal pass. On 67 minutes Holt equalised once more, by following up after a shot was parried by the keeper. Then on 75 minutes Napier retook the lead when their previous scorer ran on unchallenged before sealing the points with a fourth goal on 81 minutes. Soon everyone really wanted the game to end, and the ref obliged by blowing up over a minute early. He hadn't needed to book anyone in the game, but had he needed to do so then his hands would have been so cold that it would have been impossible for him to write! Again, the players again ran off the pitch at the end. They were bitterly cold.

I bade my farewells and returned to my car. But suddenly I had a problem. I couldn't open my car door. It seemed that the battery in my car key was no longer working, and my spare set of keys were in the car! Furthermore, the battery in my phone was almost flat. So, I went to see my new friend, who went beyond the call of duty to help me out. With his help I called out the AA, but by now I was almost too cold to talk coherently, and he did most of the chatting for me. The AA man arrived quite quickly and eventually as the rain turned to sleet now, he managed to break into my car with a wire to unlock the door, so I could get to the second key, which did work. By now I was also extremely cold, but as I drove off, I shall remember fondly and gratefully how the football club helped me out in my time of need.

contributed on 04/12/21

TT No.77: Steve Hardy - Saturday 27th November 2021; Abbey Rangers v Hanworth Villa; Combined Counties League - Premier Division North; Result: 1-3; Admission: £3 OAP rate; Programme: £1.50; Attendance: 59 H/C.

This week's fix saw a return to Addlestone, a town I last went to in 1977, for a long overdue revisit.

My match was 3rd v 1st in the CoCo League Premier North, and despite the freezing conditions it turned out to be a cracker. Abbey Rangers play at Addlestone Moor, which I originally thought was just that: A pitch on a bleak moor somewhere near Addlestone. Turns out that it was just the name of the road they play on. D'oh!

League leaders Hanworth Villa haven't lost a league match all season, but in the first half today they were really poor. Rangers were really up for it and won a penalty after just 10 minutes which was blazed miles wide (the wind took it apparently). Undeterred, they then took the lead with a 'worldy' on 18 minutes and despite a few chances for Villa they bossed the first half.

What a transformation after the break though. Villa showed exactly why they are running away with the division by equalising immediately after the restart, taking the lead on 53 mins and then rounding off a superb comeback with their 3rd on 85.

I really liked the place, I must say. A smashing clubhouse which was a warm haven at half time; a couple of seated stands which were useless against the arctic winds, and some covered terracing. The locals were all very friendly too, so all in all, a super day out, despite my frozen fingers.

contributed on 02/12/21

TT No.76: Steve Hardy - Wednesday 24th November 2021; University of Reading Women 1st v University of Surrey Women's 1st; BUCS Football Women's South Eastern Conference Cup; Result: 2-4; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance 1 h/c.

A free Wednesday afternoon in Reading. What to do? What to do? I know. How about a spot of BUCS football? That was the easy part. I then spent over 2 hours trying to find out what fixtures there were on the impossible to use BUCS app, before finding two games that were on at the University of Reading's Bulmershe Campus. The Men's 2nds were at home to UCFB 2nds, and the Women's 1st were playing University of Surrey Women's 1st.

As I like solitude, I chose the Women's match. So, whilst 50 or so noisy students watched the men's game, I watched the women in splendid isolation. A good choice it was too. Whilst the game was pretty low on skill, nobody could fault the effort both teams put into it. Surrey were much the better team throughout, and due to 'Izzy' up front they were soon 2-0 up and coasting. Izzy was really quick, and the Reading defence just couldn't catch her once she ran at them. I sat back waiting for the avalanche of goals to follow. Not a bit of it though as Reading struck back to equalise on 43 minutes before Surrey scored a third just before the break.

After the break I still thought Surrey would rack up a few more goals, but it wasn't to be. They managed just one to complete what I thought was a well-deserved 4-2 victory.

Facilities wise, the campus has seven full size grass pitches, plus an excellent changing room complex with its own tea bar. There are signs everywhere saying welcome to Woodley United FC too. This is now their base, although the first team are still playing at the Scours Lane ground of Reading City as there are no facilities at all at Bulmershe and the pitches are not even roped off.

I spent the first 50 years of my life working in, and enjoying the delights of, Reading. It was good to be back.

contributed on 30/11/21

TT No.75: Craig Dabbs - Saturday 27th November 2021; Staines Town v Sutton Common Rovers; Isthmian League Division One South Central; Venue: Wheatsheaf Park; Result: 0-2; Admission: £10; Programme: 28pp, £2; Attendance: 94

Well Plan A went, Plan B followed on Saturday morning, but there wasn't really a Plan C so one was concocted and it was time to renew my acquaintances with the M1 and M25. They didn't disappoint with a two-hour run down and a three hour plus run back meaning I didn't get back home until 8:15pm which is daft considering it's less than 80 miles!

Anyway, I will leave it to a quote from a Staines supporter who summed up the afternoon's weather beautifully when walking into the club shop where I was camped before kick-off: "*It's colder than a Polar Bear's arse out there*". It was and no vantage point around the ground would give you a break from the artic chill.

As we've covered the weather and the motorway network for the umpteenth time, I will move on to Wheatsheaf Park and Staines Town FC.

Staines Town as a club have been around since 1892 merging with another local side St Peter's Institute. A few name changes later, including one I really like, Staines Albany, they lasted until 1935 when they folded. They re-emerged towards the end of the war joining the Hellenic League in 1953, the Spartan League followed and then the Athenian League in 1971 before joining the Isthmian League two years later. The club bounced between divisions but steadied themselves through much of the 2000's in the Premier Division before moving on up into the Conference South in 2009. The Swans stayed there for six seasons before relegation back to the Isthmian League where they remain today, but I do wonder for how much longer because they have struggled badly in recent years and no doubt the pandemic has saved them from relegation, they currently sit bottom.

Wheatsheaf Park has been home to the club since 1951 and underwent a major rebuild in 2001 costing £6.5m. Principally this was for the construction of the Thames Club, a health and fitness centre which dominates the site. The club had to move away for a couple of seasons whilst it was being constructed but returned to a ground where a new 300-seater stand was bolted onto the side of the centre and a large 800 capacity covered terrace in the form of several kit stands joined together on the opposite side, provides shelter for over 1000 spectators in a ground capable of holding around 3000. The ground was deemed good enough for

Chelsea Ladies FC to move in for the 2012 season staying for five years before moving into Kingsmeadow.

The match pitted two teams struggling for points and facing relegation. Neither side created much or indeed when they did, failed to finish it off. The first half had just a handful of chances in a very poor game which improved oh so slightly in the second with SCR eventually showing more about them than their hosts and getting a couple of goals, one being a soft penalty, to take much needed points back to South London.

contributed on 28/11/21

TT No.74: Keith Aslan - Saturday 27th November 2021; SOUTHWELL CITY v Keyworth; Notts. Senior Premier Division; Kick Off: 13.59; Result: 1-0; Admission: Free; Programme: £3; Attendance: 80 (53 home, 6 away & 21 neutral). Figures don't include the cowards who watched the match from the clubhouse, they can't count it anyway.

A ground opening, souvenir programme and a mere 12-minute walk from the station, what more could you want from a Saturday? Well, some trains would be nice. The Brinkley Stadium is far closer to Fiskerton station than it is to Southwell, but being a weekend, the line was shut. Still, just a couple of stops from Newark, I can live with that. London to Newark, line shut as well. What a shambles. Went on a circuitous route via Nottingham spending an hour on a rail replacement bus that would not have looked out of place in a transport museum. And an hour late getting home as well, tree on the line at Chilham. What fun.

The football club grandiosely call themselves 'City' in spite of Southwell only being a town. Their new out of town/city ground is a couple of miles to the south, neat, tidy but still a bit basic with future plans for hard standing, floodlights and a visit from Mr. Atcost. If you are into dugouts, and who isn't, the ones here are state of the art. The big selling point was the clubhouse, hot and cold drinks and sweeties but no major food but who cares, it was warm and, on a day like today, that was all that was required. I didn't know if they would let me in as a notice on the door read 'no studs allowed in the clubhouse'. The weather was evil, global warming had struck Southwell with a vengeance. This was a pity as it kept the crowd down and quite a few more had been expected. They had a load of programmes left over due to the strange decision to let everyone in for free and charge £3 for the paper. They'd have made much more money charging £3 to get in and giving the programme away with admittance. This is the last paper we'll see here for some time, it's back to the online stuff for the rest of the season. A pity as the 36-page souvenir issue was good stuff, with plenty of photos of the transformation from field to football ground.

In one of life's little quirks the final visitors to Southwell's old ground was Keyworth, and it was Keyworth who opened the new ground today. The home side remain unbeaten at the Brinkley Stadium thanks to a solitary second half strike. Good to see a match finishing at a quarter to four, I think the ref. was as cold as the rest of us.

It's a small world. Got talking to a Wimbledon and Ware supporter, shouldn't think there's many of them in Beeston. He's the trainer at Trent Vineyard, whose game was off today, and I'd seen him play in goal a couple of months back at Ruddington. Even more coincidental he worked on the railway, and it was his job to arrange the Rail Replacement Bus we'd got to Fiskerton. He very kindly gave us a lift back to Nottingham meaning I would have got home an hour earlier than planned had not the arboreal mishap at Chilham occurred.

contributed on 28/11/21

TT No.73: Brian Buck - Saturday 20th November 2021; Crick Athletic v Coventry Colliery Reserves; Coventry Alliance Division 2; Venue: played at Crick Community Sports Centre, Yelvertoft Road; Result: 9-2; Attendance: 6.

Although today was an enjoyable day, I was worn out by the time I got home.

I only realized that Crick had moved to their current ground when I passed it on my way home after watching an evening game at Yelvertoft about three years ago (v Harpole Reserves on 22/05/18: 2-1; attendance 25 approx). They had moved here from their old Main Road ground which I had previously visited on 19/04/05 (3-1 v Kislingbury in a Travis Perkins Northants Combination Dulux Paints Premier Division match - att: 10 approx). I passed their 'old ground' once again today. It still has the goal posts up, along with a barrel-roofed stand which houses the dressing rooms, behind one goal.

To be honest I was in a bit of a hurry as the M1 northbound was closed between junctions 14 & 15. Firstly, I got stuck in a queue leaving the M1 and delayed further when I re-routed through Olney and back to the M1 south of Northampton. Luckily for me Crick is only a mile or so to the east of Junction 18 and by the time I reached the ground I had only missed two minutes of play. I'd have been there an hour before kick-off otherwise. Thankfully, I hadn't missed any goals though.

I could soon see why Crick have moved here. Although their old ground has character, the new one has several football pitches for their youth and Sunday teams, plus a separate cricket ground. They obviously played on the main pitch today and this is partly railed off, with dugouts, on the clubhouse side and also behind one goal. The secretary here is a tremendous chap. After playing for the club in his younger days, he took over from his father in the early part of the millennium after he had given 50 years' service and his mother still runs the well-stocked tea bar today. She has been doing this since 1975 and she is now 84 years old! It goes without saying that people like these, who have in effect given their whole lives to one football club, are really the people who should be admired most in football. I do hope that they have been rewarded for their dedication to the game and, in particular, to Crick Athletic FC. If not, then at the very least they should be honoured by the Northants FA.

Anyway, these days the club have switched from the Northants Combination to the Coventry Alliance (as nearby Yelvertoft have also done). This is largely for geographical reasons as the club is only six miles from Rugby and most of their

players come from that way. The game today saw Spurs former manager Nuno refereeing it. At least that's what I thought until I looked at him more closely!

On an almost full size pitch the first goal didn't arrive until the 24th minute when Crick scored with a powerful shot which must have stung the keeper's hands as he just failed to stop it beating him. Then a deep header from a corner on 38 minutes made it 2-0 at the break. Then further goals on 49 and 62 minutes seemed to sew things up for the hosts. But suddenly the Colliery scored twice in as many minutes. Game on? Not really, as further goals on 68 and 70 minutes brought the score up to 6-2 before three further goals before the end saw Crick see off a by now deflated visiting side, apart from their captain who ran his socks off.

By the time I got home, 90 minutes later, an hour earlier than it took me to get here, I felt drained, as from the moment I left home to the time I got back, because I had no chance to chill out during the day, which as I grow older, I am going to have to keep an eye on!

contributed on 25/11/21

TT No.72: Jon T Green - Saturday 20th November 2021; **GARDEN VILLAGE v. Penrhiwceiber Rangers; Ardal Southern League, South West Division; Venue: Stafford Common; Result: 3-2; Admission: £5; Programme: £1 cover price but included with admission; Attendance: 39 h/c.**

Stafford Common sits astride the boundary between Garden Village and Kingsbridge and is, in the broadest terms, sandwiched between Swansea to the South and the M4 to the North. The ground forms part of a larger complex with a further couple of pitches sitting outside of the enclosed main venue.

Changing rooms and club house are located down at road level with the playing surface being on an elevated plateau, the players climbing a number of steep steps before entering the field behind one goal. Described by one club official as being "rather basic" this seems a little harsh as there is a covered seated stand along the far touchline with a combined seated/standing roofed area closer to the entrance. Tea and coffee are available in the ground but for something stronger at half time you'll need to make a quick dash to the club house itself.

Garden Village were formed in 1922 and initially played at local Swansea league level before moving upwards to join the Carmarthenshire League. They enjoyed considerable success in that competition winning the Senior Cup on four occasions along with the Challenge Cup in 1989. Although never claiming a Premier League title, their runners-up spot in 1998/99 put them through to a play-off game against Cwmaman United from the Neath League. In a match played at Llandarcy, Village scored three in extra time to earn a place in Division Three of the Welsh League. Further success immediately followed with third spot being good enough to see them elevated to Division Two. The same season saw them make it through to the last 32 of the Welsh Cup only to be knocked out by the then holders, Inter Cardiff.

After a year of consolidation, they secured the Second Division title on the last day of the season with victory at Chepstow Town. The top-flight proved a tougher task and, after a short spell, the club were relegated back to the Second Division.

Despite the odd foray into the higher league, the bulk of the next 15 years saw them continue in the second tier and it was from here that they joined the Ardal Southern League at the beginning of the season.

With both teams having amassed 20 points from their opening dozen or so matches this looked as though it was going to be a close encounter. The home side playing in black and white stripes changed their normal black socks for some rather natty yellow ones; it certainly helped transform a regular kit into something far more eye-catching. Rangers arrived having lost just twice but too many draws has left them five points behind leaders Ynysygerwn. The visitors started brightly with Dean Brown seeing his header cleared off the line before Joseph Jenkins struck the bar with an overhit cross. Somewhat against the run of play, Village opened the scoring after just 11 minutes as Nathan Beniamous swept the ball in from the right wing from where blond centre forward, Alex Giardelli beautifully adjusted his body shape to send a crisp low drive wide of the diving Jack Howe. The same two players combined soon after with Giardelli's powerful header being well saved by the legs of Howe. At the other end Rangers were constantly looking to exploit the skills of Jenkins and it was from the right winger's perfect centre that Brandon Hill headed in the equaliser. The away team were looking much the livelier with some well-structured fast paced football but fell victim to a sucker punch (and not for the last time) a couple of minutes prior to the break. An exquisite through ball from Ricky Martin saw Beniamous stride clear and, as Howe advanced, he slid the ball beyond him.

Garden Village had only named two substitutes for the game and, following half time, it became clear that their part of the proceedings was going to be limited as they tucked into cups of tea and a box of pizza. Away from the culinary feast, Martin grazed the top of the cross bar for the home side before Brandon Davies went close for Rangers with a smart shot on the turn. As the away side increasingly threw men forward in search of an equaliser, Village really should have wrapped up the points; Beniamous sprinted away down the left but Martin, with a clear sight of goal, dragged his shot wide. With just four minutes remaining Rangers deservedly drew level, as Warren Jones calmly clipped his right footed penalty wide of Michael Moore. If Village had sprung a surprise before the interval, then they now did so again with a minute of added time being played; Dayle Selvage took a corner from the right and full back Alex Smith climbed highest at the far post to head in the winner. On a dank grey afternoon there was a genuinely warm welcome from an ultra-friendly club, driving back along the motorway in the failing light you couldn't help but raise a smile in celebration of their victory.

contributed on 22/11/21

TT No.71: Keith Aslan - Saturday 20th November 2021; RISELEY SPORTS v Cranfield United; Bedfordshire County League Premier Division; Kick Off: 14.01; Result: 1-2; Admission: Free; Programme: free with many offers of money refused; Attendance: 33 (24 home, 5 away & 4 neutral)

Riseley is a little village somewhere to the north of Bedford. An irregular bus service fits in perfectly coming back from a 2 o'clock kick off, but requires a very

early arrival. Decided to kill a bit of time and get full use of my bus pass, (which I don't know if I've mentioned, I got six years after everybody else), so went to the end of the route and came back again. A lovely run connecting some very out of the way villages/hamlets to Bedford. Places I would never get to see were it not for this wonderful hobby. Everybody gets very indignant about cutting out these rural routes and leaving people stranded but I do wonder just who it actually is who would be stranded. The entire run to Kimbolton had just two groundhoppers on it, with one passenger joining us on the return trip to Riseley. Needless to say, the bus back to Bedford after the match was empty apart from the football fraternity. We had the same bus driver in both directions, a very friendly chap, and we spent the return journey putting the world to rights. Well not quite all of the world, but public transport in Bedford.

Riseley is a typical village club with somebody having the foresight to build the pitch a minute's walk both from the bus stop and the local pub. The ground does have a bar which you apparently had to watch the Rugby on TV to stay in! There was a tantalizing whiff of bacon coming from the kitchen, but there was no food or drink available for football spectators which would have made them a few quid. The players post-match beanfeast took place in the pub across the road. Although just roped off, there is cover with a sort of bandstand just to the right of the goal with seats in it, so you wouldn't get wet if it rained, but it might be a bit of a squeeze if all 33 supporters tried to pile in.

The programme cover came in two different colours, blue or red, and sad people like me, had to have one of each. The in-depth player profile was of midfield maestro Jammie Simmons, and having read it, I feel I know him intimately. Nickname: Simmo. Favourite Food: Big Mac with cheese. Favourite drink: Beer. It's amazing how diverse footballers are. Riseley deserved to have got at the very least a point from the game, but as I have discovered, you don't always get what you deserve in life or football, and Cranfield stole it with a goal in the 91st of the 90 minutes. There was apparently a sending off late doors which passed me by as I was on one of my frequent toilet breaks at the time.

What better place to wait for the bus after the game than a genuine wooden bus shelter, free from the stress of wondering if it was going to turn up as I'd seen it go the other way. If you are into village football clubs and country bus rides, the 28 to Riseley is the day out for you. But I wouldn't leave it too long, someday soon the council are going to sus out they are spending a lot of money subsidising a bus route that virtually nobody uses.

contributed on 21/11/21

TT No.70: Brian Buck - Saturday 13th November 2021; **Cuxton 91 v Tenterden Town; NRG 24HR Kent County League Division 1 Central & East;** Result: 0-3; Programme: £1.50; Attendance: 75 approx.

With the weather being good today I elected to go to this game by train, making use of the high-speed train from St Pancras International. I arrived at Stood just over half an hour later and, with a connection waiting, I arrived at Cuxton station four minutes later. On the last leg of my journey which followed the River

Medway, there were good views of Rochester Castle and some newish looking luxury flats built next to the river on the bank opposite. Not quite so pleasing on the eye were the high up bridges carrying the M2 and the high-speed railway as we neared Cuxton station. From here it was a less than ten minute-walk to the ground, slightly longer if you stop at the White Hart pub along the way! The last part of the walk passes some well-maintained terraced houses and local shops, made all the more pleasurable to look at today as many were decorated in readiness for Remembrance Sunday.

Some groundhoppers may find the next bit interesting as Cuxton 91 have moved grounds this season. The new ground can be found on your right (north) once the intense housing stops, and it is in the grounds of the social club. The entrance to the old ground, in the recreation ground, is on the opposite (south) side of Bush Road and is hidden behind some houses. A fellow Groundhopper kindly showed me where it was after the game and the well-maintained pitch was marked out and complete with its metal dugouts.

Back to my game today and a small surprise was awaiting me. On the gate the club were selling programmes (£1.50), and after having a quick look through it I found part of one of my articles in it! It rather surprised me that my limited claim to fame now stretches into darkest Kent! Anyway, after skillfully avoiding some party being set up for later in the main part of the social club, I headed for the ‘back’ bar, where there was time to sup a couple of pints before the start, cheerfully served by the pleasant bar staff. Then it was time for the match.

The ground is effectively two sided and is cut into the side of a bank. There is a gravel footway leading up to the top of the bank and if you think of Ampthill Town, minus their stand, then you won’t go far wrong. From here the views are spectacular and not only do your eyes focus on the pitch below but also on the steep, tree lined rising hills beyond. It was a bit like watching a game in one of the many South Wales grounds which are a bit like this one.

As for the game, Cuxton 91 started the game unbeaten and top of the league, but by the end of the game they had lost that record and were replaced on top by today’s visitors Tenterden Town. The visitors took the lead on 38 minutes, slightly against the run of play, when the ball was hooked home from the edge of the area. The second half was more tense, and the ref told one player, “We had this conversation in the first half.” Someone from the opposition told him to have it again. For me Cuxton’s problem was that they didn’t get enough players forward to trouble Tenterden and, on 74 minutes, the visitors scored again, this time from the spot after an obvious foul. Things got worse for Cuxton, as on 86 minutes they were reduced to ten men following a second yellow. A minute later the visitors number 11 completed his hat-trick with a powerfully hit shot in off the post from 20 yards. Finally, a minute later Cuxton went down to nine men, second yellow again. However, the day was still very enjoyable, and such is their enthusiasm, I can see that this is a club on the way up.

contributed on 16/11/21

TT No.69: Craig Dabbs - Saturday 13th November 2021; St Joseph's Rockware of Worksop v Club Thorne Colliery; Central Midlands League Premier Division North; Venue: Rockware Sports Ground; Result: 1-3; Admission: £3; Programme: 16pp, £1.50; Attendance: 60.

The previous week at Mickleover RBL I was told that SJR Worksop were looking to move, so with that in mind I made my way to Nottinghamshire to find out and of course get Rockware Sports Ground ticked off. The truth is they may be moving but equally may not, nothing has been sorted and I'm none the wiser but also pleased that it's 'done', just in case.

The club were formed in 1984 and represent St Joseph's Catholic Club but also incorporating both Rockware (as a nod to their home) and of course Worksop the club's town. The club have been members of the CML since 2019 having moved from the Worksop Sunday League. They won the league in their first season of membership and are now embarking on their first, hopefully, full season of Premier Division membership.

Rockware for clarity was Rockware Glass who had sites around the country including one in Worksop. They manufactured glass bottles and were taken over by the Ardagh Group who no longer have a presence in the town with the Rockware Sports Ground now being overlooked by a plastic recycling company.

The Sports Ground is fairly basic with a pay hut and a railed pitch without hard standing. The rail is made of plastic and removable owing to the fact that this is also a cricket venue. There is a small bar and refreshment area over in the pavilion and that's about it, not that it's a bad venue by any means, it's just basic and probably a little difficult to develop further owing to the cricket. The fact that it doesn't belong to the club may suggest the reasoning behind a potential move further down the line.

Visitors today are Thorne Colliery, or should I say Club Thorne Colliery, as they are now known, are having the time of their lives. Their ground has recently seen investment with lights erected and money is being pumped in resulting in part to them being top of the table and undefeated.

SJR worked hard and were by no means outclassed today. However, they did look a little poorer in comparison to the visitors this afternoon who worked solidly throughout the game and now move onto 47 points.

contributed (via Brian Buck) on 14/11/21

TT No.68: Keith Aslan - Saturday 13th November 2021; FC SOMA v Clapton CFC; Middlesex League Premier Division; Kick Off: 15.05; Result: 2-1; Admission: Free; Programme: £1; Attendance: 59 (8 home, 41 away & 10 neutral)

It's the biggy in Middlesex, second v first, and to mark the occasion Soma are producing their first (and probably last) ever programme courtesy of the ever-reliable JMA stable. The match was played at the Roger Bannister Stadium in

Harrow. Named after the area's most famous son, ask anybody to name a world athletics record, and chances are they will only come up with one, the four-minute mile. Bannister spent the morning studying medicine in London, decided at lunchtime to try for the record and got the train up to Oxford in the afternoon, broke the 4-minute barrier then got the train back again in the evening and resumed his studies the next day. Different times.

Although the ground is a 3g cage there is an adjoining athletics stadium which would make an ideal location for the football but for an injudiciously sited hammer cage. Plenty of ways to get there, I got a bus from Harrow & Wealdstone on the outward journey and walked the 15 minutes to Headstone Lane station on the return.

The 'ground' was ok for a 3g with spectator facilities along one side. It was surprisingly surrounded by trees, fields and rolling hillsides with only the distant hum of traffic on the Uxbridge Road to remind you that you were still in London and not the middle of the English countryside. Strangely someone was stationed at the entrance asking everybody if they had a yellow wristband. Nobody had, which didn't seem to concern him. The Clapton fans were great, really nice people with one of them going around the crowd handing out Pear Drops, and very nice they were too. Not something you come across every day.

The only disappointment was the size of crowd. I was expecting a few more. Whilst the away support was massive by Middlesex League standards everyone was expecting a three-figure attendance. Clapton's home crowds average 400 and last May their match against FC Roast attracted 1,266 which I can confidently state is a league record by some considerable margin. Today also bought out the great and the bad of the groundhopping fraternity, like me, attracted by the paper accompaniment. Soma handled their big day immaculately with food and drink available and unsold sandwiches being utilised for the after-match hospitality. Good thinking boys.

An intense match as you would expect given the occasion, with the home side coming back from 1-0 down to leapfrog Clapton at the top of the league. They'll be dancing in the streets of Soma tonight. The story of Clapton's weird strip is to be found in the programme. 'The club have gained a lot of media attention due to the success of their purple, red and yellow away kit, a homage to the International Brigades who volunteered to fight Franco in the Spanish Civil War'. Be that as it may, it still looks a mess. I wish Soma and Clapton the very best of luck for the future, they're both the antithesis of the 'Greed League'.

Missed my train home because (a) the match didn't finish until 5 o'clock and (b) I completely misread the train timetable. Still, one mistake in 67 years isn't bad.

contributed on 14/11/21

TT No.67: Steve Hardy - Saturday 13th November 2021; Galore v Kingstanding Phoenix B; Birmingham & District League - Division 6; Result: 5-4; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 2 h/c.

OK, you have heard it all before, but this wonderful league is still my favourite, and today's game just goes to prove why.

The wonderfully named Galore FC play in Castle Bromwich at Arden Hall. This turned out not to be a stately home as I had envisaged but a rather run-down banqueting centre, with a whole raft of pitches behind it. Naturally, our game took place on the furthest away pitch possible which was reached by hiking almost into the next county.

Visitors Kingstanding Phoenix B were known as AFC Sutton Phoenix last year and both teams were in mid-table of the bottom division, although Galore have only played 4 league games so far compared to 15 for the league leaders.

The game itself had everything. Galore took the lead against the run of play on 9 minutes, only for Phoenix to equalise straight away with the first of many errors from the Galore keeper who flapped a cross into his own goal. Another keeper error saw Phoenix take the lead on 34 minutes and when a Galore defender followed his keeper's example it was 3-1. Then the fun and games started. Galore pulled a goal back and the Phoenix keeper was sin binned for voicing his opinion of the Ref's performance. 2-3 at half time then.

The second half started with a superb solo effort from the Phoenix man of the match to make it 2-4 but shortly after he had to come off following a dreadful 'tackle' by Galore, and Phoenix fell apart. 3 more goals followed for Galore which gave them a 5-4 win and one which they didn't deserve in my opinion.

Still, excellent entertainment for us two spectators and it just remained for me to battle my way back up the M6 in time for Strictly.

contributed on 14/11/21

TT No.66: Brian Buck - Saturday 6th November 2021; Woolverstone United v Stonham Aspal; Macron Suffolk & Ipswich League Division 2; Result: 15-0; Attendance: 15.

In my none too serious attempt to visit a different league every Saturday, it was the turn of the Suffolk & Ipswich League to be graced with my presence this week. Woolverstone is more of a hamlet really and it can be found on the peninsula where the River Orwell meets the River Stour before both enter the North Sea. It was easy to get to as well. I joined the A14 at Junction 31 and about an hour or so and 25 junctions later I left it just before the bridge went over the River Orwell. My sat nav then took me down to river level and under the Orwell bridge, which from where I was, looked tall, scenic and imposing.

Soon I was at the ground, which was tree lined, with the wooden pavilion, changing rooms only, set back behind one goal and partially hidden by trees as well. Meanwhile on the opposite side of the road was Woolverstone Park which had a rugby pitch marked out, probably belonging to nearby Ipswich High School.

Behind that was a church, seemingly in a field. As I was here early, I went for a short walk down to the River Orwell and, on my way, I passed Woolverstone Lodge Park, where it appears you can rent out one of the lodges. Then I reached the Royal Harwich Yacht Club, where no members of the public were allowed to visit their almost empty bar. After looking at the Woolverstone Marina I returned to the ground where I ate my sandwiches and had some coffee.

Generally, though, apart from the football traffic, the place was deserted. As for the match it was played out on a leaf strewn grassy pitch, which looked as though it had only been mown that morning. One thing I had forgotten to do before I left home was to check where these two clubs were in the league. The answer soon became obvious! In the first half, even I could have scored for Woolverstone, who wore kit similar to that of Spurs and they scored with just about every attack they had. By the 17th minute they were leading 6-0! They then had a ten-minute break before the seventh goal went in. Then on 31 minutes they got going again and they rattled in another six goals in ten minutes to make the half time score 13-0! Stonham Aspal seemed to want to get in on the act as well as the goals on 27 and 31 minutes were technically own goals, but *Full-Time* has not reflected this. By now some of the crowd had departed, probably because the game had ceased to be a contest. The second half was quieter. Woolverstone made four subs and I found someone to talk to on the touchline. Two of the subs scored, on 69 and 70 minutes to conclude the scoring. To be fair to Stonham, who were in the top division of this league when I visited them in August 1999, they never gave up or argued amongst themselves. Clearly, they took the attitude that taking part and fulfilling the fixture was more important than trying to win.

As for me, I thoroughly enjoyed my day on the ‘peninsula’. Not really knowing quite what to expect when I left home, it was lovely to be in such picturesque surroundings and I shall remember the sight of the River Orwell bridge passing overhead, as I drove alongside the river underneath it, for many years to come.

contributed on 12/11/21

TT No.65: Jon T Green - Saturday 6th November 2021; BILLINGHAM TOWN v. Northallerton Town; Northern Football League Division One; Venue: Bedford Terrace; Result: 2-1; Admission: £7; Programme: No; Attendance: 157

I must admit to being something of a sucker for a trip to the Northern League – fabulous locations, a very good standard of play and some of the most welcoming and knowledgeable football people in the country. Having visited the wonderful, but now sadly lost, Central Avenue ground of Billingham Synthonia, it was time to see what the blue half of town had to offer.

Billingham Town were founded in 1967 as Billingham Social Club and joined the Stockton and District League where they won the Second Division title at the first attempt. They remained in the league, winning three top division championships and claiming a brace of League Cup trophies, until 1974 when they switched allegiance to the Teesside League. Success again followed as two further league titles were won in 1979 and 1982. With the Northern League expanding in 1982 the club took the opportunity to join the Second Division and to change their name to Billingham Town. By this stage the club had left their original home at Mill Lane, a ground at which it was said the slope was so severe that the corner flag at the top end was level with the crossbar at the bottom. Floodlights were installed at their new Bedford Terrace home in 1992 with nearby Hartlepool United funding the laying of a new pitch in 2007 so that their reserve side could use the ground. 2018/19 saw Town win the Second Division championship and, with it, promotion to the First Division.

The ground is within walking distance of the town centre and, although the freshly re-surfaced car park has plenty of room, space within the surrounding streets is tight. The Main Stand, decked out in blue and white, is something of a tardis in reverse. It looks big from the outside but, once inside, it has a modest capacity of less than 180 seats with a flat standing area at the rear which offers great views out across the surrounding area. Opposite is a brutalist style metal stand offering shelter above a shale and concrete terrace, it's a cover that certainly would not look out of place in Eastern Europe. The rest of the ground is uncovered save for a bus shelter set close to the main entrance. At first, I thought it looked *like* a bus shelter but on closer inspection it definitely was a bus shelter; I am sure of this because the timetable from 2013 is still displayed inside. With thoughts swirling around my head of disorientated passengers in Stockton High Street still searching for their stop the two teams entered the field...

It's not been the best of seasons for Billingham, 20 games played and only three wins. A measly seven goals scored at home suggests a tough afternoon against a Northallerton side who, despite being below them in the table, have already won three times on their travels. The visitors started brightly, maintaining position and pinning Town back inside their own half, then after four minutes they found themselves a goal down. Billingham had barely touched the ball before Jude Harrison's deflected shot looped into the top corner. Centre forward Harry Close lived up to his name a few minutes later and might have added a second had he not inexplicably managed to find himself back to goal when presented with a simple scoring opportunity. Now playing with unbridled confidence, the home side struck the woodwork through Connor Rennison, his shot slamming off the bar before striking 'keeper Michael Roxburgh on the back and rolling away for a corner. Rennison was not to be denied though and, with 27 minutes played, he beautifully bent his long-range drive beyond Roxburgh's full-length dive. Northallerton should have reduced the deficit shortly before the break; Michael Rae turned and fell

under what appeared to be an innocuous challenge, but Alex Bruton could only smash his penalty against the bar.

Within minutes of the re-start the visitors had struck the woodwork again, Sonny Whittingham's 25 yarder look destined for the net before cannoning off the post. Rennison was continuing to be an influential player for Town, having a quick succession of shots on goal which would surely have wrapped up the points. Instead, it was Northallerton who scored with just five minutes remaining; Gary Mitchell found space on the right and his perfect low cross was finished, at close range, by the in rushing Rae. This should have set up a grandstand finish but, as is often the case, the chasing team just couldn't get the ball. With darkness fallen and the rooftops of the nearby flats mesmerizingly changing colour from blue to red to green to yellow, referee Helen Conley brought proceedings to an end much to the relief of the majority of those present. This was an important win for Billingham but with all of the teams below them having games in hand they'll need to produce similar performances over the coming weeks if they are not going to have an uncomfortable second half of the season.

contributed on 11/11/21

TT No.64: Craig Dabbs - Saturday 6th November 2021; Mickleover Royal British Legion v Pinxton; Central Midlands League Premier Division South; Venue: Poppyfields Drive; Result: 3-0; Admission: £3; Programme: 16pp, £1; Attendance: 58.

This has always been up there on the list of Central Midlands League clubs I've wanted to visit, so it was nice to see them back in the league this season and nice to see the club doing well.

With remembrance Sunday just around the corner (next weekend), I felt it was also fitting to pay a visit to the Royal British Legion Club close to the event. Set up in 1921, the RBL provides support of all kinds to members and veterans of the forces along with their families, it's something I have always given to and personally I am so grateful for our British Armed Forces for how much they have given and continue to give to protect us and our freedoms.

Mickleover RBL FC can trace its roots back to 1945 when the ground was given over to the people of Mickleover. Always playing local level football, much of the club's recent history has been in the Central Midlands League where of course they find themselves today.

The ground is dominated by the large club attached; Ypres Lodge was opened in 2007 and is on two levels with the upper-level bar and function room having a small balcony which offers an excellent viewpoint to watch from.

The ground is railed on three sides with two small areas over the far side that are quite quaint and between them can probably keep around 50 or so patrons dry, oh

and a lovely bench seat in the corner with a bit of cover over it in memory of a certain Stephen Astley who passed away in 1997.

The club are doing well this season and made relatively light work of a Pinxton side who were unbeaten going into this game. RBL could well be there or thereabouts come May, and then it's a question of what next. Whilst there is no doubt about the quality of the off-field facilities there is some work to do here. Lights are the obvious one and the ground is in close proximity to houses which might be a problem, but who will say no to the British Legion? A seated stand would be needed but that's only a small hurdle and some more hard standing, but again, not really a problem. The ground with lights wouldn't take a huge amount of work to bring up to step six so who knows, will it be another CMFL season, or will the bright lights of the United Counties League or Midland League be on the horizon?

contributed (via Bria Buck) on 07/11/21

TT No.63: Keith Aslan - Saturday 6th November 2021; **NEWHALL UNITED v Willington; G & T Jenkins Midland Regional Alliance, Drayton Pacs Division One;** Kick-Off: 14.04; Result: 4-2; Admission: Free; Programme: £1.50p; Attendance: 15 humans (12 home, 2 away & 1 neutral) and 3 dogs - all neutral.

What better way to celebrate P.J. Proby's 83rd birthday (ask your grandparents) than a visit to the Midland Regional Alliance's only programme issuers. Burton-on-Trent is the one you want with a half hourly bus service from right outside the station to a six-minute walk from the bus stop at the other end. Although only six minutes I managed to extend this on the outward trip to over 20 by virtue of getting lost. Newhall is not the easiest ground to find, it was made harder by the fields shown on my map now being a housing estate.

This is a proper football ground. Fully enclosed, railed on three sides, grass banking on the fourth. A small stand along the side with some chairs added for old folk and a wonderful, corrugated iron stand behind the goal which pre-dates 'Atcost' by many decades. This provided much appreciated shelter during the afternoon as the showers showered. A small clubhouse, which was shut until after the match, and the all-important hatch serving hot drinks and sweeties.

The Match Ball was sponsored by '*Groundhop UK*' although none of their officials were present. If they had attended, they'd have been well gutted to see their ball kicked out of the ground after 15 minutes, being replaced by a non-sponsored one. Balls have played a big part in Newhall United's history and were responsible for the most bizarre ground exile I have ever come across. With the building of the surrounding housing estate a lovely neighbour complained about stray balls landing in his garden and went to the council who barred football from being played at the ground until more protective netting was erected. Newhall didn't have the money and had to spend two years ground-sharing at Netherseal Sports until the cash became available and they were able to return home. One can only wonder how this 'neighbour' failed to spot the football ground next to his back garden when he bought the house.

The programme had more reading in it than any I've ever seen at this level, and all riveting stuff, much of it historical. A labour of love for the editor who manages the reserves and was away with them today, so missing the opportunity to see me drool over his handiwork. The match was full of goalmouth action with Newhall maintaining their 6-point lead at the top of the league, still yet to be beaten. But Willington made a meaningful contribution to the afternoon's entertainment. The game was enjoyed by all, including the canine quotant.

Unlike my last trip with Midland Main Line the trains behaved themselves today. So, all good.

contributed on 07/11/21

TT No.62: Steve Hardy - Saturday 6th November 2021; **Excel Church v Dudley Lions**; West Midlands Christian League - Division 2; Result: 2-2; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 2 h/c.

Definitely a day of CBA for me today. There were plenty of easy doubles to be had, but none really took my fancy so, instead, I took an easy 13 mile drive down the M6 to Dudley for my first West Midlands Christian League match of the season.

The venue was The Dormston Centre. This is a sports and arts centre, actually in Sedgley rather than Dudley with a grass pitch and 3G pitch in a cage for footie. Both teams play their games here, but today it was the turn of Excel Church to be at home, and mercifully the game was played on grass. Excel were rock bottom of the bottom division before kick-off this morning, but this point has seen them rise to the dizzy heights of second bottom on goal difference.

On a very heavy pitch, the game took a while to settle down. It took Dudley 38 minutes to open the scoring and I fully expected the floodgates to open then. Not a bit of it, as Excel equalised with a wonder goal from a free kick on 41 minutes and stunned everyone by taking the lead a minute later. Dudley responded well to this setback, however, and equalised themselves with the last kick of the first half to leave us 2-2 at the break.

The second half promised much but delivered very little unfortunately, as both teams seemed to settle for a draw after the hour mark. Dudley made most of the running, but a combination of great goalkeeping and bad finishing meant neither team could score, and we ended at 2-2.

Back home by 1.15pm meant I could watch the FA Cup ties on TV or listen to the Biscuitmen in action at St Andrews. I did neither but, went back to bed for a snooze. Up at 7.30am is something we retirees are not used to, and I was exhausted.

contributed on 07/11/21

TT No.61: Brian Buck - Saturday 30th October 2021; **FC Soma v Cricklewood Wanderers**; Cherry Red Books Middlesex County League Premier Division; Venue:

played at Bannister Sports Ground, Uxbridge Road, Harrow Weald; Result: 3-0;
Attendance: 14.

It was a late decision to come here after my original choice was postponed earlier in the morning. But there was no problem with this game taking place and both sides replied to my texts fairly promptly. But looking at the aerial view on both *Google* and *Bing Maps*, I couldn't quite see where it was going to be played in the complex. It would have been nice had it been played within the athletics track, but I guessed, correctly, that it wasn't big enough. So that left a yet to be shown on the maps outside pitch.

On my arrival it was clear that the game would take place on the new 3G pitch, which I later found out had been there all season. There are some grass pitches being prepared, but although these were grassy(!) they didn't look developed enough to stage games on them yet. Before the match (no programmes!) started, it was good to meet up with both Carmen and Eva again, the chairperson and secretary of Cricklewood Wanderers. I first got to know them a few years ago when I watched them play at Wembley after Spurs had played in the lunchtime kick off when they played their matches at Wembley Stadium while Spurs new ground was being built. The two of them have been running the club for over ten years now, being responsible for developing players of the future.

So, it was rather ironic that five of today's opposition were once with Wanderers, one of whom was their manager. Consequently, both sides got on very well with each other. Not that the ref completely saw it that way as he booked four players from Soma and one from Wanderers. But most of them were for 'nothing' fouls or mistimed tackles. One of the lino's didn't turn up so as there was a match going on before our one kicked off the ref managed to persuade the young ref of that game to do one of the lines here and he was chuffed to bits that he would be taking home a revised pay packet of £75 for doing the two games, one after the other. The crowd watched the game within the cage from a designated spectator area on one side of the pitch and the dugouts were on the other side.

Soma are top of this league and today you could see why as the game unfolded in rural Middlesex! Wanderers are clearly a decent side themselves, but the Soma keeper had yet to touch the ball when his side took the lead on three minutes with a 25 yarder through a ruck of players. The lead was doubled on 12 minutes when the ball was stabbed home at the far post, when another free kick came to him. That goal effectively killed the game from Wanderers' point of view but after a brief rain shower passed overhead they did start to come into the game, more so after the break when at times they became the better side. But despite this they conceded a third goal, on 90(+1) minutes. Ewa was a bit upset at the end because rather like the Lymore Gardens manager a few weeks earlier, she wanted her side to win for me, because I had come to watch them play. What lovely people I meet sometimes.

contributed on 05/11/21

TT No.60: Jon T Green - Saturday 30th October 2021; FRIAR LANE AND EPWORTH v. Northfield Emerald; Leicestershire Senior League Premier Division; Venue: Whittier Road; Result: 1-0; Admission: £3; Programme: No; Attendance: 37 h/c.

The absolute thrill of groundhopping is the immense variety of grounds out there, whether that's a disintegrating Soviet style concrete bowl in Eastern Europe or a simple village ground in the Cotswolds, there is so much to appreciate and excite. Despite the onslaught of modern stadiums, the choice still seems almost endless, and I don't think I'll ever lose that sheer childish sense of anticipation, trying to spot the floodlights on the horizon and that most glorious of moments when you first push through the turnstiles and see a wide expanse of green framed by stands and terracing. This Saturday was why you get up early and come home late - it was perfect, simply perfect.

The weather hadn't been great in the early part of the day so, with a number of Leicestershire Senior League games falling victim to the soggy conditions, it was with some relief that I drove through the open gates of the car park. Situated south of Leicester city centre, the ground, currently known under its sponsored title as The Spice Bazaar Park, is within sight of county cricket headquarters at Grace Road and, if the number of parked cars was anything to go by, also within walking distance of the King Power Stadium. The clubhouse, reached by crossing a foot bridge over a fast-flowing stream, is notable for colourful murals on its white-washed walls and for the pictures of when Friar Lane played Real Valladolid in 1991. The camera records a smiling Carlos Valderrama (he of Colombian big hair fame) shaking hands with the home captain. Even for a pre-season friendly it seems a remarkable fixture.....

Inside the ground the artwork theme continues with "The Lane" picked out in the club colours of orange, white and black next to a rather surreal impression of Pacman eating footballs and a trophy. The wooden main stand seems to be held together with a combination of love and string, but it is a real beauty with a fine engraved fascia and an oversized tannoy speaker, more likely to be seen on a Mersey tugboat than at a football ground. Next door is a low covered flat standing area stretching all the way to the corner flag., Behind that lay allotments and opposite, atop a high bank, sits a busy main railway line. For a club operating at a relatively junior level, it's an absolute must see for fans of old school venues.

Little seems to be known about the about the early days of Friar Lane Old Boys (FLOB) as although there is a photo hanging in the clubhouse showing a team photo from the early 1900's, it wasn't really until the club joined the Leicestershire Senior League in 1969 did the club rise to prominence. The Division Two title was lifted in that first year before their dominance of the league saw them win the Division One championship seven times in the following eight seasons. Even more remarkable were consecutive runs to the FA Vase semi-finals where they were beaten by Hoddesdon Town in 1974/75 and Stamford a year later.

Back in the league FLOB were runners-up four times during the 1990's and early 2000's before, in 2004, merging with Epworth who had played with some distinction for a couple of years in the division below. The new club won the Premier Division title in 2006 before moving to the Midland Football Alliance where

they failed to make any real impact. They returned to their Leicestershire League four years later but, other than for a solitary League Cup triumph, further success has eluded them.

With both sides occupying places in lower mid-table, it was always going to be a tight contest and, whilst chances were at a premium, the afternoon was enlivened by the linesman on my side of the pitch engaging all and sundry in random conversation. To the referee's assessor "I was trained by one of the best, shame it wasn't you though", to the Northfield left back "It might be a free kick, it might be a throw, I'm not really sure I just blag this job every week", to a spectator "Have you still got your Renault Clio?". This isn't to suggest that the chap, who shall remain nameless, got any decisions wrong because he was constantly up with play and succeeded in putting a smile on the face of the players, he was enjoying his afternoon and so were the rest of us.

The home side also enjoyed their day as, having seen an earlier penalty well saved, they won by a solitary goal scored after 28 minutes. A long raking cross field pass was pulled down by Lane's left back Shimron Thompson Isaac before he turned inside his marker and dispatched a fierce drive into the roof of the net. In one final surreal incident the home side went down to ten men, their departing player yelling over his shoulder as he disappeared into the changing rooms "I've gotta take my daughter to a dance class and I'm already late". This was an opportunity too good to miss for our lino friend "I would've given you a lift after the game...but I don't like you".

contributed on 02/11/21

TT No.59: Craig Dabbs - Saturday 30th October 2021; Cater Bank Hounslow United v Hanworth Villa; Combined Counties League Premier Division North; Venue: Green Lane Sports Ground; Result: 1-4; Admission: £4; Programme: 40pp, free; Attendance: 57.

The best laid plans and all that. My original match was postponed on Friday evening so much trawling of the fixtures took place until Chris Berezai had convinced me that CB Hounslow United might be a good shout. This made me feel uncomfortable though - as far as I was aware they were online programme issuers only and that wouldn't do. The helpful chairman however did say they printed a handful and was happy to reserve for one me, so it was off to the smoke for yesterday's football fix.

CB Hounslow play very close to Heathrow airport and the ground is directly underneath the flight path used for landing which made for some good pictures. The club moved here quite recently with the £1.5 million facility opening in August 2017. Previously they had a groundshare with Bedfont & Feltham at the Osterley Sports Club.

The current ground has its main seated stand over on the far side (where you enter) where a large clubhouse and changing block is also situated. It is one of those pre-built stands but a decent one I think it's from Stadium Solutions. The other kit stand is found behind the goal to your left (from the same company) and

it provides shelter for around 50 I would say. This isn't the only cover though as the club have made use of what looks like and probably were two old dugouts which have been placed at either end of the clubhouse. These provide additional seating for around five each, small but they do a job and are a nice touch.

There are further pitches on the other side of the clubhouse, and it was on one of these where I think a Middlesex County League game was drawing to a close. I may be wrong because the club has a plethora of sides with a clear emphasis on youth development through a Promise Football Academy and mini kickers set up.

The club itself was formed as recently as 1989 after Richmond Rangers FC formed by a group of friends and troubled youths was disbanded and reformed as CB United. Cater Bank was a company formed by the late father of the current chairman and has been kept as part of the club's name with the Hounslow bit added in 1994 to represent the area more and also to give a nod to an old Hounslow club which was formed in the late 1800's.

The club have worked their way through the Hounslow and District League and the Middlesex County League and now play at step 5 and are comfortable with that level.

The visitors Hanworth Villa in slight contrast are a little more ambitious. Unbeaten now for 25 games, they sit five points clear at the top of the division and have a certain Sam Merson in their ranks, son of Paul. He is prolific at this level and is certainly a factor in the club's success and netted one yesterday.

CB Hounslow United couldn't really deal with Hanworth; yes, they took the lead, but it was a lucky break and afterwards whilst it was competitive and enjoyable to watch, it was one way traffic.

contributed on 31/10/21 (via Brian Buck)

TT No.58: Keith Aslan - Saturday 30th October 2021; **ENGLISH BICKNOR v Hardwicke**; Gloucester County League; Kick-Off: 15.01; Result: 0-1; Admission & Programme: £3; Attendance: 26 (23 home, 0 away & 3 neutral).

Let's start with a homage to the Gloucester County. While virtually every other league now makes it optional to issue a programme, here it is still very much mandatory with sizeable fines for non-compliance. And it's got to be a proper paper programme, none of this 'e' rubbish. Well done boys. English Bicknor checked in with a 24-pager full of glossy goodness for today's match.

I doubt I was alone in not having ever heard of the village of English Bicknor until this season's elevation to the county league. It's delightfully situated on the edge of the Forest of Dean in the Wye Valley, with Welsh Bicknor just the other side of the river. For the adventurous car-less traveller it is possible to do the ground by public transport from a two o'clock kick off, but I was fortunate to again get a lift from a well-known Stockport groundhopper. I was picked up from Worcestershire (not Worcester) Parkway. This is the only station I know of that's named after a

county. Due to a closure on the M5 he was over half an hour late so I will be sending him my delay repayment claim form.

The ground is in a very rustic setting, although around these parts it couldn't be anything else, fully railed with attractive wooden dugouts. A small bar which doubles as the village hall, with hot and cold drinks and some fine cheese and onion rolls, my favourite filling. Plenty of seats dotted around the ground and you would be hard put to find a more pleasant location to spend a Saturday afternoon.

Before the match there was a minute's silence (note: not applause) for the recently deceased club president Keith Gane. He was instrumental in forming the team in 1953 and I had a chat with his daughter who is also the club secretary. Good to see the baton is being passed on within the family. The match itself was nothing to write home about, so I won't.

It's Halloween and returning through St. Pancras there were hordes of partygoers in fancy dress. One girl was dressed as the Devil, and if Satan looks anything like she did I can't wait to get into Hell.

contributed on 31/10/21

TT No.57: Steve Hardy - Saturday 30th October 2021; Trefonen v Prees United; Shropshire Challenge Cup - 2nd Round; Result: 1-2; Admission: Free; Programme: £1; Attendance: 26 h/c.

Trefonen is a beautiful village just outside Oswestry in Shropshire. Just like fellow Salopians TNS (The New Saints), Trefonen play their football in Wales, but, like TNS again, they are allowed to play in the Shropshire County Cups as well.

We have had torrential rain across my area for most of last week, and there was some doubt as to whether this match would go ahead. Luckily, I was kept fully in the picture by Trefonen's *twitter* guru Greg who confirmed at 10am on Saturday that it was game on.

The ground is on the site of the former Trefonen Colliery, now long closed, and is known as the Pit ground. The locals have built a memorial on a former slag heap next to the pitch, with a board showing the layout and history of the mine. Sadly, this has been destroyed by local kids, but the copper, miner's statue and remembrance cross are still there.

Trefonen play their football in the Montgomeryshire League, whilst visitors Prees United are in the newly styled Shropshire County League. Despite the damp conditions, I thought it was an excellent match, with both teams giving it their all. Trefonen scored first from a penalty after 20 minutes, given for handball. Prees then equalised on 40 minutes after a slip by the Trefonen 'keeper and we went in to the break at 1-1.

Trefonen have a tea bar running as well, which did a roaring trade throughout the game from the 26 spectators there, me included.

In the second half, Prees were much the better team, with Trefonen unable to handle the very young and very quick Prees left winger. Had he had better control they would have had loads more goals, but they did win the game with a penalty of their own after 65 minutes. Overall, it was well deserved, I thought.

The bonus for me was the match programme, also available from the tea bar. Turns out they have been issuing intermittently since 1980, and regularly for the past two seasons and yet nobody had ever seen a copy. £1 for 8 matches and produced by the very busy Greg.

contributed on 31/10/21

TT No.56: Jon T Green - Saturday 23rd October 2021; Old Harrovians II v. Old Chigwellians II; Arthurian League Division Two; Venue: Harrow School Sports Centre; Result: 1-2; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 4 h/c.

Harrow School will celebrate its 450th anniversary in April 2022 but what's even more remarkable in a sporting context is the major role that their former pupils have had on the development of the game. C.W. Alcock, who attended the school from 1855-59, became FA Secretary at the age of 28 and organized the first international match in November 1870 when England beat Scotland at The Oval in London. His greatest achievement was however the founding of a knockout cup competition and, having purchased a trophy for the not inconsiderable price of £20, the first FA Cup Final took place in 1872. Wanderers, whose side contained four old boys, defeated Royal Engineers 1-0. Alcock captained the team and, despite having had a goal disallowed for handball, ended the day by effectively handing the cup to himself - it's unclear whether the current FA transparency rules would allow this nowadays. There hasn't been a former pupil in a cup final team since 1877 but ex House Master David Elleray did take charge of the 1994 showpiece between Manchester United and Chelsea.

Old Harrovians AFC were founded in 1859 making them the second oldest surviving Association Football club after Sheffield FC (1857) but, with the school deciding in 1927 to abolish the playing of the game in favour of rugby union, the club was disbanded in 1931. With the establishment of the Arthurian League in 1961 (a competition for ex-pupils of public schools and sitting outside of the FA structure) the club resumed playing two seasons later. It wasn't until 1977 that the decision was taken to re-introduce football to the school, it's a decision that remains a considerable point of contention in some circles to this day. The first of three Arthurian League Premier League championships was won by the First XI in 1978 with subsequent titles in 2004 and 2010. Cup success was achieved in 2007 when the team finally claimed the much-prized Arthur Dunn Cup (a knockout competition named in honour of the Old Etonian FA Cup winner and England international who had sought to establish such a competition in the early 1900's). Dunn, a man known for his modesty, once went off to captain England without telling his wife presumably just saying that he was popping down the shops and returning several hours later suitably muddied.

Harrow play the majority of their matches at The Philathletic Ground but today both the Third and Second XI's have been moved to the Sports Centre adjacent to

the school itself. The pitch is a caged 4G but, with flocks of gold and green parakeets screeching overhead and the spires and turrets of the school buildings visible above a tree lined steep incline, the venue feels a lot more exotic than you would initially expect. Interestingly the game is played without linesmen; the teams officiate throw-ins themselves and this works remarkably well and indeed perhaps considerably better than a few Sunday League games I have witnessed. Don't get the impression that this is a bunch of upper class, foppish City boys just having a gentle kick about, nothing could be farther from the truth. The game is full bloodied with plenty of skill on show, all that is missing is the constant back-chat to the referee and is all the better for it.

Harrow open the scoring after just three minutes as a long ball splits the visitors defence, the 'keeper, right on the edge of his area, does well to block the initial shot but as the ball rebounds away at an angle the follow-up is rolled into an unguarded net. Chigwell who have won two of their three opening fixtures respond quickly; a lofted free-kick from 30 yards is met with a bullet-like header from their centre-half (rather confusingly he is one of two players wearing the No. 5 shirt). Harrow almost regain the lead as a deep cross from the left drifts over the goalkeeper's head only to smack against the cross bar and bounce away to safety.

The half ends with the score still tied at one each; the home side are seeing plenty of the ball, but Chigwell look the more dangerous with their speed and movement causing plenty of nervous moments for the hosts. They have a big bleached blonde centre-forward who is winning absolutely everything in the air and, as the match progresses, has two glorious chances to give his team the lead. With just four minutes remaining the game is decided in favour of the visitors; a corner results in an almighty six yard box scramble and amid shouts of "hands", the ball is finally prodded over the line.

The Arthurian League has a number of early kick-offs so is absolutely ideal for a Saturday double in and around the Capital - take the opportunity to watch a decent standard played in good spirit at some interesting venues, it really is too good to miss.....

contributed on 25/10/21

TT No.55: Craig Dabbs - Saturday 23rd October 2021; Leatherhead v Merstham; Isthmian League Premier Division; Venue: Fetcham Grove; Result: 2-3; Admission: £12; Programme: 32pp, £2; Attendance: 351

Let's get the moan out of the way early; our motorway network was in fine form once more and without going into detail Surrey is a three-hour journey from Northamptonshire which is plain ridiculous. It needs serious planning going forward. As it was, I arrived in plenty of time despite the crawl down. Moan over.

Fetcham Grove was opened in 1924 and was the home of Leatherhead United FC who were formed four years earlier. After the war United merged with Leatherhead Rose to form the present club and in 1946 and the club elected to play at Fetcham Grove which required work after military occupancy.

The club built a stand in 1948 which forms part of the cover you see today which is actually three separate stands that fully cover one side of the ground. Both ends are covered with much newer structures than those on the one side of the ground. There is also a curve over the far side and quite a gap between the pitch and terrace due to the fact that there was once a cinder track around the pitch.

The whole site is susceptible to flooding and there are two marks along with dates on the walls of the main stand showing the levels that the river Mole which runs opposite rose to.

When you mention Leatherhead to a football fan it's almost certain that the club are linked to FA Cup exploits of the past and most famously their appearance in the fourth round of the 74/75 competition where the club's run came to an end at the hands of Leicester City.

Today's game saw a struggling home side who only this week have appointed a new management team to turn the fortunes around and get them off the bottom of the table. The match started brightly for the Tanners who looked good value early on until the visitor's, Merstham, made sure from the spot. This seemed to knock the wind out of Leatherhead's sails however they did go in level at half time.

The second half was much more even with only another spot kick separating the two sides in a game that should've been a draw base on the performance of both teams.

contributed on 24/10/21

TT No.54: Keith Aslan - Sunday 24th October 2021; AFC WIMBLEDON v Walton Casuals; Vitality Women's FA Cup 3rd qualifying round; Kick-Off: 15.01 (would have started on time but for extended pre match hugs); Result: 7-1; Admission: Free; Programme: £2; Attendance: 1,365; Crowd demographic data not available.

The first thing you will see of Wimbledon's new ground, is that you won't see it. You will walk down from Earlsfield station within a few yards of the stadium, and it is completely hidden from view surrounded by 'luxury' flats obscuring any signs of a football ground the other side. A walk around the perimeter to the entrance in Plough Lane is the first outward sign of what lies within. Like Brentford's new abode it's only a short walk from the previous ground and is on the site of the old Wimbledon speedway track.

A nice setup, none of the quirkiness of the old Plough Lane of course, but it would be wrong to expect quirkiness to feature in architects' plans when building a new stadium. It suits its purpose which is all that matters and a fitting venue for Wimbledon's return home. Was amused to see an area of 'safe standing' which the FA won't let them use yet. People currently stand at every league match which the FA are quite happy with. So that's unsafe standing ok, but safe standing, not so sure about that one. Aren't the people who run our national game wonderful. If it was up to them AFC Wimbledon wouldn't exist.

Still a little bit of work to be done on the ground, they can't use the hospitality areas yet as they haven't got any seats. I would have thought that would have been the first thing they'd have sorted out. Catering available for those with lots of money and plenty of toilets, a must when you get to my age. Usual gripe about the clock, why does it stop at 90 minutes? Being in London the ground is easy to get to with buses and trains all over the place. I opted for the 20-minute walk from Earlsfield station through an area that has become far more yuppified since my last visit.

This was Wimbledon Ladies first match at Plough Lane and their biggest attendance by far since AFC. was added to their name. The women's team, unlike the men, are the same as the original Wimbledon, seamlessly just adding the prefix in the close season. They intend to play all their games here from now on, but I wouldn't be so sure. Today's match was free, but you had to print out a ticket which is well beyond my capabilities. Thank goodness for the nice young lady at the library. As with all games, a programme was issued, a bumper edition today. I had the company of Wimbledon's number one supporter, the legendary Jonathan Crabtree. One Saturday with the first team not having a game, he travelled up to Durham to watch the youth team. What a star. It was he who excitedly pointed out that at a substitution in the 77th minute, the Wimbledon number 77 came on. It's moments like this that make football such a wonderful game.

As for the match there was only ever going to be one winner, cup shocks in women's football are pretty much non-existent, and the crowd, over 1000% up on Wimbledon's average all enjoyed themselves and for a fair number this was their first ever women's football match.

So that's the '92' refinished for another season. If I kept proper records, I would know just how many league grounds I have done. I well recall the excitement all those years ago of going to Scunthorpe. A once in a lifetime opportunity to do a new football league ground, I thought at the time. Unusually for me, I was wrong.

contributed on 25/10/21

TT No.53: Keith Aslan - Saturday 23rd October 2021; **SOUTHWATER v Ferring**; Southern Combination (nee Sussex County League); Kick-Off: 15.06; Result: 2-3; Admission: Free; Programme: £2; Attendance: 52 (44 home, 7 away & 1 neutral).

Plenty of buses to this one from outside Horsham Station. These buses are also the ones you want for Horsham's new ground which is a long way from the station. From the stop in the centre of Southwater walk the 'North Downs Link' for 10 minutes and here you are. The 'link' is a fantastic long-distance footpath along an old railway track. The remains of the platform and some signage are still visible at Southwater station and for the athletic hopper if you stay on the train to Christs Hospital you can walk to the ground along the 'link' in around 50 minutes. They've made a really good job of this footpath, although the one thing they could do to improve it is to start running trains again!

The ground is one side of the 'link', the large clubhouse on the other. This appears to be used as a pub by the locals and I would imagine it's well patronised

throughout the week, with beer prices to suit even my meagre resources. Programmes are on the bar with football showing on a number of screens. Knocking back the amber nectar and cuddling a programme while watching Chelsea demolish Norwich, it doesn't get much better than that.

I have great admiration for Ferring, a few years back they were in a terrible state losing every game by double figures. I last saw them play at Worthing United where they turned up with a team, some of whom clearly weren't very good at playing football and looked as though they'd been picked up off the street on the way to the game. They lost 16-0 but the important thing was, Ferring made the effort to turn up with eleven players, as they did for all their games. They could have easily thrown in the towel but kept going have now put their problems behind them and are back on an even keel. Looking at the league table also good to see St. Francis Rangers in mid-table. Three years ago, they went through a season losing every match they played. Two examples of clubs overcoming adversity.

Ferring won this one with a goal in the ninety third of the ninety minutes. Their gobby manager got sent off in the second half yet stayed on the touchline for the rest of the game. The referee was aware of this and seemed quite happy so they must have different rules down in Sussex.

Network Rail shut the fast line to Broadstairs today because they can, so another enervating journey home with a detour along the Kent Coast stopping at every station. They don't call them 'engineering works' anymore, it's 'rail improvement works'. I'm anxiously waiting for the improvement aspect to come on line, after all it's only been 30 years since they were privatized.

contributed on 25/10/21

TT No.52: Steve Hardy - Saturday 23rd October 2021; **South Notts v Phoenix Inham Reserves**; Notts Senior League - Foundation Division; Result: 5-0; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 8 h/c.

Today's fun and games took place at the Clifton Football Centre, which is immediately next door to Clifton All Whites ground on Farnborough Road in Clifton. When I arrived the two teams were warming up on pretty nifty looking grass pitch, and it was something of a surprise when we were told that the game had actually been switched to the adjoining 3G pitch. (Groan). No spectators allowed inside according to the signs on the entrance to the cage, but after a quick word with Grace, our Referee for the day, I was told I could come in and take photos as long as I didn't get hit by a wayward shot! Seemed a good idea that, so I spent the next 90 minutes avoiding sliced shots, mishit shots etc. Result.

The match was between two teams in the Foundation Division of the league. I have no idea what qualifies you to play in the Foundation Division, as both teams contained both young and very old players, so it can't be age. The 'Ressies' arrived short of players to start with, and I was told that their keeper was actually their

centre midfield maestro. He proved to be their best player in the end, making some stunning saves to keep the score down to just five.

And then there was the fire. After about five minute's play, fire alarms began ringing in the nearby buildings and 3 fire engines arrived in very quick time. With black smoke billowing out of broken windows, play ended very quickly as players from both teams ran off to move their cars out of the way of the fire brigade, and I actually thought that the game was going to be abandoned at this point. Luckily it didn't and after a ten-minute break we were off again. Notts led 3-0 at half time after goals on 20, 26 and 42 minutes, and it could have been many more without the heroics of the stand in Phoenix keeper. It became 4-0 on 50 minutes with the final goal coming on 89 minutes.

Game played in an excellent spirit I thought, giving Grace very little trouble and a relatively easy afternoon. Wish I could say the same about Sarah Satnav though, but I can't. She is obviously still sulking after being ignored by me last week, and offered very little help at all. Women!

contributed on 23/10/21

TT No.51: Brian Buck - Saturday 16th October 2021; **Lymore Gardens v Jolof Sports**; Essex Alliance Senior Division; Venue: played at Leyton Sports Ground, Crawley Road, Leyton; Result: 2-2; Attendance: 11.

I'd been waiting to tick off this ground for a few years now, the main reason being that it was once one of the homes for the Essex County Cricket Club. But the club played their last game here in 1977, although the ground is still used for non-senior cricket. It's a large peaceful place, compared with the hurly burly of the traffic passing by outside.

Although I'd never seen a game here until today, I know the area well, having over the years, been to nearby Leyton Orient (68 times); the old Walthamstow Avenue (51 times), with less frequent visits to the current Wadham Lodge ground and the defunct grounds of Leyton and Leytonstone. Additionally, over the years, I have seen the Leyton Orient youth teams play at seven different local venues! So, I know the area well. Despite this my method of travel to the ground was one I've rarely used over the years, as I took advantage of the Gospel Oak to Barking line, alighting at Leyton Midland Road station, from where the ground is just over a five-minute walk away.

After having a lengthy chat with the jovial Council supplied parking attendant, a Leeds United fan and ascertaining that there was no bar at the ground, I headed off to the Coaches & Horses, which was close to Leyton Orient's ground and which I last visited in June 2016 during the African Nations (UK) Cup which was being held on the nearby Hackney Marshes (East!). It is described in their blurb as a 'relaxed British pub with entertainment'! Well, if you call being squashed in with a load of cheerful Orient fans waiting to see their side draw 0-0 with Walsall, then I suppose it was.

But soon it was time to go and watch my match, along with another non-local Groundhopper who told me that he was trying to tick off the Essex Alliance. Anyway, we were made to feel most welcome by the both the manager and his wife and although our requirements were undemanding, they did everything they could to make our day a happy one. This included providing us with free hot refreshments at half time. My main question was answered though, which was, why are the team called Lymore Gardens, when I believe that the only other one in the country is to be found in Bath? Apparently, there was one locally once, but it got demolished when a new housing development was built!

The game though didn't quite go the way the hosts wanted it to. We watched it from the far side of the pitch, where we could see the large old cricket pavilion in front of us. These days, although it's still in use, the outside of it is starting to need a bit of TLC. In this almost no friction game, Lymore took the lead on 27 minutes from about 30 yards out with good build up play. But three minutes later Jolof were level with a 25 yarder after the keeper had strayed too far off his line. Then on 38 minutes Jolof took the lead from a close-range effort from a short cross from the left. But it was all square by half time after the ball was side footed home from the edge of the area following a pass from the left. Much to the disappointment of the home manager, Lymore never got going after the break and Jolof dominated this half, but Lymore defended well enough to stop them scoring again. It was good to note that both sides totally respected the match officials today. So afterwards I made my way home a happy bunny. Not only was everyone so friendly and I thank them most sincerely for this, but all my travel connections worked perfectly as well.

contributed on 22/10/21

TT No.50: Jon T Green - Saturday 16th October 2021; YNYSHIR ALBIONS v. Cwmaman United; Ardal Southern League, South West Division; Venue: The Oval; Result: 4-3; Admission: £3; Programme: Free but online only; Attendance: 74 h/c.

This really might be a first as today's game has been chosen on the basis of a work of art. Now before you all go thinking that I have ideas above my station, and will be talking about post modernism impressionism, I must point out that the painting was of a football ground (what else?) and appeared in caricature form on the front of the excellent *Welsh Football* magazine.

Ynyshir Albions (I do love that it's "Albions" in the plural) were formed in 1992 and joined Division Two of the South Wales Senior League. They clinched promotion as champions in 1998/99 before going on to win the Division One title four years later. Success followed in the South Wales Alliance as Albions progressed through the divisions before joining the Welsh League in 2019. Their home ground, The Oval, is a little cut-off from the village itself, separated by a busy road which has to be crossed by bridge. Rail access is via Porth on the Rhondda line and runs south to Cardiff. There are a couple of good value cafes in Porth and from there it's a 20-minute walk to Ynyshir. The Oval consists of one stand, complete with smart red seats salvaged from Brentford's Griffin Park, and to either side of it a few steps of terracing - watch the game from here as the views of the hills are just

breathtaking. There is flat standing on two other sides with no access behind the goal to the right.

The home side had begun the season in blistering form winning five straight matches but, after back-to-back defeats, they find themselves four points adrift of the leaders Cardiff Draconians, albeit with games in hand. Cwmamman arrived having won their last two matches, both on a Friday night and both under lights.

If the opening exchanges of this encounter were anything to go by the visitors are pretty handy on a Saturday as well with Calem Rees forcing Jason Pritchard into a smart save. Pritchard was powerless on eight minutes, as with Albions calling for a foul, Kyle Ashford broke through the defensive line before lifting his shot into the roof of the net. Their lead should have been doubled as Ryan Hurlow beat the right-back, but Rees drove his low cross disappointingly wide. Somewhat against the run of play Ynyshir drew level, Carn Thomas being first to react to a corner and finding the target through a clutch of defenders. The goal gave the home side new life and on 35 minutes they took the lead with Liam Eason executing an overhead kick which bounced treacherously beyond 'keeper Nathan McNeil. McNeil was nearly beaten again on the stroke of half time and did well to keep out a Zack Philpott's free-kick.

Cwmamman began the second period brightly with the twin threat of Ashford and Rees causing some uncomfortable moments for the home rear-guard, but it wasn't until the final 20 minutes did the game really explode into life. First the speedy Hurlow sprinted down the left and, when he played the ball inside, Rees was there to sweep it past Pritchard. Three minutes later the visitors had another as substitute Geraint Rees set up Ashford who made no mistake with a well struck right foot drive. Yet another Rees was involved as Albions drew level, this time it was Alex who found himself unmarked at the far post and the substitute made no mistake with a powerful header from close range. With referee Mr. Lewis checking his watch the ball was swung into the penalty area for one final time where Eason rose highest to direct a perfect header back across goal and into the far corner. Queue wild celebrations on and off the pitch.

On a perfect Autumnal day, it was an absolute pleasure to visit this progressive club where the welcome could not have been more genuinely warm. With this division in the Welsh pyramid looking extremely competitive the Ardal South West should be, for sure, added to your must see list.

contributed on 19/10/21

TT No.49: Craig Dabbs - Saturday 16th October 2021; Saltney Town v Aberystwyth Town; Welsh Cup Fourth Round; Venue: Sandy Lane Result: 0-0 (Aberystwyth Town win 5-4 on penalties); Admission: £3; Programme: 24pp, £2; Attendance: 604.

Saltney Town are not known to issue programmes very often and so a couple of weeks ago when they announced they would, for what was their biggest game to date, there was only one choice for me today.

Saltney Town were formed in 2010 and have played for much of that time in the Welsh National League (Wrexham) Area until restructuring saw them placed in the new Ardal North West League; strange I guess as you really can't get much more East than this with the ground less than a mile from Chester and therefore England.

There's evidence of football in Saltney since 1908 and indeed Saltney United reached this very round in 1910. In more modern times there was a Saltney Community Centre FC playing out of Sandy Lane in the 90's but that fell by the wayside with the current club taking up the football baton as I said in 2010.

The ground, which is situated in the Welsh part of town, is still quite basic and whilst the whole site is private, the ground doesn't have that enclosed feel to it with it being a railed pitch with another running behind the goal parallel with Chester Road. The rail is completely filled in and there is cover courtesy of two small, seated kit stands situated alongside each other on the Sandy Lane side of the ground.

The match saw the third tier Bordermen more than match Welsh Premier side Aberystwyth, and yes, the visitors were the better side but were completely lacking in any imagination in the finishing department relying on five good penalties to see them through a difficult tie. The home team can hold their heads high on that performance.

contributed on 17/10/21 (via Buck Buck)

TT No.48: Steve Hardy - Saturday 16th October 2021; Hillfield v Kingstanding Phoenix A; Birmingham & District league - Intermediate Cup Round 2; Result: 1-4; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 2 h/c

Have I mentioned that the Birmingham & District league is my all-time favourite league in the world? What, that many times, eh? Well, it is.

Today's match took place at Birmingham & Solihull Rugby club, which is just off junction 3 of the M42. This is a vast complex with the floodlit main pitch and at least 7 other rugby pitches around it. Then, through a hole on a hedge at the far right of the set up are a herd of football pitches too, and that is where my match today took place. Today was one of many internal cup competitions the league has and featured two teams who are both in division 4 of the league.

The score-line flatters Hillfield, I must say. They were a shambles from start to finish with seemingly no idea of who was playing where, what formation they were using or what the point of the game actually was. Phoenix, on the other hand, were excellent, and but for a dodgy home linesman and very weak Referee, they would have had umpteen more than the 4 goals they were begrudgingly allowed.

To sum up, Phoenix were three up at half time and coasting. After the break, shock of shocks, the Phoenix keeper flapped at a cross and punched it in to his own net. 1-3. Could an unlikely comeback be on the cards? No chance, and once

Phoenix got their 4th on 69 minutes I sat back and waited for the avalanche of goals to arrive. Sadly, it didn't, but it was still a fab day out in South Birmingham.

For once, I didn't need Sarah satnav. You could hear her clearing her throat repeatedly to remind me she was there, but it is a path I have driven so many times that I knew it like the back of my hand.

contributed on 17/10/21

TT No.47: Keith Aslan - Saturday 16th October 2021; **WOODNESBOROUGH v Snodland Reserves**; Kent County League Division 1 Central and East; Kick-Off: 14.44; Result: 1-1; Admission: Free; Programme: Donation; Attendance: 57 (45 home, 10 away & 2 neutral)

Still suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder after last week's disastrous return trip from Sheffield, I decided to stay local today and with Woodnesborough currently issuing programmes, this fitted the bill perfectly. But of course, *South Eastern Trains* weren't going to make things easy with even such a short journey down the coast requiring some rail replacement action. I decided to ignore the trains and give my bus pass a workout. A wonderful stress-free journey with the bus, a mere 3-minute walk along the boulevard from my country retreat, taking me all the way to Sandwich. Coming from London this is the railhead with an hourly bus service to the ground. Don't get off in the village, still the best part of a mile to go, but alight at the bottom of the hill and you'll see the ground on your left.

As grounds in Division one of the Kent County League go, this is as good as it gets. Railed on one and a half sides, major dugouts, wasted on Snodland who didn't have anybody to put in them. A bar, hot food and a tannoy, but whoever chose the records needs to have some musical appreciation lessons. My hot drink came in a cup that informed me the contents were 'smooth, silky and indulgent'. Just tasted like coffee to me. The ground is in a very remote location, and one wonders where the players all come from to make up Woodnesborough's three teams.

A game that was good entertainment but a bit on the frisky side with Snodland having a player sent off late doors by somehow managing to get himself booked twice within a minute which takes some doing. The away team bought along a few supporters which added to the atmosphere with their enthusiasm somewhat enhanced by the on-site availability of alcohol. I wonder what makes you become a Snodland Reserves fan when the first team were playing at home? All in all, a trip to Woodnesborough is highly recommended, but don't leave it too long in case the enthusiasm for programme production wanes.

Refuelled at the chippy in Sandwich before Stagecoach South East carried me almost to my front door and I arrived back at my dacha over six hours earlier than last Saturday. No need to record Strictly Come Dancing this evening.

contributed on 16/10/21

TT No.46: Brian Buck - Saturday 9th October 2021; **Worcester Raiders v Studley; uhlsport Hellenic League Division 1**; Venue: played at Worcester Rugby Club,

Sixways Stadium, Warriors Way, Hindlip, Worcester; Result: 1-4; Attendance: 150 approx.

Today I gratefully accepted the lift offered to me to tick off this ground. The ground is right next to Junction 6 of the M5, and we arrived without encountering any serious traffic problems, although with a name like Sixways for the stadium, goodness knows how we'd have coped with the traffic control cameras had there been roadworks here! We even had time for a relaxed slurp in nearby Droitwich beforehand. Parking at this, 11,000 capacity (average attendance 7,000) ground was easy, and the first thing we had to do at this cashless stadium was to buy a ticket from the ticket office. It was the largest ticket I have ever received for a non-league game.

Then once we had scanned it at the turnstiles, we were in. Next step was to find the bar and after about 30 of these steps we eventually found it, at the top and back of the 7,500-seater stand, we were now in! I fancied another pint, but to get it was rather like getting a cup of coffee from a tea machine. You pay by card, put a plastic cup in the machine and hey presto your pint suddenly appears. Hot drinks and food were also available here, but I didn't partake. I didn't see any programmes either, but then I didn't ask about this.

For a national league rugby ground this was a good ground to watch football in. My only gripes were that on this artificial pitch, the rugby markings in white dominated the football markings which were in faded blue, plus the fact that pre-match you could hear the loud music blaring out over the tannoy system, but not the quiet announcer.

The game itself wasn't great, but just as we were wondering if we were going to see a goal today, Studley took the lead on 37 minutes, following a first time shot from a deep cross from the left. The first half had started off rather evenly but as it wore on, so Studley gradually got on top. The second half saw this theme continue. On 60 minutes and as the warm sun was replaced by cooling clouds, the floodlights were unnecessarily switched on at around the 60-minute mark. The lights on the four pylons are in the shape of the letter 'W'. The game really needed more goals and at the end of the match we got them. Firstly a 20 yards direct free kick on 84 minutes saw Studley double their lead and three minutes later they got a third after the scoring player only just beat the offside trap as he ran on. Then on 89 minutes Raiders scored and the lights flashed on and off to celebrate, before Studley scored the last goal of the game from the spot after being obstructed by the keeper.

Overall, this was an enjoyable day out. I must get a job as a steward here. They were all very polite and helpful, but on the day, there were far too many of them. You also wonder for just how long the Raiders will play here. They are a Step 6 side at present and as much as I would love them to do well, in the short term I can't see this happening and I understand that it is only by the welcome generosity of the owners of the rugby club that they are allowed to do so. Meanwhile not far

away, Worcester City were busy losing 2-1 to Tividale in a Midland League Premier Division match in front of a crowd of 551 at the County Ground in Claines Lane, a rather tight venue with difficult parking. You can't help but wonder if the respective clubs would do better if they swapped grounds.

contributed on 14/10/21

TT No.45: Keith Aslan - Saturday 9th October 2021; ECCLESFIELD RED ROSE v Swinton; Sheffield County League; Kick-Off: 14.11 (2 o'clock too early for Swinton!); Result: 1-2; Admission: Free; Programme: £1; Attendance: 22 (15 home, 4 away & 3 neutral).

Having remarked on what a good train journey I had last week, God, who seems to have it in for me, decided to even things up today with my return subject to delays of apocalyptic proportions. But let's start with the good stuff and what a revelation Ecclesfield's ground turned out to be. I wasn't expecting very much from a plastic pitch inside a college, but don't be put off, this was a proper football ground. Grass banking on two sides topped by trees, with the far side containing some nicely laid out gardens. Plenty of seats, some with picnic tables, to watch the game in comfort, with the Pennines forming the background. Hillsborough College is obviously big on horticulture with a mini nature reserve built next to the entrance. Just up the road from Owlerton Speedway track there are plenty of buses from the city centre. Stock up on eateries in town before you come out, no food available in the vicinity unless Dukin' Doughnuts is your bag.

One minute to kick off, both sides out on the pitch with Ecclesfield ready to go, but Swinton who had been aimlessly running round cones for the past half an hour, decided now was the time to go back to the changing rooms where they stayed for 10 minutes leaving the home players kicking their heels and the spectators fuming. It's not just me who gets wound up by this sort of thing. Swinton walked right past the referee who didn't feel moved to make any comment. They showed absolute contempt for everybody else and judging by the referee's indifference, the late kick-off won't be appearing in his report. On the subject of the match officials, lineswoman Clare Thompson is one to look out for in future, when she got out of her car, I mistook her for a W.A.G.

A hard-fought encounter, literally. When a wonder goal by the Ecclesfield number nine pulled the score back to 1-2 midway through the second half, guess what happened next. Goalkeeper and forward had a fight over who should get the ball back to the centre circle which developed into the obligatory mass brawl with a running headbutt by an Ecclesfield player resulting in them having a numerical disadvantage for the rest of the match. Also, amid the mayhem one player gave the Swinton goalkeeper a smack which I reckon the referee saw but ignored on the grounds that the keeper thoroughly deserved it.

And going off on a bit of a tangent, do you know who was the first Premiership manager to be sacked? You would do if you'd read the quiz in the programme. I should have known the answer but didn't. It was Ian Porterfield.

Apart from the obvious paper attraction I chose this match because the 2 o'clock kick off meant a (fairly) early return to my country dacha, but I needn't have bothered. The early start, or as early as Swinton felt they could manage, was so the players could get into the pub before it filled up with Sheffield Wednesday supporters who were at home half a mile up the road. Honestly. Got back as far as Harpenden where the train stopped for 55 minutes. Points failure at Kentish Town. Moved on down to Mill Hill for another 35-minute rest. Fair play to Mrs. Guard who was tip top on giving out information (unlike some) and when she announced the technicians expected to have trains running again in three hours' time, there was a mass exodus onto a local train on the adjacent platform, crossing over with people getting off said train as they'd lost interest with it running over an hour late. After 20 minutes waiting on this one the driver announced we would be going one stop up the line to Hendon then terminating. This is what I wanted to hear, and at Hendon we all embarked on a mass 15 minute yomp up the hill to Hendon tube station and made our way into London on the underground, arriving in St. Pancras just in time to miss the Broadstairs train and so spent another 55 minutes there. But it did give me time to get very well acquainted with the girl serving in Greggs. Also investigated what had happened to the original train I was on; it still hadn't arrived. And just to add that extra bit of spice to the journey it was a rail replacement bus between Ramsgate and Broadstairs. Got home 3 hours later than anticipated. Didn't think this sort of stuff was going to happen when the railways were privatized. Surely the politicians didn't lie to me.

contributed on 10/10/21

TT No.44: Steve Hardy - Saturday 9th October 2021; Kenilworth Wardens v Coventry Polonia; Coventry Alliance - Division 1; Result: 5-2; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 14 h/c.

Every now and again you pick a game to go to and it turns out to be a gem. This was one of those games. Older readers may remember Kenilworth Wardens playing in the Midland Combination many years ago. I never got there though so today was the day to rectify matters.

The club play at The Wardens Sports ground, which houses a cricket square, several rugby pitches as well as the football pitch. I tried very hard to find out where the 'Wardens' part of their name came from, but nobody seemed to know. Interestingly both the cricket and rugby teams are also called Kenilworth Wardens, so perhaps it is just a case of adding the vast sports' club name to each side?

Today's visitors were Coventry Polonia who were all Polish speaking and dressed very smartly in the Polish national team kit. Took their poor manager ages to fill in the team sheet, but hardly surprising when you consider most of his player's names don't have any vowels in them.

The match itself wasn't as one sided as the score-line would suggest. Polonia had several chances throughout, but their defence/keeper wasn't able to handle the lively Warden's centre forward who scored 4 himself as well as being sin binned before half time for berating the referee to do something about the very biased

Polonia linesman. Had he not kept his flag permanently up when his team told him to, the score could well have reached double figures.

3-0 at half time then, and plenty more to come, I thought. Even a cracking Polonia goal on 53 minutes was only a brief interruption as Wardens scored again just two minutes later. A second Polonia goal was the least they deserved and the number 9 rounded things off with his 4th goal on 80 minutes.

I completely ignored Sarah Satnav on the way there and you could sense the exasperation in her voice. Turns out she was right, so I followed her preferred route going home and it was 10 miles and 10 minutes shorter. Sorry Sarah. Can we still be friends?

contributed on 10/10/21

TT No.43: Brian Buck - Saturday 2nd October 2021; Sheerwater v AFC Croydon Athletic; Cherry Red Records Combined Counties League Premier Division South; Result: 3-3; Attendance: 43.

Today I travelled by public transport for the first time since the first Lockdown started last year, mainly to try and conserve my petrol supply. I also picked a new ground which had both cover and a 3G pitch. However, when I rang up the secretary pre-match, he told me that the match might still be off as he had been told that there was a hole in the pitch and as he was on the way to the ground to inspect it, he didn't know just how big it was at this stage. But when I spoke to him later, he told me that the hole had been downgraded to an indentation and the game was definitely on. And it was.

The downside of the day was that I got soaked in the heavy rain as I walked for the 20 or so minutes it took me to reach the Eastwood Leisure Centre, not helped by the fact that I soon discovered that my shoes weren't waterproof! The entrance to the ground is off the first roundabout on Albert Drive if going westward off the A425 and the ground itself is only a few hundred yards, if that, away from their old ground at the athletics track in Sheerwater Recreation Ground, where on 26 October 2002 I saw The 61 FC (Luton) beat Sheerwater 4-1 in a Cherry Red Books Trophy 2nd Round match (Attendance: 20 approx).

Today I arrived early enough for a couple of pints in the spacious bar from where I could have seen most of the pitch and watched the match for nothing, but the home secretary gently encouraged me not to do this! So, after more puddle splashing, I entered the ground and was pleasantly surprised to find that there was cover down the whole side of the pitch. At the back of the stand there was one row of seats behind the shallow terracing, with the appropriate yellow diagonal lines in front of them. This was fine for today's small attendance, but if the club move into the big time, then adjustments will need to be made. You can actually walk around the whole pitch, but with today's inclement weather, I didn't see anyone attempt this! The only problem I spotted, if indeed it is a problem, is that spectators and players have to use the same exit/entrance to the cage which houses the pitch. But again, this wasn't a real problem today.

The game turned out to be a decent one despite the rain which got heavier as the game progressed. Sheerwater scored first, on 16 minutes with Croydon equalising ten minutes later. Within two minutes the hosts were back in front again and on 65 minutes they extended this lead. In deteriorating conditions this should have been enough to secure the points for them, but opposition goals on 90(+1) and 90(+5) minutes made sure they got a share of the points, which was probably deserved. Then came another soggy walk through the puddles and back to the station.

contributed on 06/10/21

TT No.42: Jon T Green - Saturday 25th September 2021; **NUNEATON GRIFF v. Bewdley Town; FA Vase Second Qualifying Round; Venue: The Pingles Stadium; Result: 0-3; Admission: £5; Programme: £1; Attendance: 49.**

The Mill on the Floss was written in 1860 by Nuneaton's most famous daughter George Eliot (George was actually a lady named Mary Ann Evans) and her book is described as a "story of pain and suffering ending in total extermination" all of which very neatly sums up Griff's afternoon as they were swept aside by Bewdley Town.

In truth, Nuneaton wasn't really today's intended destination but with the town proving devoid of fuel the scheduled trip into darkest Mid Wales before returning to Norfolk looked at best ill advised. In the end everything turned out rather splendidly, the sun shone (at times it bordered on the genuinely hot), the ground, even with an athletics track, proved an enjoyable venue and the club themselves were incredibly friendly.

Formed back in 1972, as Nuneaton Amateurs, the team have had a pretty successful 50 odd years moving upwards from the Coventry and North Warwickshire League, where they would have been champions in their inaugural season. They were only denied the title when their opponents failed to show up and the league management committee deemed there to be lack of sufficient time to re-arrange the fixture. By 1975, and now known as Nuneaton Griff (disappointingly after an area of the town rather than the mythical beast) they were playing in the Coventry and Alliance Suburban League where they remained until the late 1990's after which they joined the newly formed Midland Football Combination. Placed straight into the Premier division, Griff won back-to-back titles and in 2001 completed a remarkable double by lifting the Endsleigh Challenge Cup at Villa Park before claiming the Coventry Telegraph Cup at Highfield Road just 24 hours later. The last eight of the FA Vase was reached in 2016/17 with a record crowd of 870 turning out at the Pingles Stadium.

With Nuneaton Town also at home today that attendance record was never going to be threatened but, with the sun beaming across the ground, it was still a perfect Autumn afternoon. Not that things went perfectly for the home team, as Bewdley, without a league win this season, tore into them from the very start. Josh Carpenter went close to converting a Sammy Lester cross and Dan Bayliss went even closer with a header from a free-kick. Patrick Kollie, wearing huge white gloves rather reminiscent of Sepp Maier, was rather unluckily beaten after

20 minutes when Dylan Harte's low shot was deflected beyond him. Kollie was given no chance a minute later as Zak Kourouyiani's right foot centre was met with a glancing header by captain Simon Rudd. With a little under 15 minutes of the half to play the game was over as a contest; Harte juggled his way past the Griff left back before threading a pass into the path of Carpenter who, adjusting his body shape, steered the ball back across goal and into the net.

The second half was noticeably better for The Heartlanders as skipper Ross Proudlock directed a header just over whilst centre forward Chanda Mulenga tirelessly worked the front line despite a notable lack of quality service. Town should have extended their lead as Chris Seekins, on as a sub, was denied by a brilliant double save from Kollie before the same player somehow contrived to spoon his shot over from just three yards when surely it must have been more difficult to miss.

In the First Round Proper Bewdley have been rewarded with a home tie against fellow Midland Football League Premier strugglers -Racing Club Warwick.

contributed on 05/10/21

TT No.41: Steve Hardy - Saturday 2nd October 2021; Langley v Berks County; Combined Counties League - Division One; Result: 3-1; Admission £3 OAP rate; Programme: £1.50; Attendance 29 H/C.

Langley play at Arbour Park, which is the new Slough Town FC ground, so I was able to kill 2 birds with one stone by this visit. A new ground and a new programme!

I must admit I quite liked the ground. It may be that as my normal fare is an unrailed ploughed field, then anything of this standard is sure to impress, but I suspect not. Cover on all four sides, and two stands along the sides. The main stand was excellent, with a viewing rail at the top for folks who like to stand and watch their footie.

At one stage as I peered through the torrential rain, I could have sworn I could see Noah's Ark coming towards us on the Stoke Road. Like most of the south of England, it rained heavily all afternoon, but that had no effect on the game as Arbour Park has a plastic pitch.

The game itself took some getting used to. Langley are an 'in your face' team that give the opposition no time to settle on the ball at all. Berks never quite able to cope with it, and it took Langley just 13 minutes to open the scoring following panic in the Berks defence. A second goal quickly followed as a belter of a shot flew into the net on 22 minutes. Berks got back into the game briefly from a headed goal following a wicked cross, but any comeback was quickly dashed by a 3rd Langley goal from another long-distance strike on 33 minutes.

3-1 at half time then and we sat back and waited for more of the same in the second half. It wasn't to be though, as neither side could gain the upper hand, and

it ended 3-1 to Langley. The win was their first of the season, and they were able to move up from the bottom in the process. Berks remain in 5th place, but it is very early days of course.

Getting out of Slough after the game was a nightmare and I could sense that Sarah satnav was unimpressed by my slow process. I have to stop when traffic lights are red, Sarah, so try not to get exasperated with me.

contributed on 03/10/21

TT No. 40: *Keith Aslan* - Saturday 2nd October 2021; **WEST ALLOTMENT CELTIC v Wickham**; Northern League Division 1; Kick-Off: 15.02; Result: 1-2; Admission: £3 for the chronologically challenged; Programme: £1; Attendance: 86 (68 home, 12 away & 6 neutral).

Another Saturday, another new build, and a trip to the far north for this one. Neat and tidy, Mr. Atcost is the lead architect with three examples of his work dotted around the pitch. Important bit is the adjacent hall containing a much welcome respite from the continuous drizzle, and even more welcome sausage rolls and burgers. Palmersville is the Metro station for this one which is a ten-minute walk from the action. A typical Newcastle suburb, ie. pretty grotty. Its grottiness was enhanced by the miserable weather. But it's good to see the football club back where it belongs just a couple of miles away from the village from which it takes its name. When they were bunged out of their previous home in 2018 an ill-fated sojourn at Newcastle Blue Star's ex. ground nearly bankrupted them, but things are now looking good for Celtic, and they appear to be back on an even keel.

The club have a rich history and as most people will know they were formed in 1928 through a merger with West Allotment Juniors and West Allotment Primitive Methodists which threw up the obvious question, what is a Primitive Methodist? With the name Celtic in their title, it's no surprise they play in green and white hoops while the opposition turned out in the black and white stripes of Newcastle United. Playing in Division 2 in last years truncated season the Allotment were 'invited' to take promotion to the higher grade and while their current results would suggest it was an ambitious move, todays match showed they are just as good as anybody else in the division.

Bottom of the league with 3 draws and no wins from their ten games, conversely Celtic have won four cup ties, two in the F.A. Cup and two in the Vase which they are still in, with last week's 8-1 victory against fellow Northern Leaguers Blyth Town being particularly eye catching. On today's showing I can see the problem with their League form, they are very, very, unlucky. They were by far the better side in this match, and hit the metalwork three times, yet still somehow managed to lose. As somebody once said, It's a funny old game. Results will surely pick up soon.

I enjoy my visits to the Northern League where the spirit of the now retired inventor of the 'Groundhop', Mike Amos, lives on. Over 700 miles travelled today, and all the trains ran perfectly. Were that it was always so.

contributed on 03/10/21

TT No.39: Brian Buck - Saturday 25th September 2021; Erpingham United v East Ruston; North East Norfolk League Saunders Coaches Division 1; Result: 3-7; Attendance: 11.

After rescuing a partly injured rabbit sitting stunned in the middle of the road leading up to the ground, I arrived at the village hall about three quarters of an hour before kick-off. Apart from the teams warming up, there didn't seem to be much else going on, so I retreated to the car until close to kick off. Woodforde's Brewery was based in this village from 1983 to 1989, but these days it's located in Woodbastwick, some miles away.

There was a small, caged arena where some boys were having a kick around and this was 'policed' by a lady sitting on a chair by the adjacent clubhouse. A similar thing happened with the nearby children's play area, where an elderly lady took a chair to sit and watch some kids playing on the swings. Is this place the home of the Health & Safety executives?

Meanwhile on the pitch there was a game waiting to happen. The playing arena was lush and generally flat, but in some parts, they had forgotten to remove the recently mown grass. Also, the groundsman must have made too many visits to the brewery, as the touchline markings wobbled all over the place on one side of the pitch. Only once have I seen worse pitch markings and that happened after having three pints in a pub in Lamberhurst, I had two goes at marking out the pitch in a Tunbridge Wells Veterans League match. Neither of my attempts were anywhere near straight!

The pitch today was long and narrow, and it sloped from side to side, a factor which would become very relevant during the game. Despite not being the better side, the hosts soon found themselves in the lead, by way of goals on 6 and 16 minutes, both scored by their number 9, James Moore, who looked far too good a player for this team. Perhaps then, it was no surprise that when I checked *Full-Time* next day, his name was nowhere to be found! East Ruston, the last ground I visited before the first Lockdown started on 14th March 2020, pulled a goal back on 32 minutes and really the hosts slippery slope to ultimate defeat started from here. To delay matters whilst they were in the lead, whenever the ball went out of play and was kicked into the bushes and trees on two sides of this tightly enclosed ground or into the thick undergrowth behind one goal, no effort was made to retrieve it quickly or kick another one onto the pitch.

At the break the ref pumped up two match balls himself. In the second half East Ruston quickly had the game won. Starting on 50 minutes they scored four times in ten minutes. The first three of these goals came from long throws from the top of the slope and were either tapped or headed home. However, to me it looked as though the throw-ins were one handed 'chucks'! On 72 minutes Erpingham pulled a goal back to make the score 3-5, but five minutes later that scorer got himself sin

binned! Soon Ruston claimed their 6th goal and on 89 minutes their final goal came from yet another long throw. So ended a very disappointing day for the hosts and they remained bottom of the table with no wins from their five matches. It was also a bad day for their reserves. They too are bottom of the table, with no wins from four matches. Today they lost 15-0!

The day was enjoyable enough though as my groundhopping aims were fulfilled here. I don't know quite how the hosts see their future, but the fact that they could still field two sides must count for something. Sometimes us Groundhoppers have it too good. Today I just ticked off a ground which I will probably never return to and next week I will go somewhere else. The people who run the club will most likely stick with it every week, living with results like this until things improve, or maybe not. It's they who deserve the plaudits, not me!

contributed on 29/09/21

TT No.38: Steve Hardy - Saturday 25th September 2021; Sportsco v Silhill B; Birmingham & District League - Division 1; Result: 0-4; Admission: No; Programme: No; Attendance: 2 h/c.

Another trip into the depths of Birmingham's badlands. This time to Minworth, just outside Sutton Coldfield, and the brand-new facility of Sportsco FC. The club have led a nomadic life over the years, but have now acquired this large area of land, and are setting about making it their forever home (as cat lovers everywhere say). The main pitch is outside the spanking new clubhouse and dressing room block, which was open when I arrived, but mysteriously closed just after the match started. In the distance I counted at least 4 other pitches laid out and it looks to be an ideal home for the club.

The visitors today were Silhill B, or second team, to you and I. They are the epitome of an amateur club in my opinion and the behaviour of their players today was exemplary. At one stage the Sportsco keeper made a brilliant save and to a man the Silhill players applauded him and shook his hand. Had they not been winning easily, I still think they would have done the same thing.

The match wasn't as one-sided as the score-line would suggest. As the home manager said at halftime the only difference between the teams, was that his boys were missing the bite of a final touch. Silhill took the lead on 20 minutes through a penalty given for handball and led 1-0 at the break. After half-time it was still fairly even until a brilliant chip from some distance, over a stranded keeper on 56 minutes, made it 2-0. After that a few home heads went down and Silhill were able to score a couple more for a convincing 4-0 win.

So, yet another new ground in my favourite league in the world. Still two more to go I reckon and possibly more by the way clubs change grounds without telling anyone.

contributed on 26/09/21

TT No.37: Keith Aslan - Saturday 25th September 2021; PRESTON PARK v Broadwater Athletic; Brighton Worthing & District League; Kick-Off: 14.06; Result: 2-5; Admission: Free; Programme: £2; Attendance: 10 (4 home, 1 away & 5 neutral).

It has always been my dream to watch a match in the Brighton Worthing & District League and today that dream came true. And what better day to pick a visit to Brighton than while the Labour Party Conference is taking place. You couldn't escape it with banners of 'Captain Hindsight' everywhere above the slogan 'Stronger future together', somewhat ironic coming from the Labour Party. You couldn't walk more than a few steps without someone either trying to flog you a copy of the 'Socialist Worker' or attempting to get you to join the Labour Party. As an aside, back in the day I had a mate who joined The Workers Revolution Party. He was young and idealistic (weren't we all) but left after six months saying it was 'too political'. I'd have thought the word 'revolution' might have been a bit of a giveaway on that one. Outside the conference hall it was a protesters paradise with three going on within a few yards of each other. Climate change, Israel and China all had their groupings, each gathering had plenty of banners, whistles and someone with a microphone. Climate change doesn't bother me as I'll be worm food long before that one takes effect. I've nothing against Israel either, but I'm tempted to join the one against China where they put you in prison for not wearing a facemask. Plenty of police around, but not the slightest hint of any aggro. While most people take it for granted, we are very lucky to live in a country where protests like this are allowed. I did ask at the Conference Centre if I could buy a ticket for one of the party meetings, but they were all sold out. Warning: The last sentence may not be completely true.

You would think the station for Preston Park would be Preston Park and you'd be completely wrong. Falmer is the one, the same station as for Brighton and Hove Albion, with the Amex about a quarter of a mile away. I could see some logistical challenges to playing when Brighton are at home, but the Preston officials were pretty laid back about the idea. Mind you, it hasn't happened yet. A ten-minute walk from the station, 5 to the ground then another 5 to get into it, this was clearly a major stadium once upon a time. A huge bank behind one goal has some very old wooden terracing visible among the undergrowth, and I suspect a visit from Tony Robinson would reveal a lot more. A spectacular view from the top, not just of the match but of the South Downs which created a scenic backdrop. The Aldridge Community Academy has a couple of grass pitches and a 3g one which 'Traveller' says is the one they play on. Thankfully it isn't. Inside the main building are the changing rooms, a drinks machine and a food machine, both empty, and on another hot day the water cooler would have been most welcome had that not also been devoid of contents. The arduous climb up the banking precludes a half time visit to the changing rooms, Broadwater didn't even bother to use them at all and changed pitch side.

Both teams had 100% records, so something was going to give this afternoon and it was the home side. Much to enjoy, particularly a couple of the Broadwater goals, one of which was a lob from the half-way line. When David Beckham does it, it's

replayed over and over again for the whole world to see, but at this level only 10 spectators were a witness, never to be seen again. A smart glossy programme was on sale for £2, far better than Tuesday night's effort at Brentford, and inside was a free copy of 'Grassroots Football', a new magazine to me but lots of reading for the journey home.

Preston Park F.C. are on the up, as well as programmes they have their own *You Tube* channel. But all for 4 supporters?

V2 - contributed on 26/09/21

TT No.36: Keith Aslan - Tuesday 21st September 2021; BRENTFORD v Oldham Athletic; Carabao League Cup 3rd round; Kick-Off: 19.48; Result: 7-0; Admission: Just a fiver for old people! Programme: £2 (total rubbish); Attendance: 12,819 (home -, away - & neutral -: forget it!!).

I enjoyed this one much more than I thought I would. State of the art new ground, although nothing like the various artists impressions that have been appearing in the Brentford programmes for the past twenty years. Looks good, perfect sightlines as you would expect, only small gripe was the randomly coloured seats, which like York City, look a mess. Apparently, the colouring is deliberate as it disguises any empty seats and makes the ground look full for the TV cameras. Don't think empty seats is a problem for Brentford, at the moment. You can see the game on a big screen, although I don't know why you would want to do that when you can watch the actual match taking place in front of you. And why do the clocks only go up to 90 minutes then stop. When was the last game you attended that only lasted 90 minutes? A good atmosphere, even for an inconsequential cup tie like this one, and the pre-match light show was very effective. The stadium is adjacent to Kew Bridge railway station with a tunnel built to connect the ground to the platform.

Brentford rolled out their reserves for this one, with the big guns sitting on the bench to bring on if needed. As the score line indicates, they weren't. A minute's clapping like seals was an undignified way to mark the passing of Jimmy Greaves, and when the players 'took the knee,' more applause. Why on earth do people feel the need to clap at someone who kneels down for a few seconds? If I did it with my dodgy knees, I would expect some kind of recognition, particularly if I managed to get up unaided afterwards, but not fit footballers who are just making some kind of political gesture imported from America. Brentford's star player, Ivan Toney, who is black, refuses to join in so there's two of us who see this nonsense for what it is. Why not clap the 'Respect' handshakes as well?

With Oldham struggling to stay in the league any ambitions of a shock result disappeared after 4 minutes when Marcus Forss scored the first of his four goals from a penalty, and from then on it was an exercise in keeping the score down. Oldham's number 24, the catchily named Dylan Bahamboula, played in a pair of tights a la Keith Weller. He was substituted at half time, possibly to save him from further ridicule. As the game progressed the Oldham supporters got a bit restless, and a mass infiltration of stewards was needed to calm things down. Most of their

ire is being directed against their owner. Abdallah Lemsagram running a football club is about as effective as a diversity awareness seminar being run by the Taliban.

Having only paid £5 for a wonderful evening's entertainment it would be churlish to complain about the programme, but then again, I am a very churlish person. For league games Brentford do one of the best programmes in the country, but for matches like this, they just don't bother. There was more reading material on my matchday ticket, and you won't hear this very often from me, but at £2 the programme was a waste of money.

Highlight of the journey home was whilst waiting for the train at Kew Bridge when, to my surprise, the *Flying Scotsman* went through. I don't normally get gooey eyed over steam trains, but in the dark, this was a sight to behold. You could see the passengers (customers?) reclining in first class opulence tucking into their boiled grouse. Just like travelling on '*Avanti*', but probably cheaper. And an extra special thankyou to South East Trains for turfing everybody out at Ramsgate to get on a Rail Replacement Bus. At 12.30 in the morning who could wish for more.

contributed on 22/09/21

TT No.35: Brian Buck - Saturday 18th September 2021; Deddington Town v Longford Park; Banbury District & Lord Jersey FA Premier Division; Result: 4-1; Attendance: 25 approx.

The day got off to a bad start when, for various reasons, I left home for the game a little later than I intended. I find that when I do this, I invariably forget something and today it was my flask of coffee and sandwiches. Of course, had I got here earlier then I could have resolved the problem by visiting one of the four pubs in this delightful little, but expensive, town on the edge of the Cotswolds. With a population of around 2,000 it will set you back around £81 a night for a three star B & B, but you will be safe as I'm told that *Midsomer Murders* has yet to appear here! Anyway, with only half an hour to spare following my arrival and eventually finding that neither the adjacent Windmill Centre or the nearby Chinese takeaway did teas, a little kiosk near the kiddies play area did and this satisfied my needs.

The club was established in 1888, but one of my co-watchers told me that having gone through the local newspapers of the time he found out that they were actually formed two years prior to that. They have played here at the Windmill Centre since 1995, having previously played in the ruins of nearby Deddington Castle, which apparently offered spectacular views of the crumbling castle.

Just before kick-off, the main stand started to fill up and soon two locals turned up and, with me, it became three quarters full! It consisted of two beamed seats and was unsuitable for people with big bums! There was a minute's silence before a lump of poo was removed from the pitch. It must have been a very important lump of poo!

As for the game, it was the hosts first league match of the season and, for the first fifteen minutes or so, they were under the 'cosh'. But gradually the game settled

down and exchanges became more even. However, on 36 minutes Longford took the lead by way of an angled shot and, in truth, the goal was not unexpected. But within a minute Deddington were level from a 25-yard shot. There seemed to be arguments as to if the goal was offside or not and, before play could restart, the experienced ref left the playing arena to have words with a disgruntled Longford spectator and I had visions of seeing Detective Chief Inspector Barnaby turn up to resolve matters. But eventually he was not needed. Deddington played much better after they scored and, the early promise of Longford faded after the break. In the second period Deddington took the lead on 69 minutes with a close-range header. A third goal followed on 85 minutes after the keeper hadn't covered one of his posts properly and a fourth goal arrived on 90(+1) minutes when the ball was volleyed home from 12 yards out. Overall, this was a good day out and as I left my two new friends, they were thinking of applying for planning permission to erect a roof over 'their' stand! I suggested that they get backs added to the benches as well, but I think that they thought that I was pushing my luck here!

contributed on 22/09/21

TT No.34: Craig Dabbs - Monday 13th September 2021; Milton Keynes College Football Academy v Berkhamsted Raiders; Spartan South Midlands League Division Two; Venue: played at Sport Central; Result: 3-0; Admission: Free; Programme: 16pp, £2; Attendance: 128.

Just four miles from work, this was a very easy visit on a Monday night brought about by the issue of a programme, leaving just one to go now in Division Two. Sport Central isn't the best place to take in a game, although the urban backdrop improved it a little.

Sport Central is very close to where the old National Hockey Stadium was situated, and I'm told that you can still see the original office blocks. Built by the council as a legacy on the reclaimed land it was opened in 2017 with the aim of providing Football, Rugby, Basketball, Netball and Tennis to the local community. In 2019 Milton Keynes College took on the site with the College's Football team using it for their college's programme including the English Colleges FA matches and, from this season, Spartan South Midlands League football which is seen as another vehicle in which their players can improve their game.

Sport Central then is what it is, an excellent facility located close to the town centre - ideal for participants, but for spectators it's dreadful although at least there's a café. The best vantage point was on a small bank opposite the entrance and accessed by leaving the site and walking down towards the supermarket and along a public footpath. Yes, you were still looking through a cage, but you did have an interesting backdrop and you could see all of the pitch which wasn't the case from in front of the café where there is a large standing area, patio if you like.

Should the club wish to progress, I actually think it's possible here because they have just as much room as they do at North West Counties side Lower Breck FC and the token 100 seater stand could easily be dropped into place in that area to

enable that. For now, I think Division Two is exactly what they are looking for and it's seen as a development rather than a swift march through the pyramid that's the objective.

On the pitch the Academy made light work of the Raiders who quite honestly didn't do much in the way of raiding all evening and looked poor in comparison. MKCFA didn't have the best of starts to life in the league but have certainly got going now and I expect that they could be there or there abouts come May.

contributed on 19/09/21

TT No.33: Steve Hardy - Saturday 18th September 2021; Punjab United v Willington Reserves; Midlands Regional Alliance - Division 2; Result: 2-2; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 5 h/c

This was the third ground I have seen Punjab United play at and, surprisingly, I had not heard of this venue before, at all. The new home is Chellaston Park in, er, Chellaston in Derby. The venue has a cricket square, this main pitch and a couple of other pitches I spotted far off in the distance. There is also a large block housing dressing rooms, an upstairs lounge bar and a veranda bar for meals.

The match itself was a cracker. Both teams went at it all game and in the end, I thought the draw was the fairest result. Punjab took the lead on 5 minutes before the Stiffs had really settled, and Punjab really bossed the rest of the half without managing the vital second goal. The second half was a different story with Willington equalising on 51 minutes through a mesmerising solo goal from a player who beat everyone twice on his way to scoring. An even better goal then gave them the lead. Looked like a training ground routine to me, as a free kick was floated into the penalty area. It looked to have been over hit, but a Willington player appeared from nowhere and headed a superb goal from an acute angle.

Punjab were clearly rattled by this, and a touchline melee followed as United management and subs took exception to the Ressies' lino and attacked him after he gave another dubious offside decision. The Ref, who had a fine game, intervened and suggested Willington change their lino, and that Punjab calm down before he sent anyone off. That done the game restarted, although Willington, who clearly weren't happy with the outcome of the melee, then started shouting abuse at the Punjab lino who they thought was completely wrong in every decision he made as well.

Anyway, handbags over we had an outbreak of football, with Punjab getting a deserved equaliser near the end.

So, another excellent day out in a very competitive league. There are some duff teams, admittedly, but overall, a very good standard indeed.

contributed on 19/09/21

TT No.32: Keith Aslan - Saturday 18th September 2021; CASSINGTON RANGERS v Ducklington; Witney & District League Division 2; Kick-Off: 11.00; Result 0-0; Admission & Programme: £4; Attendance: 133 (20 home, 2 away, 111 neutral).

The first post Covid hop, and while I'd already done the second and third grounds, the morning kick-off at Cassington fitted the bill perfectly to enable me to get home in time to watch the first episode of a brand-new series of 'Strictly Come Dancing'.

Didn't seem like such a good idea when the alarm went off at 5 o'clock in the morning, but being young and fit I leapt out of bed and was soon skipping down the road towards the station. Was joined at Ramsgate by Thanet's number 2 hopper who spent most of the journey to London asleep, these youngsters have no stamina. Bus S2 provides an hourly service from Oxford bus station to Cassington Turn, free for me of course, but £3 for my young companion. The ground is a 12-minute walk from the bus stop. Managed to get through Oxford without being murdered, which as anyone who watches 'Morse' will know, is a bit of a result. One downside of the journey was that the McDonalds on platform 1 at Paddington and the one just outside the station, have both closed. What's going on there Ronald? Arrived at the match in an advanced state of malnutrition, but the meaningful sausage and bacon baps on sale at the ground revived me.

Cassington were only formed in 2019 and have been promoted from the fourth to the second division of the Witney League without actually completing a season. Lots of footy facts in the programme, the most interesting of which was that the 1878 cup final was refereed by a Mr. Bastard. And how many people know that 'Subbuteo' is named after *Falco Subbuteo* which is the Latin name for the Eurasian Hobby Bird of Prey. The half time teaser was to name ten teams in the Witney League with the clues all in morse code. To think some people say programmes are an anachronism. Incredibly I heard one hopper moaning that he had to pay £4 to get in. As every other game Cassington will ever play will be free to enter, one wonders why he chose to visit on the one occasion where admission is being charged. Hops are social gatherings and it's nice to meet up again with people I hadn't seen since pre-Covid, and good to see so many have survived against the odds. As previously mentioned, hot food was available but don't turn up for a non-hop match and expect the same range of goodies. Well done to Chris and Laurence for their usual excellent organization.

Some 0-0 draws can be very entertaining, but in truth this wasn't one of them with the game being a bit scrappy without the 'S'. Let's just say there was room for improvement in the shooting department. At the final whistle while everybody else made their way to further football action, I set off home. Bus back was 20 minutes late, but given the horrendous traffic on the A40, it did well to make an appearance at all, with roadworks adding to the chaos. And on another hot day I don't think you could have squeezed any more people into Oxford City Centre. Make the most of it people, Lockdown 4 is just around the corner.

contributed on 18/09/21

TT No.31: Brian Buck - Saturday 11th September 2021; Crouch End Vampires v Old Stationers; Southern Amateur League Senior Division 2; Result: 1-2; Attendance: 8.

Rather surprisingly, to me, I have never been to this ground before, so rather than wait until the more appropriate Halloween, for obvious reasons, I decided to get it ticked off today.

The ground is about a mile away from that of nearby Wingate & Finchley, but on the opposite side of the North Circular Road. The club were formed in 1883 and in the early years they were rather nomadic as they didn't seem to stay anywhere for that long. But in 1952 they moved into their current ground and pitch. Later on, the Muswell Hill Playing Fields were extended and these days it houses several other pitches and today one of the club's lower teams were playing on the furthest one from the main pitch. The main pitch is divided from the others by a children's play area, and it is in a bit of a hollow as it is banked on one side and behind one goal. They have a clubhouse here which was open, but no one seemed to be using it until probably post-match.

Getting here was a bit of a problem, as I elected to take the shorter route, in terms of miles, thus ignoring the instructions from my Sat nav and I got stuck in traffic in Barnet and Friern Barnet before arriving at the ground about twenty minutes before kick-off, rather than half an hour earlier, as I intended. This was good news in some respects as otherwise I would have had to suffer watching Crystal Palace beating some local team to here, on the clubs TV!

The Vampires have had spasmodic success throughout their existence but more recently, in 2018/19, they won the Southern Amateur League Senior Division 3. Today they put in a rather toothless display, against a side really not that much better than them. The sides seemed to have a bit of 'previous' though, as just before kick off one of the Stationers players shouted out, "Come on, they've got no ringers today!" He said this twice, but no one responded. As you can see from attendance shown above there were very few present, although people did come and go during the match, but they didn't always stay that long. Also, and I might be wrong here, neither side seemed to have proper managers and what there was of the crowd seemed to do most of the encouraging, although one of the hosts people did seem to have the 'Three Lions' on his trousers. But it was the players themselves who seemed to do the coaching and the subs.

The match was played without lino's and on 33 minutes Stationers took the lead when the scorer followed up his own blocked shot. We then had to wait until the 75th minute for the equaliser, a header from a corner, which by this time was partially deserved, but three minutes later the visitors won the match after the ball was swept home from close range following a cross from the right. The Vampires did make an effort to get an equaliser, but it was not to be their day.

I was pleased to get the ground ticked off but in reality, for a club with such a famous name this was far too low key. From what I saw today they survived on just a handful of people running the club. But they do have lots of other teams, both at adult and youth levels, so perhaps if they carry out their plans to relay the first

team pitch and build a new clubhouse it will help the club look to their future with confidence.

contributed on 16/09/21

TT No.30: *Jon T Green* - Saturday 11th September 2021; NEW BRADWELL ST.

PETER v. Totternhoe; Spartan South Midlands Football League Division Two;

Venue: New Bradwell Recreation Ground; Result: 0-1; Admission: Free;

Programme: No; Attendance: 53.

As is synonymous with a team named after a saint, the origin of the club is closely linked to the church. Formed in 1902 by members of St. James' church as Stantonbury St. James, they soon became Stantonbury St. Peter although it's unclear whether the congregation also moved to the St. Peter camp in some sort of religious transfer deal. Early success was had as they won the North Bucks & District League in 1912/13, a title they retained the next year. They were champions again in 1938/39 setting a rather unenviable record of being league winners in the years preceding the outbreak of both World Wars. With football back under way in 1946 they merged with New Bradwell Corinthians and adopted the current club's name.

The 1970's saw the club join the South Midlands League where Division One titles were won in 1976/77 and 1983/84. With the amalgamation of the South Midlands and Spartan leagues in 1997, St. Peters were placed in the Senior Division and promptly gained promotion to the Premier. The turn of the century saw them defeat Milton Keynes City on penalties to capture the Berks & Bucks Senior Trophy. A series of promotions and relegations followed culminating in their resignation from the league in 2017 after failing to meet ground grading requirements which would have seen them continue as a Division One outfit. Help was at hand though as St. Peters were resurrected a year later when fellow Milton Keynes based Loughton Manor adopted the name and relocated to the Recreation Ground.

Putting aside the obvious wrongs of franchised football clubs, it's easy to take a lazy, jaundiced view of Milton Keynes and, providing you have no especial aversion to roundabouts, the tree lined roads and green spaces are something to be thoroughly enjoyed. New Bradwell forms a part of the greater MK conurbation but feels a million miles away from the shopping and entertainment areas of the central area. A walk along the tow path of the nearby Grand Union Canal is literally a breath of fresh air.

St. Peter's home ground is shared with the local cricket club (something which stops the pitch from being fully railed at one corner) and has had floodlights since 1998. On the far side from the separate changing room and club house buildings is a wonderfully kept grandstand. Although simple in design, breezeblock walls beneath a sharply sloping roof, the real beauty is in the colour scheme. One half is claret and the other pale blue with the steel work cleanly finished in white. There are a few basic bare metal benches (certainly more durable than plastic if a tad cooler to the touch in mid-winter) set on the two rows of concrete terracing. Dug outs, also made of metal but containing padded seats (players are clearly more sensitive than us fans), are situated close to both ends and painted in contrast to

the stand itself. From here, looking out across the pitch, the sails of the fully restored 18th century Bradwell windmill can be seen rising above the tree-tops.

The game was a classic not for the goalmouth action but for the tactical masterclass given by the visitors' coaching team and one that would have had the pundits purring with delight if pulled off by Pep or Klopp in a midweek away European tie. Totternhoe pressed from the front and mercilessly harried the home side all over the pitch; this against a side who had started the season with five straight wins. Not that Totternhoe were in poor form themselves having taken maximum points from three games in seven days. The only goal of the game arrived after 14 minutes as Josh Spavins converted with a low drive from the left-hand side of the box, although they might have added to their lead late on as the home side increasingly played a high line. Bradwell's chairman had somewhat prophetically commented pre-match "Totternhoe: they're a good side and will be there or thereabouts". On the basis of this performance, you are a good judge Mr. Chairman.

contributed on 15/09/21

TT No.29: Keith Aslan - Saturday 11th September 2021; **BALSALL & BERKSWELL v DSC United; Midland League Division 3; Kick-Off: 15.03; Result: 4-3; Admission: Free; Programme: £1; Attendance: 40 (29 home, 0 away & 11 neutral).**

When the Luftwaffe made a flying visit to Coventry in the single most concentrated bombing raid of the second world war the place was left in ruins, but it's risen like a phoenix from the ashes and only 79 years later proudly boasts the accolade of '*U.K. City of culture 2021*'. This prize is awarded every four years and their predecessors, Hull, set the bar very high with an aquarium being the centre piece of its celebrations. Lots of events happening in Coventry, but I'm not sure how a visit from the Radio 1 roadshow qualifies as 'culture'. This is a highly sort after accolade, and is apparently worth millions in tourism, but anyone who goes for a staycation in Coventry must be a bit short on holiday ideas. There is a raft of cities bidding for 2025 including such cultural hotspots as Wolverhampton, Newport, Bradford, Wrexham and bizarrely Great Yarmouth whose credentials as a city are a tad disputable. Exciting times ahead.

The football team play in the village of Balsall Common which is a couple of miles west of the U.K. City of Culture. The ground is a 12-minute walk from Berkswell station. A modern clubhouse with some heavy-duty cheese and onion rolls among the face filling fayre on offer. Plenty of programmes available at the bar and while a lot of clubs higher up the food chain should be issuing and don't, it's good to see a number of teams like Balsall giving the paper a go. Although formed way back in 1947 this is their first try at Midland League football, having spent nearly all of the previous 70 odd years in the Coventry Alliance. And to answer the question on everybody's lips, their opponents DSC stands for Digbeth Snooker Club.

The Balsall *twitter* feed described the match as 'a great game for the neutrals' and they weren't wrong. 0-1 at the break, it all happened in the second period. We had a bit of a wait for the action as half time lasted an enervating 28 minutes. The elongated stoppage was due to a lengthy dispute about the DSC team sheets with a

late arrival appearing in the first half and playing when he shouldn't have done. Finally, it got sorted out and off we went with 56 action packed minutes. It took the away side 2 minutes to increase their lead, Balsall pulled one back, then DSC missed a penalty. Two more home goals saw the home side 3-2 up on 90 minutes, but these days a game is nowhere near finished and there was plenty more fun to be had. On 90 + 3 DSC equalized, cue a big punch up. Usual stuff with players from both sides trying to grab the ball for the re-start. Why do they do this, they never used to. The upshot of this naughtiness was three bookings and a sending off. A draw then? Nope, and on 90 + 10 Balsall scored a dramatic winner. Phew! Amid all the excitement I couldn't help thinking that a 3 o'clock kick off shouldn't still be going on at 13 minutes past 5.

Missed my train of course, but every cloud has a silver lining, and by getting a later service home from Coventry I was able to share the journey with a load of Millwall supporters coming back from West Brom. What a bunch of sweeties.

contributed on 12/09/21

TT No.28: Steve Hardy - Saturday 11th September 2021; **Blurton Reds v Three Spires United**; Staffs County League - Division 2; Result: 7-2; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 8 h/c.

Another game in a 3G pitch in a cage (groan). A 3G pitch with no spectator access (double groan). When I checked out the ground on *Google* maps earlier, I could see the 3G pitch, but also 2 grass pitches, so I had assumed the game would be played on one of those. No chance, as one was a rugby pitch, and the other was a kiddy size pitch.

The venue was St Thomas More Catholic Academy in Blurton, Stoke. To be fair, the floodlit 3G pitch was in excellent nick. I asked if I could come inside the cage and take a few photos and that was fine too, so on with game.

Visitors Three Spires United, from Lichfield, are in their first season in the league, and are currently having a torrid debut with this game being their 4th defeat in a row. They looked incredibly young to me as well, and with one exception, they are probably all under 19s. Their problem was their defence which couldn't handle a very lively Blurton attack, but credit to them they kept going and even managed a couple of goals of their own in the second half. 3-0 at half time with many Blurton chances spurned, became 7-2 at the end and was no more than Blurton deserved.

Hosts Blurton are in their second season in the league but don't seem as well organised as TSU. When I arrived, there were at least 15 players warming up on the pitch and 2 lads still in civvies standing in the car park frantically ringing their mates up to see if they were coming. I had assumed it was Blurton on the pitch warming up, but I was totally wrong. Eventually Blurton kicked off with a bare eleven, and no substitutes.

So, a champagne job for me as I recomplete the Staffs County League again. As I only needed this ground then perhaps Champagne is a bit excessive, so perhaps a *Tizer* job is more appropriate.

contributed on 12/09/21

TT No.27: Brian Buck - Saturday 4th September 2021; Magna 73 v Northfield Emeralds; Everards Brewery Leicestershire Senior League Premier Division; Result: 2-1; Attendance: 45 approx.

The ground of Magna 73 can be found in the countryside on the Leicester Road just after you leave the northern end of nearby village Countesthorpe. The club is named partly after nearby Wigston Magna and partly after the year they were formed and they have played at their Meadows Sports Ground for most of their existence, but it was also the home of Wigston Rugby club for many years. Buses seem to pass the ground to and from civilization roughly every 15 minutes or so.

On my arrival here about an hour before kick-off, a reserve match was taking place on the main, railed off on three sides, pitch, a vet's game was taking place on the second pitch and a cricket match was also in progress. There were also four other unused pitches here, so the place was a hive of activity. I had a pint of cider before the match and was a bit surprised that it was from the Bulmers stable. The club bar also served hot food.

The game I saw was a decent one. Both sides had been 'put up' a division this season, a term used by a former referee, who seemed well known locally. He revealed, allegedly of course, that today's ref could have gone to the top had he not embarked on his hobby of fathering six children instead! I think that by the end of the game we both agreed that although he had a decent game, there were learning points for him to consider. However, my new-found friend tipped new local Premiership ref, John Brooks, to go all the way.

As for the match, by half time you would have tipped the visitors to win it. However, it was Magna who were winning, courtesy of a 15th minute goal, scored against the run of play, when the ball was guided home first time from about six yards out from a cross. The first half statistics showed one goal and two other attempts for the hosts and no goals and eight chances for the visitors. The second half not only saw the cricket match finish early, but it also saw Emeralds score an equaliser on 57 minutes, when the scorer rushed into meet and finish off with power, a cross from the right. The goal had been coming and at this point I fully expected them to go on and collect all three points. But somehow Magna dug in and on 65 minutes the scored what would prove to be the winner, when the ball sat up nicely for the scorer to score from about 15 yards out. This goal was still against the run of play though. So, as the game moved on to its conclusion things became quite tense, even though most of the goalscoring chances created by both sides had dried up by now. As time ticked on, I moved around to the dugouts to get the scorer's name's - the first thing I noticed was a wheelie bin full of empty cans and bottles by the home dugout. Then on 90(+4) everyone heard what was thought to be the final whistle from the ref, but in fact it was his attempt to defuse a coming together which was eventually resolved by a couple of yellow cards. Then after the final whistle did go a few minutes later, it looked as though it might all kick off again, but after another blast on the refs whistle the respective parties

separated, albeit seemingly reluctantly. Overall, I enjoyed my day out here. This was the best Saturday game I'd seen so far this season and there was plenty of enthusiasm around the place.

contributed on 08/09/21

TT No.26: Steve Hardy - Saturday 4th September 2021; Hopwood Swifts v Cannock United; Birmingham & District League - Division 5; Result: 4-4; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 5 h/c

Hoorah! The first games of the season in my favourite league in the world. I think I have four new grounds to visit this season, so where better to start than Hopwood, where my local club Cannock United were the visitors. Cannock were in the West Midlands Regional league last season, but went through a torrid time, culminating in a 17-0 home defeat to Shifnal in the end of season cup. Following that game, they resigned from the WMRL immediately, and have now been accepted into the BDL and placed in Division 5.

Hopwood are also newcomers to the league. The club is based at the Hopwood Community Centre on Redditch Road. The centre here contains the changing rooms and apart from the pitch, there is a small kiddies play area behind one of the goals. No facilities pitch side, not even a rope around the pitch, but the surrounding trees and bushes contained a herd of blackberry bushes which I basically spent the afternoon troughing.

The game itself was fab, being played in a very good spirit and well reffed by Kenny. Both teams held the lead twice, and a draw was a fair result in my opinion. Not a good day for either defence, of course, but excellent keeping and attacking meant there was barely a dull moment.

The score went from 1-0 to 1-2 and 2-2 by half time. After the break the same pattern was followed as we went 3-2 to 3-4 with the equaliser coming on 82 minutes.

Glorious sunshine throughout as well with the only downer being endless queues on the M6 and M5 meaning a journey of less than an hour took me nearly 2 hours eventually.

contributed on 05/09/21

TT No.25: Keith Aslan - Saturday 4th September 2021; KINGSCLERE v Hook; Hampshire Premier League Division 1 North; Kick-Off: 15.03; Result: 0-1; Admission: Free. Programme: £1; Attendance: 66 (57 home, 5 away & 4 neutral)

Kingsclere is equidistant between Newbury and Basingstoke stations with the 'Link' bus offering an hourly service from both. Got there ridiculously early by virtue of catching a bus from Basingstoke that should have left 3 minutes before I arrived. The buses in both directions were almost full which is unusual these days outside of London. As everybody knows, Kingsclere was the winner of the Hampshire and Isle of Wight *Village of The Year 2018*. The certificate sits proudly in the village hall which includes the words: 'Excellence in localism'. Is localism even a word? On

arrival the first port of call was the tea shop for a bacon and brie panini served by a girl with pretty eyes which was the only bit I could see above her mask. Next, a visit to the local store with a big sign outside saying masks are still compulsory. No, they aren't. Finally, to the pub where I had to sit down and wait to be served at my seat by a masked barmaid. It's as though 'Freedom Day' never happened, here is one village that won't have to change very much when Lockdown IV gets going

The ground is an eight-minute walk from the village centre. It's the Hampshire League so you know what to expect, a rope round the pitch is about the size of it. It's adjacent to the village hall where hot drinks and nibbles were on sale. I was immediately identified as a groundhopper (note to self: must change image). When I said where I had come from the reaction was, 'how admirable'. I've never been called that before, but I think he really meant sad, but was too polite to say it. For the second half of last season Kingsclere did a sort of monthly magazine cum programme, but today's offering was match specific. Wittily titled 'Loud and Clere' it was 12 pages of colour glossiness and must have cost a fortune to print, so why leave them in the changing rooms and only produce copies on request. While the groundhoppers avariciously grabbed them I doubt if many of the other spectators even knew they existed. Spread the joy around boys, get someone to sell them and make a few 'bob'. Pre-match I had a word with the Hook treasurer who wasn't as enamoured as he might be with their promotion to the Hampshire League this season due to the additional expense. I asked why they went up and was told the players wanted it. Perhaps they should pay for it then. I did suggest doing a one-off programme would boost the coffers, but he didn't sound convinced.

The match will stick in my memory for a very strange occurrence in the second half. The game was stopped, and the referee had a conversation with a couple of the Hook players. He then came over to near where I was standing and said one of their players was complaining of racist remarks from someone in the crowd, and if it happened again the Hook players would walk off the pitch. I didn't hear anything myself but what bemused everybody was that the entire Hook team, like the home side, were a 100% white Anglo-Saxon and it will forever remain a mystery what was said that could be construed as racist. All a bit weird if you ask me. Anyway, Hook decided to hang around until the final whistle and were rewarded with their first ever 3 points in the Hampshire League.

contributed on 04/09/21

TT No.24: Jon T Green - Saturday 28th August 2021; CARLTON TOWN v. Cambridge City; Northern Premier League Division One Midlands; Venue: Bill Stokeld Stadium, Stoke Lane; Result: 1-0; Admission: £9; Programme: £2; Attendance: 160.

It was cold. Not just cold but really mind numbingly bitter with a wind chill that found its way down into your lungs and froze you from the inside out. A low hanging mist drifted over the freezing streets obscuring what little watery sunshine dared make an appearance. That day in late November there had been no football in the town as the game fell victim to the least surprising of frozen call offs. As chance would have it only a last-minute postponement of this weekend's chosen

fixture in Derbyshire has provided the opportunity to finally strike Carlton's ground from the dreaded "seen but not visited" list.

Named in honour of former chairman the Bill Stokeld Stadium, as it's officially known, is buzzing this afternoon. The excitement is not in anticipation of the forthcoming Millers' match but because the clubhouse is showing the Derby v. Forest game and the Reds have just netted a late equaliser. It's been a smart move by the club to screen both this and the tea-time Premier League fixture either side of their own game, it's kept the beer flowing and the cash registers ringing.

Football has been played in these parts since 1904 when Sneinton FC were founded and soon achieved considerable success by winning four Notts Alliance League titles before the end of the decade. There followed something of a hiatus before the 80's and 90's culminated in them reaching the Supreme Division of the Central Midlands League. Then, playing under the current name of Carlton Town, the new century saw them promoted to the Northern Counties East League where, after winning Division One in 2005/06, they finished third in the following campaign to earn promotion to the Northern Premier League.

As the teams line-up, the tannoy announcer welcomes the visitors. and pithily remarks that he didn't realise that Cambridge was in the North, he has a point and one which won't be lost on their coach driver who is going to become overly familiar with the A1 over the next nine months.

City start the sharper with Isaac Maynard testing the reflexes of home 'keeper Kieran Preston who produces a fine save. Preston is having a busy, few minutes and is at full stretch as centre-forward Thomas Hitchcock's header clips the bar. Cambridge have a back line containing some big lads and their physical presence in the air is causing Carlton problems at both ends of the pitch. Louis Czerwak, a willing runner and central point of attack for Town, increasingly goes wide to find some relief and from this position sets up Danny Elliott for a headed chance. On a dry, dusty pitch, half time is reached scoreless but it's far from a dull game. The resumption sees a flurry of activity; Niall Davie fires narrowly wide for Carlton, strong penalty claims for the visitors are waved away by referee Mr. Jones before Hitchcock once again strikes the crossbar with a header. The only goal of the contest arrives just after the hour as Nathan Watson stoops low to head home following a free-kick but the drama is far from over: City substitute Jonas Kalonda sprints clear and is bundled to the ground, Mr. Jones points to the spot but Preston, who is having a great game, maintains his impressive performance by palming away Hitchcock's penalty. Kalonda is involved again seconds later as once more he is fouled, the ensuing fracas turns increasingly ugly with City's Ryan Swift landing Dan Brown a sly punch to the back of the head. Swift may have escaped punishment, but Max Ryan is less fortunate and receives a straight red card for his part in the brawl; along with his departure go the visitors chance of an equalizer. The result condemns Cambridge to their third successive single goal defeat; whilst for Town three goals in as many games has given them a haul of seven points - thin margins would seem to be the order of the day.

contributed on 02/09/21

TT No.23: Brian Buck - Bank Holiday Monday 30th August 2021; The 61 FC (Luton) v Codicote; Spartan South Midlands League Division 2; Result: 3-0; Attendance: 53.

Today was the day to put right something that I got wrong over 40 years ago. It was on Thursday 21st August 1980 that in believing the then *Stevenage Gazette*, I headed over to Luton from Stevenage by public transport to watch what I thought was a first team home match between The 61 FC (Luton) and Leighton Town. But on my arrival, I found that the fixture had been misdescribed in the Gazette and it was actually a reserve game instead. The 61 FC (Luton) won that one 3-2. So after never having seen a first team game on their ground, which is a couple of hundred yards from Luton Town's Kenilworth ground, I finally rectified the situation today.

The surroundings are much more pleasant than I remember and I'm sure that the trees behind one goal weren't there on my last visit. The ground is fully railed off and is banked on one side and drops away on the far side as it was in effect carved out of the side of a hill many years ago. With the sight of planes coming into land at the airport and some pleasant countryside to look at and with some large covered standing in the corner by the clubhouse, this was no bad place to spend an afternoon.

One constant over these 40 years is the club's secretary Richard Everitt who with the help of a local vicar helped form the club from a church team sixty one years ago this year, hence the clubs name. Richard is also chairman of the Beds FA these days. At the time I must have left a lasting impression on him at the time because on 1 May 1984 he remembered me well enough to agree to give me a lift to a match at Winslow United when I rang him up.

As for today's game it was one both sides needed to get something out of as neither side had picked up a point at this stage in the season. It was the hosts who would eventually prevail though. The first half was just about shaded by them. However, on 16 minutes Codicote nearly scored with a 40-yard lob, but although it beat the keeper it then went on to bounce on the dry pitch and over the bar. Soon 61 FC had two powerful shots in quick succession, but they both hit the framework of the goal. Then on 43 minutes they did score when the ball was bundled over the line from a free kick.

The second half was more one-sided and on 58 minutes the hosts doubled their lead when the ball was rifled home cleanly from just inside the area and ten minutes later the same player shot home in off the post to put the final outcome beyond doubt. The afternoon was made even more sweet for the hosts as this was their first league win since 22 December 2018, although obviously the last two seasons had been abandoned. But overall, I was pleased for Richard, who along with several others, has been with the club for so many years through thick and thin. May this be a turning point for them.

contributed on 01/09/21

TT No.22: Brian Buck - Saturday 28th August 2021; Silver End United v West Bergholt Reserves; Essex & Suffolk Border League Division 1; Result: 2-1; Attendance: 30 approx.

Silver End is a village in Braintree. It was conceived as a model village by the industrialist Francis Henry Crittall who established a Crittall Windows Ltd factory there to manufacture components for metal windows. Crittall, or "The Guv'nor" as he was known to his workforce, had a vision to provide his workforce with houses and amenities, in close proximity to his window factory. Thus, over six years from 1926 Silver End village was built.

In 1928, a large department store was opened with 26 various departments under one roof; burnt down in 1951, it was re-built and today houses the Co-op and adjacent shops. By 1927 the village hall boasted a first-class dance floor, cinema, library, snooker room and health clinic. It is the largest village hall in the UK. The village includes some noteworthy early examples of Modernist architectural design; the distinctive white, flat-roofed houses on Francis Way and Silver Street are the work of influential Scottish architect Thomas S. Tait, a leading designer of Art Deco and Streamline Moderne buildings in the 20th Century who is also credited with designing the concrete pylons on Sydney Harbour Bridge.

Now onto the football! In line with the local design, the village has two large recreation grounds, on opposite sides of the road. Silver End play on the southerly one and access to it is down a narrow track off Silver Street. It also possesses a decent wooden clubhouse which is in keeping with the décor of the area and it had a bar which was open before kick-off. I'm always amazed to find clubs at this level have clubhouses. This one also had a young cleaner on site. But she struggled to do her job, as she found at least three spiders in the gent's loo and after they were removed for her, she then spilt some bleach!

As for the game, it was played out on one of the biggest pitches I've seen for some time. Both teams contained players coming towards the end of their careers, if they ever had ones originally that is! The upshot of this was that they felt fully qualified to tell the ref how to do his job. The worrying thing was that sometimes he seemed to listen to them! When are we going to get refs who tell players how to do their jobs! Despite not necessarily being the better side, the hosts took the lead on 40 minutes with a close-range effort and the same player doubled it on 62 minutes after some good build up play. Bergholt were better than this though and after they pulled a goal back on 79 minutes they tried hard for the equaliser, which wouldn't come. A decent day out then and everyone seemed to enjoy themselves, in this typical type of match at this level.

contributed on 01/09/21

TT No.21: Keith Aslan - Saturday 28th August 2021; DEARNE & DISTRICT v Sheffield Res; Central Midlands League Premier Division North; Kick Off: 15.00; Result: 4-2; Admission & Programme: £3; Attendance: 70 (62 home, 4 away & 4 neutral).

With the plague having wiped out my original fixture on Friday night, as substitutions go, they don't come much better than this. A club that hadn't impinged on my consciousness until this season's elevation to the Central Midlands League, Dearne & District is what football at this level is all about, indeed they have just been awarded '*Grassroots club of the Year*'. Whatever that may be, it sounds impressive.

They play in the (ex) mining village of Goldthorpe. While it does have a station, a 25-minute bus ride from Doncaster bus station drops you outside the ground and is the quickest way to get back to southern civilization after the match. Although most of the shops in the high street are boarded up there are still plenty of cafes and chippy's open to ensure hunger won't be a problem. One of the friendliest places I've ever visited with strangers smiling and wishing me a good day instead of recoiling in horror like most people do when they see me coming. This friendliness was evident at the ground, which was fully railed with a dinky little stand. The small clubhouse served hot food with the coffee going for ten bob a cup. As I told them, they won't make enough to pay for the match officials with that pricing structure. And what better prelude to the game than fondling my programme and quaffing Fosters while watching Arsenal get annihilated in the lunchtime football on TV.

The players came out then went back so they could come out again side by side before lining up for the '*Respect*' fist pumps. What a farce, but fair play to the referee who still got the game going on time. And having been mercifully free of them so far this season, the 'drinks break' reared its ugly head in this match. The Ken Bates look alike linesman on the far side decided it wasn't worth the effort walking across the pitch to take on water. Given he was at least twice the age of the players I wondered if any of them noticed how he managed to get through the whole game without dropping down with dehydration. The match itself was highly entertaining, level pegging at the interval with D & D coming on strong in the second half.

The programme had a page dedicated to their sponsor, '*Aldi*'. Three short paragraphs, 102 words (I counted them, it was a long journey home), from which I quote the following extracts (my capitals): *Aldi* were our kit sponsor for the 20/21 season, this was a MASSIVE sixth year in a row.....This is a MASSIVE contribution to our club.....Kit is a MASSIVE overhead.....*Aldi* have shown their spirit in being a MASSIVE part of our community.....MASSIVE thanks to *Aldi*.....Absolutely amazing and MASSIVELY appreciated.

And I had a MASSIVELY good day out.

contributed on 29/08/21

TT No.20: Steve Hardy - Saturday 21st August 2021; North Sunderland v Blaydon Community; Northern Alliance Division 3; Result: 2-2; Admission: Free; Programme/Team Sheet: None; Attendance: 17 H/C.

Here's a quick question for you all to start with. Where would you think a club called North Sunderland might actually play? The north of Sunderland somewhere

perhaps? Wrong. They are actually based in Seahouses on the wonderful Northumberland coast, not far from Bamburgh Castle. Over the years of holidaying up in Northumberland, North Sunderland have become my team to watch. With Covid messing everything up, I haven't been able to get to see them for the last 2 years, during which time they have moved into a shiny new ground in Seahouses, that was purpose built for them.

With the demise of their previous league, The North Northumberland league, they have also moved leagues as well, and are now in the bottom division of the Northern Alliance. Visitors Blaydon Community are also newbies, and so in pouring rain throughout I finally got to visit the new setup at long last.

The ground is extremely basic, consisting of a fully fenced off pitch adjacent to a floodlit pitch which doesn't seem to be used at all. Changing rooms are a portacabin behind one goal and they do have a fabulous tea bar next to the portacabin too.

The match itself was a cracker, ruined by the 22 players on the pitch. The poor old Ref had a terrible game, but he wasn't helped by both sets of players haranguing him after every decision he made. 2-1 to North Sunderland at half time, Blaydon bossed the second half but just couldn't get the goal they deserved until another poor decision from the Ref gave them a ridiculous penalty with 3 minutes left. Overall then I thought a draw was the least Blaydon deserved, and it was great to finally get to the new North Sunderland ground.

contributed on 27/08/21

TT No.19: Jon T Green - Saturday 21st August 2021; ABERBARGOED BUDS v. Trethomas Bluebirds; Ardal Southern League, South East Division; Venue: Recreation Ground; Result: 2-2; Admission: £4; Programme: No; Attendance: 58 h/c.

It's said that the Inuit language has between 40 and 50 words for 'snow' which has me thinking there should be the equivalent number of options in Welsh for rain to account for days like today. The weather has been threatening since crossing the border and arrival at Excelsiors' ground in Abertillery is accompanied by low cloud and *cawodydd* (showers). The pitch isn't yet marked out (always a warning sign) but when the groundsman completes an initial inspection, he confirms the game is on. With due reference to the Met Office website the conditions over the next hour deteriorate from *dilyw* (deluge) to *cathode a chwn* (cats and dogs) to *cenllif* (torrent) with the volume of water literally flowing in rivers down the steep streets. Midday arrives and with it the inevitable news of postponement. A rapid trawl through the fixtures reveals a nearby option at Bargoed and, with their game being confirmed as "on", it's a quick drive into the Rhymney valley to find the Recreation Ground, home of Aberbargoed Buds. Luckily the Rec is at the top of a hill so, although the pitch is spongy, there is no danger of a second call off.

There has been a team representing Aberbargoed since football resumed after World War Two when Town played in the Welsh League, their existence was brief and by 1950 they had folded. The club was reformed in 1957 as Aberbargoed Buds

(which is believed to be an abbreviation of “Bedwellty Urban District Sides”) and joined the Gwent League before that competition morphed into the West Monmouthshire League. The League Cup was won in 1978 and 1980 with more silverware following from the newly formed Gwent County League courtesy of a cup win in 1984 and a championship title in 1985/86. Buds then merged with the re-formed Aberbargoed Town club in 1999, a timely decision as it enabled them to maintain their Gwent League status when they were in grave danger of folding. A league and cup double was completed in 2002/03 but it was not until 2005/06, after ground up-grading work and another title win, that they were accepted into Division Three of the Welsh League. Buds gained promotion as champions in 2009/10 and then reach the top division two years later as they finished runners-up to Goytre. The next few years saw them yo-yo between divisions one and two before, with the installation of floodlights, they obtained Tier Three status within the new Welsh pyramid system.

It’s been a mixed start to the season for the home side with only a two-nil win over Abergavenny Town to show for their efforts, although a five all draw with Panteg must have been an absolute cracker. The Bluebirds, after an opening day loss, have won back-to-back matches and, with a Welsh Cup 2nd Round tie at Carmarthen Town on the horizon, they arrive in good spirits. Those spirits are lifted even further when, after 12 minutes, their tall midfielder executes a technically perfect bicycle kick to give them the lead. You know it’s a great goal when even the home fans applaud, and I doubt that I’ll see a better one all season. The away team are dominating what is a high-quality game but, somewhat against the run of play, Buds draw level with a little under ten minutes of the half remaining. Levi Rees surges through the inside right channel and finishes with a confident low drive. Buds are sharper as the second period begins; new signing Joe Speicher drifts in from his right-wing berth, picks up the ball in a central position and unleashes his shot into the bottom corner.

In a less than aggressive encounter it’s something of a surprise as both teams find themselves down to ten men. A scuffle breaks out and a punch is thrown which accounts for the home sides dismissal before a “last man” foul evens up the numbers. The red cards seem to affect Buds more than the visitors as Trethomas are hunting down an equalizer which duly arrives with a quarter of an hour remaining - a corner from the right is only half cleared and the follow up shot finds its way into the net through a crowd of players. Overall a fair result on what is rather ironically turning into a sunny afternoon...

contributed on 25/08/21

TT No.18: Brian Buck - Saturday 21st August 2021; Earls Barton United Reserves v Harpole Reserves; Chromasport Northants Combination Division 2; Venue: played at Pioneer Sports Ground, Station Road, Earls Barton; Kick-Off: 4pm; Result: 4-1; Attendance: 25 approx.

By the end of the previous game the rain had become more steady. As I had found a trestle table seat to sit on in the earlier game I felt well enough to take in a

second game, despite the deteriorating weather. I went back to my car to change into my wellies and then got into my car and had my sandwiches and some coffee.

While I was partaking of this, the second match started, bang on time, but I could see the pitch clearly having parked my car behind the goal. I joined in ‘live’ as soon as I could! You could tell that this was a reserve match because the players in this encounter came in all shapes and sizes! By now the rain was coming down very heavily, but the grassy pitch held up well.

In a match which had similar characteristics to the first game, it was Harpole who had the better of the first half, taking the lead on 28 minutes, when the scorer ran on unchallenged before unleashing a shot which seemed to go in off the keeper’s outstretched arms. But just before the break, a header from a deep freekick saw Barton level and this was the signal for them to go on and win quite comfortably by the end. Further goals on 58, 69 and 77 minutes did the trick. Despite having his work cut out at times the ref didn’t need to book anyone in this decent game. The only real mystery was despite the heavy rain here, there had been very little at home, just about an hour’s drive away!

contributed on 24/08/21

TT No.17: Brian Buck - Saturday 21st August 2021; Earls Barton United v Harpole; Chromasport Northants Combination Premier Division; Venue: played at the Pioneer Sports Ground, Station Road, Earls Barton; Kick-Off: 2.00pm; Result: 3-2; Attendance: 45 approx.

When I saw in the league’s handbook that they are only playing here until September 20th, I thought that I’d better get this ground done. It seems that they have been doing this for a few years as cricket has been getting in the way at their Grange, Northampton Road, ground, which is where they usually spend most of the season and where, on 16 April 2013, I saw them draw 0-0 with Wootton St George in an MDH Northants Combination Division 1 match (attendance: 30 approx). The club could play here all the time soon though, as the pitch is being turned through 90 degrees so football and cricket can take place at the same time.

The Pioneer ground is not so bad and it’s where the club’s youth teams play. There are three pitches here and the club play on the middle and largest of these. It is railed off on two sides and is partially banked, from where I watched the action. There are also two brick-built dugouts at pitch level here. The only slight downside is that there was, as far as I could see, no social facilities existed for spectators and the only buildings were changing rooms in the shape of large portakabins.

The ground is to be found on the south side of the A45 and a short walk from the old Castle Ashby railway station, where the last passenger train on the Peterborough to Northampton line left in 1964!

On my arrival at the ground, I was mistakenly greeted by someone who called me Matt. I didn’t mind and in fact I told him that for a couple of hundred quid I was prepared to be anybody he wanted me to be! As for the game, as the rain came on intermittently, the first half was rather sub-ordinary and somewhat uninspiring.

Harpole, who usually do well in this league, started well, but gradually Barton dominated possession without doing much with it. The second half was much better. The hosts took the lead on 48 minutes after the keeper was gently lobbed from an angle, just inside the area. But Harpole were level on 54 minutes, direct from a corner, which went in off the far post. But a bullet header from about 12 yards out saw Barton regain the lead on 67 minutes and now they were well in control. On 75 minutes their club lino was booked for arguing with the ref and then on 80 minutes the score became 3-1 when the scorer was able to pick his spot from about 25 yards out. On 83 minutes a Harpole player was sin binned, but despite this handicap they still managed to pull a goal back four minutes later to set up a tight finish.

contributed on 24/08/21

TT No.16: Keith Aslan - Saturday 21st August 2021; **SHEERWATER v Cobham;** Combined Counties Premier Division South; Kick-Off: 15.01; Result: 0-3; Admission: £4 for old people; Programme: £1.50p; Attendance: 68 (57 home, 9 away & 2 neutral).

Although still in August this was my third visit to a new build, with Gillingham seamlessly transferring grounds, Woodford spending 22 years in the wilderness and Sheerwater forced into a 3-year groundshare with Woking before the Eastwood Leisure Centre was ready for use. What all three clubs have in common is their new grounds are all only a few hundred yards away from the old with Sheerwater's the closest, moving from one side to the other of the adjacent cricket pitch. Obviously, I set off exploring to see if there were any remnants remaining. All that is left of the old ground is the small 'Atcost' stand, and judging by the heavy plant equipment lying around, I don't expect that to be in situ much longer. The unobtrusive entrance to their current domicile is easy to miss, it's through a school with only a handwritten notice on the gate alerting you to the sporting activity within. While green netting is a compulsory surround to a plastic pitch, the twist here is that it was painted black which coupled with the black rail inside was surprisingly effective. But where the ground really scores is the covered stand, surely the longest at this level, which runs alongside the entire length of the near touchline. Only a couple of terraces deep with a few seats bolted onto part of it, nobody will ever get wet here no matter how large the crowd. There is a good clubhouse to watch the lunchtime football on TV with hot food and drink in plentiful supply. But in view of its situation, I can't see it being used very much when there isn't a match on.

Sheerwater is a housing estate built in 1948 to house the London overspill. Did London have an overspill in 1948? When it was new it was regarded as a wonderful place to live. Not these days. West Byfleet is the station for this one, it looked about a 25-minute walk but there is a regular bus service from outside the station which my knee doctor will be disappointed to learn was my chosen means of travel. There were two reasons why I didn't walk, one was to get some value from my old persons buss pass, which I might have mentioned I got six years after everybody else. The other was because I am a very lazy person.

No surprises that Sheerwater usually win the Combined Counties '*Programme of the Year*' award. A magnificent £1.50p's worth, well laid out and chock full of information. Without it I would never have known that Cobham's record attendance was achieved in 1974 when 2,000 crammed in to see a Moody Blues X1. Note for younger readers, the Moody Blues were a seventies pop group who had a string of hits including 'Knights in White Satin' and well that's about it. Sheerwater lost any chance of getting something out of the game when, at 2-0 down, midway through the second half they had a man sent off for an elbow to the face. Didn't deserve to go, totally accidental shouted the Sheerwater supporters around me. I'm not so sure.

contributed on 22/08/21

TT No.15: Keith Aslan - Wednesday 18th August 2021; **WOODFORD TOWN v West Essex; Essex Senior League Premier Division; Kick-Off: 19.47; Result: 1-2; Admission: £3 for the elderly; Programme: £2; Attendance official: 358; My headcount: 278 (242 home, 18 away & 18 neutral)**

Wind the clock back to Friday 13th and Woodford's first game at their new ground, the crowd allegedly 822 but generally reckoned to be around the 500 mark, the cream of groundhoppers in attendance, but with one notable exception. It would mean getting home well past my bedtime, so I was looking to do it on a Saturday. Closer inspection of the fixture list showed all games, bar one in March, as evening kick offs so five days later, here I am. The ground is a 20-25 minutes walk from Woodford tube station, all uphill going back, and on the way you pass their old ground which closed in 1993. The grass is still there but the only sign a stadium used to exist is a set of rusting turnstiles at the entrance. All very sad.

After leading a nomadic life for so long, it's great for the club to be settled into a new ground just a few hundred yards from the old one, but this is not somewhere I would want to watch football on a regular basis. The athletics track leaves spectators a long way from the action and it's very difficult to get involved in the match. But beggars can't be choosers and the 'singing section' of the Atcost stand provided a bit of atmosphere. While I normally expect a slight discount in the admission price due to my great age, here it's a 'biggy', with the £7 entrance for normal people reduced to a mere £3 for senile citizens. The big advantage of everybody already having visited the ground is that I can pick up a few tips, and a recurring theme was 'Don't go near the burger van', No prices on display, which is illegal, and they charged what they thought they could get away with without causing a riot. £4 for a small portion of cheesy chips. Come on. If you want a coffee, you can either pay £2.50p for some gruesome brown liquid in a paper cup or go into the clubhouse and get the best coffee you'll ever have tasted in a Woodford Town mug for a quid less. Beer in there was also very cheap. When I went for my caffeine top up at half time, in spite of it being very busy, the young lady remembered how many sugars I took. It's the little things like that that stick in the memory.

Before the match the players had a minute's applause, so I assumed somebody had died. Nothing says respect as much as clapping like seals. If anyone tries to clap me when I die, I'll come back and haunt them. As for the match, Woodford surprisingly went into the lead before West Essex finally took a couple of their many chances to gain the victory most people were expecting. Woodford haven't started the season too well and are still looking for their first victory, but it's still early days. I arrived home around midnight and lost out on a good, few hours of my beauty sleep. Luckily, I don't need it.

contributed on 19/08/21

TT No.14: Brian Buck - Saturday 14th August 2021; Long Bennington v East Leake Robins; Notts Senior League Division 2; Result: 3-1; Attendance: 25 approx.

This game took my fancy, especially as once I joined the A14 at Godmanchester it was only an hour's drive to the turn off to Long Bennington, between Grantham and Newark on the A1. Furthermore, there were no roundabouts to encounter. But all was not straightforward on the day.

At the start of the week the host's opponents were Aslockton & Orston Reserves (3pm). By Thursday, I think, this had been changed to Colterworth (3pm) and next day it had been changed to East Leake Robins. On the league website the kick-off was now 2.30pm but East Leake had it down as 2pm. I took no chances, arriving here shortly after 1.30pm and it transpired that the 2.30pm kick off time was right.

The ground can be found on the north side of the village and with a wide main road passing through it I'm guessing this is the route the A1 once took. There was no car park at the ground, but there was plenty of street parking available. There is also a clubhouse, but I couldn't see that it contained a bar. What it did have though was an excellent tea bar. I had a bacon bap which must have contained at least five rashers of bacon, served to by me by a very pleasant lady, wearing her 'Planet Bake, The Pavilion' apron. But her main specialty were her cakes which she makes as a hobby and it's worth coming here alone for a slice of at least half a dozen large ones she'd made. But there was a football match to be watched.

The ground is very pleasing on the eye, but not on the ear, as it's right next to the busy aforementioned A1, even though it's masked by some trees, which surround just over half the pitch. The pitch itself is flat, having been cut out of some banking on two sides, thus offering decent viewing. There was also a Football Foundation sign here, so I am assuming that they have been involved here.

As for the game, it was one I think that the visitors were expecting to win. They looked to have experienced players in their side, whilst the hosts were quite young looking. It was the hosts who took the lead, on 14 minutes after East Leake started better. The goal came from one of their energetic young strikers and the other one scored their second goal five minutes later when he dispossessed the visitors left back before rifling the ball home from the edge of the area. But on 25 minutes East Leake pulled a goal back and at this point I felt that they might go on and win

the match. However, things didn't turn out that way. On 66 minutes the two home strikers combined to generate the defining goal. It came from a long diagonal pass from the left, which was met first time by the scorer who guided it home, beating the keeper, who guessed wrong as to which side of him it would go. There was just time for a bit of player stupidity before the final whistle was blown. Firstly, on 84 minutes a visiting player picked up two yellows in a matter of seconds for things he said to the ref and then 10 minutes later a home player was sin binned for booting the ball away after the ref had given him offside. Overall, a decent day out, with plenty going on. Afterwards, as I supped my remaining coffee from my flask, it was interesting to watch players of both sides heading back to their cars, up the road, still in their full kit!

contributed on 17/08/21

TT No.13: Steve Hardy - Saturday 14th August 2021; Sheerwater v Horley Town; Combined Counties League - Premier Division; Result: 1-6; Admission: £4 OAP rate; Programme: £1.50; Attendance: 34 H/C.

A return visit to Sheerwater was long overdue, as I hadn't been there since April 2003. Their shiny new ground was all the incentive I needed and despite work on the ground not being finished yet, I thought what they have there already was really good. The new set up will be accessed via the Eastwood Leisure Centre once it is finished, but as the turnstile block isn't ready yet, they have built a temporary entrance in the Broadmere Primary School in Devonshire Avenue

Once you gain access you have another 3G pitch, but not in a cage this time and access is available to all four sides. The whole length of one side is given over to a covered area of terracing with a row of seats at one end. I assume there will be more seats installed as work continues, but in the blazing sun we had today a bit of shade was very welcome.

On the pitch, the Sheers were brilliant for the first 11 minutes! They missed a penalty on 4 minutes before taking the lead on 11. Sadly, that was as good as it got for them, as Horley then dominated the rest of the game. They equalised on 19 minutes and a quick double on 41 and 43 minutes gave them a deserved 3-1 half time lead. The Sheers urgently needed a goal to kick start their second half, but Horley gave them no chances at all and pushed on with a 4th goal on 56 minutes, a penalty 5th on 58 minutes and a cracking 6th on 74.

My headcount was just 34. With at least 10 groundhoppers in attendance, plus a further 10 from Horley, that means just 14 people came to watch their local side in action. It seems such a shame after all the effort the Sheers' staff have put in proving step 5 football and a super new ground for their local to enjoy.

contributed on 17/08/21

TT No.12: Steve Hardy - Tuesday 10th August 2021; Kanaphill v Lordswood; FA Cup Extra Preliminary Round - Replay; Result: 2-2 (4-3 on pens); Admission: £4 OAP rate; Programme or team sheet: None; Attendance 110 H/C.

This match turned out to be a bit of a gem, with Lordswood fighting their way back into it when all seemed lost at half time. With extra time and pens though, we spectators who had bravely turned up in shorts and tee shirts, ended up perishing cold.

I liked the ground very much. It has a motley collection of stands including three different seated stands and two further covered standing areas. There is a large clubhouse behind one goal right next to the turnstiles, and a walkway all around the ground. Behind the far goal seems to be out of bounds though, as it is fenced off, although several fans still managed to stand in there.

Knaphill were brilliant in the first half taking the lead on 15 minutes through a penalty, and then scoring a second after a keeper's error, on 27. 2-0 at half time was the least they deserved. After the break though, they went off the boil a bit allowing Lordswood to cheer up their large contingent of fans by firstly scoring a penalty on 70 minutes before equalising just 2 minutes later.

Extra time was a bit cagey from both teams with no real chance of a goal, so off to pens we went. By this time, I had nearly frozen solid, but I was just about able to see Knaphill deservedly win the shoot-out 4-3.

No sniff of a programme or team sheet tonight as they don't issue this season. They took a lot of flak from the Lordswood fans for this, as well as a 'herd' of groundhoppers who were apoplectic with rage. There is one to download on their web site however, and as I don't mind such things, I have now got my paws on a nice shiny copy for my collection.

contributed on 17/08/21

TT No.11: Keith Aslan - Saturday 14th August 2021; RUSHCLIFFE RAVENS v Trent Vineyard; Notts Senior League Division 2 North; Kick-Off: 15.00; Result: 3-1; Admission: Free; Programme: £1; Attendance: 18 (11 home, 0 away & 7 neutral)

Nottingham used to be full of geneticists trying to work out why the Lace City was the only place on earth where considerably more girls were born than boys. In the rest of the world, it was round about 50/50 but here from 1945 onwards, it was 70/30. Alas nobody ever found out the cause and the imbalance righted itself after 20 or so years. However, for my age group a night out in Nottingham was always a sure-fire success with the dearth of young men meaning even Groundhoppers weren't going to spend the night alone. These were good times and as Eric Burden once famously said about Los Angeles: '*The time was the time, the place was the place*'. The time now is for tram rides and with the network having trebled since my last visit, an early arrival and a bargain £3 day ticket gave me the opportunity to tick all of the new lines. Stopped off at the Greggs in Beeston, with Steak and Chips in Clifton. All great fun (but not as much fun as 45 years ago).

Rushcliffe play next door to Clifton All Whites. Big disappointment on arrival to find the game was being played on the adjacent plastic pitch and not on the grass one which was being reseeded, information that only percolated through to the home team on the morning of the match. So, I'll have to come back to do the grass

pitch. Ha! Ha! Hot drinks and snacks were on sale and the bottle of ketchup on the counter suggests more substantial fayre was also available. Can't make out how Rushcliffe got into the Notts League northern section, if they were any further south of Nottingham, they'd fall off the edge. On my tram travels, going through an industrial estate I passed a very large warehouse with Trent Vineyard plastered all over it, so I assumed today's opposition was a works team. Unusually for me I was wrong, Trent is a church team and further investigation revealed that the warehouse is actually their place of worship. Unless they have a very big congregation, I don't think social distancing will ever be a problem.

Good to meet up again with Notts League mogul, Rob Hornby, who like myself, is one of the nice guys. He set himself up with a table full of badges and programmes. He came with his missus who, having dropped him off, promptly turned round and drove back to Mansfield because she'd forgotten her handbag, returning just after half-time. What was in the bag I wondered. The match resulted in a 3-1 win for the home side with full details on Rob's charity blog which I can highly recommend, particularly as it contains a fabulous photograph of me. Highlight of the game came when Rob mis-identified the Rushcliffe scorer as Callum Price. Plenty of people to put him right. Next goal was actually scored by young Callum himself to which I said to Rob: 'This time The Price is Right'. How we all laughed, sometimes I even surprise myself with my wit.

Many thanks go to the hopper who gave me a lift back to East Midlands Parkway after the game. Got home much earlier than anticipated so more time for some meaningful interaction between my Nottingham Tram map and a highlighter pen. And to think some people say I'm sad!

contributed on 15/08/21

TT No.10: Brian Buck - Saturday 7th August 2021; Hockering v Dereham Taverners; Barnes Print Central & South Norfolk League Division 1; Result: 2-1; Attendance: 30 approx.

I decided to take in this game just as I was about to leave home to go to another game nearby, but on checking the league website, this match seemed to be the more attractive of the two. The other reason for checking the games at that late stage was that there were some very heavy showers around and I wondered if they would still be on. I encountered a few of them on the way to the game, but by the time I reached Hockering, near Dereham, there was no rain.

Initially my trusty sat nav let me down, sending me down a short, narrow dead end housing estate, but this was easily rectified, and I soon found the right turning a few yards further on, clearly signed Hockering Football Club. I got one of the few remaining parking spaces in the car park, but because I had got there over an hour before kick-off, my exit after the game was then blocked by later arriving cars.

While I waited for the game to start, I ventured into the clubhouse, where I ate my sandwiches and washed it down with a bottle of cider. Someone connected with the club must be also connected with a furniture shop as most of the clubhouse space was taken over by two very large sofas, one of them a big four-seater. They

also had a sort of club shop, which seemed to consist of a rack of football shirts but getting to them was a problem because these sofas were in the way.

While everyone was waiting for the game to start, we had one of those very heavy sharp showers, which was accompanied by some thunder and for a while there seemed a possibility that the game might get called off. Then the ref went out to inspect the pitch and didn't return, so we either assumed that he had drowned or the game was on! Luckily it was the latter scenario. I went back to my car to put my wellies on but couldn't get into the driver's side because of a large puddle, which expanded to both sides by the end of the game, leaving me to drive off with them still on before changing back into my shoes down the road. There was no rain during the match and no problems with the pitch which was well maintained.

As for the game, it was contested by two decent sides, but whom I suspect may not be lifting the league title come the end of the season. A cleanly hit 18 yarder gave Hockering the lead on 5 minutes, but by the time Dereham equalised on 42 minutes the goal had been coming, although the hosts remained dangerous on the break. In the second half fortunes seemed almost to be reversed. Then, on 48 minutes there was a delay whilst the seemingly only fit match ball was retrieved from a 'cornfield' behind the goal. Play eventually continued and on 82 minutes the scorer of the first Hockering goal grabbed his second one, this time with a well-placed effort from some 25 yards out and in truth his shooting ability was the difference between the sides.

contributed on 12/08/21

TT No.9: Jon T Green - Saturday 7th August 2021; KENILWORTH SPORTING v. Inkberrow; Midland Football League - Division Two; Venue: Gypsy Lane; Result: 3-5; Admission: £3; Programme: Yes, £2.50; Attendance: 175.

Hard though it is to believe, football wasn't the major attraction in the Warwickshire town of Kenilworth today. Special buses have been laid on to transfer hordes of excitable families (well the plastic sword wielding kids are excited even if the adults are slightly more reticent) from the High Street to the castle for a jousting tournament. Whether jousting is a sport is questionable, although given of the events seen recently in Tokyo, there is every likelihood of it replacing dressage at the next Olympics. The castle, first built in Norman times, is however, still a formidable looking structure and well worth the 15 minute stroll from Abbey Fields through green pastures and alongside the quiet waters of Finham Brook.

Kenilworth has been hosting non-league since 1936 when Town entered a team into the Coventry and District League. They had no permanent ground at this stage and played at a number of venues before in 1962, then known as Kenilworth Rangers, they leased their current home at Gypsy Lane. 1992 saw a return to the club name of Town, and it was during that decade they achieved success in both cup and league. 1992-3 saw them lift the Birmingham County FA Challenge Vase - a feat they repeated three years later in a season which also saw them promoted to the Midland Combination Premiership.

Sadly, this turned out to be as good as things got as they finished the century being relegated after winning just three times. Division One proved no easier and they found themselves at the foot of the table once again in 2002. They do love a name change here and in 2005 they became Kenilworth Town KH, a year later they joined Division One of the Midland Football Combination. After a series of withdrawals, promotions and relegations the club folded in 2011. They re-formed three years later, once again as Kenilworth Town, and won the Midland Combination Division Two title that same season. They completed the following campaign, but having finished second bottom, they once more folded.

2018 saw Gypsy Lane purchased by Coventry Plumbing FC who competed in the Midland Football League for two seasons before, in 2020, the club was once again re-branded this time as Kenilworth Sporting. Only eight matches were completed last year with Sporting winning seven of those to finish two points ahead of today's visitors Inkberrow - both sides were subsequently promoted to Division Two.

In recent years plenty of improvements have been made at the ground with floodlights erected and two stands built, one of which today is being used in lieu of dugouts of which there is a notable absence. An enhanced drainage system has been installed to help alleviate waterlogging, and the pitch still bears the scars of this recent work. Rather oddly there are no turnstiles with entrance being made through the club house. This is an extremely impressive building with two bars, facilities for serving a wide range of food (including breakfast from early on a Saturday morning) and a large patio area complete with umbrella shaded tables and heaters. The glossy programme shows that the club have a new very smart liveried team coach; now call me penny-pinching if you will, but in a fairly local league, what's wrong with going to away games in a beat-up old minibus with worn out suspension and dodgy windscreen wipers? Surely that's character building for the physical battles to come...

A mighty thunder shower rolls through just before kick-off which leaves the air thick with the scent of summer. Luckily the rain subsides before play begins and within three minutes the green shirted visitors score the opening goal. Jay Higgins-Pugsley responds to a poor defensive clearance and sends his shot beyond home 'keeper George Woodward. Both sides create, and spurn, chances in equal measure before Ben Thomas is neatly set-up and he doubles Inkberrow's advantage shortly before the break.

Sporting are back in the game soon after the re-start as Dave Freeman is rewarded for his perseverance, muscling his way between two defenders before prodding the ball home. Freeman has been excellent all afternoon and deserves his goal. Thomas then turns provider as Nathan Davies's header restores the visitors two goal lead. Quarter of an hour remains as Kenilworth once again reduce the arrears; Connor Mack finds himself in space and his low drive beats Jack Turner. Any sense of a comeback is squashed almost immediately though as Davies finishes off another slick team move by firing into the top corner. The home side are proving to be extremely resilient and make it 3-4, substitute Alpha Wurie sprints in at the far post to volley in Archie Ascroft's inviting cross. Inkberrow are wobbling and Mack has a golden opportunity to draw his team level, sent clean through he can only shoot weakly at Turner with the goal at his mercy. Four minutes of added

have elapsed as the visitors finally wrap up the points; Davies latches onto a long pass before picking his spot and coolly completing his hat-trick. It's been a thoroughly enjoyable afternoon and at just £3 incredible value for money.

By way of a post-script the attendance was posted as 175 which is something at odds with a headcount of 53. Fully accepting of my mathematical short-comings I do still have doubts that a further 100+ people attended the game without me noticing. Strange but true...

contributed on 10/08/21

TT No.8: Gary Spooner - Saturday 7th August 2021; Penmaenmawr Phoenix v Menai Bridge Tigers; Welsh Amateur Trophy Round Two; Kick-Off: 2.00pm; Result: 2-4; Programme: None; Admission: £3 (Free for OAP); Attendance: 35 approx.

Yesterday I headed to North Wales in the company of fellow FGIF pixel merchant Mr Brown and Spongebob. The weather en route was dreadful though thankfully the torrential rain had stopped, and the sun was shining, when we arrived at Cae Sling, home of Penmaenmawr Phoenix, to see a Welsh Amateur Trophy 2nd Round tie against Menai Bridge Tigers.

Having dodged some sheep to park the car we entered the ground where Spongebob was delighted that it was free admission for OAPs. Adult admission was very reasonable at £3. There was no programme, but plans are afoot for an online edition at some point. I enquired about badges and was told they were not available but the chairmen then said he would find some which he duly did from a cabin which is to become the club shop.

Cae Sling has an excellent clubhouse with plenty of outdoor seating. There is a café that serves meals along with usual matchday fare including excellent coffee in proper mugs. There is the "Phoenix Fun Bus" for children which has a tele and an air hockey table and complements the outdoor play area complete with trampoline. Great facilities for all the family! The ground itself is set in absolute stunning scenery with both sea and mountain views. Quite simply the photos do not do it justice. Definitely a must visit for all hoppers!!

Having been blown away by the welcome, the facilities and the scenery the game did not disappoint either. In the first half Phoenix took the lead and then Tigers equalised before Phoenix scored the goal of the goal with a belting shot from distance (see album nos. 22 & 23). Tigers equalised again and it was 2 all at half time which saw Spongebob buying the coffees as he got free admission! I'm sure I saw tears but that may have been because Dundee United had beaten Spongebob's Scottish team in the early SPFL game. Half time also saw the appearance of Phoenix giving away lollipops to the great delight of all the children present. The second half saw some heavy rain, some heavy tackles and a cracking cup tie which wasn't settled until late on when Tigers scored their final goal in a 4-2 win. The day out was capped on the way home with news that the Cobbs had won. Superb day out!!!!!!!

contributed on 08/08/21

TT No.7: Keith Aslan - Saturday 7th August 2021; **GILLINGHAM** v Lebeq; Western League Division 1; Kick-Off: 13.01; Result: 2-2; Admission: £4 for old people; Programme: £1.50p; Attendance: 46 (45 home, 0 away & 1 neutral).

Gillingham is the centre of the musical universe this afternoon with the world famous Woodwater Music Festival taking place, a sort of 'Glastonbury' without the crowds. As it is all happening next door to the football ground the sporting activity has had to be bought forward by a couple of hours to avoid a clash, and early kick offs are very much my thing. I don't like change, so Gillingham hits the spot for me. It's about 25 years since I was last here, and everything is exactly as it was. Breakfast in the station cafe, like last time. A long wait for the train afterwards so sightseeing in the High Street, teeming with inactivity like last time. And a roast beef dinner in a cafe that hasn't changed one iota in the quarter of a century since my previous appearance. Only difference to my last visit is my game today is taking place in a brand-new stadium, 300 yards up the road from the Gills former domicile. You pass the old ground on your way to the new, everything is still as it should be, and it's still being used for football.

I liked this ground, nothing special about it with Mr. Atcost's footprint being much in evidence, but it just looked like a football ground should look. Still a work in progress with the floodlight bulbs having been delayed but are due to arrive by the end of the month. Apparently, this will be the first ground in Europe to have these type of bulbs - Phillips 3.5 Optivision. Doesn't mean anything to me but sounds good. The programme has a long article on the travails of moving to the new ground, this has been going on for over ten years, planning permission was granted in 2012, and the article intimates that if they'd known what lay ahead of them, they'd have stayed put. They now have the best drainage in the country allegedly and will never have a game called off through waterlogging, although I must stress this has yet to be put to the test. There is a basic bar, and unlike a lot of new grounds these days, the sightlines from the stand are perfect. How I miss having half the pitch obscured by the dugouts.

There is only one thing you need to know about Lebeq. Their website is all in Latin. Surely, I'm missing something here I thought and started searching the web for an alternative. But no, this is their official website, and I haven't slept since wondering why it's in a language that most people cannot really understand. With none of the Lebeq officials at the game I tried asking a couple of their players which was never going to produce an answer. Latin or English, it's all a mystery to the average footballer. My guess is someone took a degree in Latin before realising a language that's been dead for the past couple of millennia wasn't going to be the slightest bit of use to them in the real world and they had to showcase it somewhere. *Vanitas vanitatum* as they say in Lebeq.

Last week I saw a goal scored after 20 seconds, today I had to wait all of 42 seconds for Gillingham to take the lead, and they'd made it two before half time, with the visitors coming back for a point. And while I never like to see a player get

hurt, every appearance onto the pitch of the home ‘trainerette’ gladdened the heart. If visiting the ground dig out the secretary who will take time out to talk to you about all Gillingham football club matters. Definitely one of the army, of unsung heroes, that keep football going at this level. I left the ground to the strains of Purple Haze coming from the music festival next door which really sounded rather good.

The day was punctuated by ark building thunderstorms which I managed to avoid. Global warming, I hear you say, or typical English weather as I call it. The rain caused a few postponements up and down the country. Summer football isn't all it's cracked up to be.

contributed on 08/08/21

TT No.6: Jon T Green - Saturday 31st July 2021; **BACUP BOROUGH v. Cleator Moor Celtic**; North West Counties Football League - First Division North; Venue: West View; Result: 2-2; Admission: £6; Programme: Yes, £2; Attendance: 147

I love the equality of opening day. For a few brief moments the good, the bad and the distinctly average are all as one. I simply can't resist looking at the formative league tables (if indeed they can really be called that) and seeing teams split only by dint of their initial - maybe that's why we have so many teams called themselves AFC nowadays, it's simply their way of being top of the league at least once in the season. Today everything is pure and unsullied, the columns stretch away across the page in time honoured fashion Played 0 Won 0 Drawn 0 Lost 0 For 0 Against 0 Points 0 it's a thing of immeasurable beauty. By the time that they are rewritten at 5pm all of this will have changed, someone will be top after a thumping 5-0 win (and likewise someone bottom after the corresponding defeat). The first game takes on a disproportionate importance and almost seems an indicator of what is to come. Starting with a win is somehow psychologically more important than winning the second, third or fourth fixture. In the early 80's I watched the late, great Justin Fashanu score a hat trick in a 5-1 win. Surely this was a taste of great things, to come? A week later we had lost 3-2 at home to Leeds and come early May we were relegated thanks to another hat trick, this time by Leicester's Jim Melrose.

If today's game is important for the clubs and players, it's equally vital for the travelling fan. Select wisely and it's going to be a great year full of cracking trips, memorable goals and unexpected programmes. Make the wrong decision and nine months of motorway holdups / train cancellations, last minute postponements and games played in 3G cages awaits.

Awake at least two hours before I need to be but it's no use lying in bed when that long awaited sense of anticipation is gently twisting your stomach into knots. Today I am a little boy again, bouncing about the house and generally annoying everyone with my unbridled enthusiasm. It's more a case of “Can we go now?” rather than “Are we there yet?”. At 6am I give in to the craving and gently ease the car into gear....

The North West Counties League suffered more than most Step 5 divisions last season so when they made an early announcement that they would be starting this year in late July it seemed like a great choice for the first game. Scanning the fixtures there was an abundance of grounds that were still firmly on the “to do” list. After considerable deliberation (I told you that it was an important choice) Bacup Borough was chosen not only because the town is an interesting visit but also because having a two-word team name starting with the same letter really appealed. There is a wonderful symmetry about Corinthian Casuals, Risborough Rangers, Tipton Town and Wixams Wanderers, don’t you think?

A cotton mill town by trade, Bacup is situated midway between Rochdale and Burnley but feels more remote than it actually is. Walking uphill away from the well-preserved centre out past the ground and onto the Pennine moorland, the sense of splendid isolation grows stronger. All around are curving hills, dissected by slate grey dry, stone walls and below a rectangle of bright green identifying itself as West View, home of Borough. Returning down a narrow footpath, onto the fabulously named Cowtoot Lane, you come across a magnificent piece of artwork depicting team photos and notable moments from the club’s history.

Upon entry you are struck by two things; firstly, the pitch is on a considerable slope (hardly surprising giving the hillside location) and secondly, it’s bloody cold. The wind, which wasn’t noticeable down in the town, is whistling around the stands although a home fan describes it as no more than a draught and suggests that you should be here in winter when it’s only 20 degrees. He says this with some pride as if surviving 90 minutes is something of an heroic feat, maybe it is but I don’t intend to put his metrological knowledge to the test any time soon.

Kick-off is pushed back 10 minutes as the visitors are delayed on route from Cumbria or maybe they are waiting for a pie in the world’s slowest moving queue - the pies are first rate but a long time in the serving. Cleator Moor Celtic, in green and white naturally, take their traffic/pie related frustration out on the home team in aggressive fashion. Almost every challenge involves a push, a late follow through or some snarling post contact comment. If intimidation is the name of the game, it doesn’t quite work, as despite being out-played, Bacup take the lead as Kyle Siddle sweeps in Toby Wright’s low cross. The goal really seems to infuriate Celtic as first Brad Tatton is rightly red-carded for a horrible lunging tackle before Tom Mahone (already booked) is sin-binned. James Glover and Ryan Hall follow Mahone to the bench (or wherever sin-binders go) before Mahone comes back on leaving a 11 v. 8 scenario at the break. There was a rumour during half-time that two Cleator Moor players had been dismissed along with a claim that someone had asked the linesman. It turned out to be one of those great footballing “I heard it from my mate, who’s brother’s sister-in-law was sat next to the chairman....” half-truths as Celtic eventually get ten men back on the pitch. In the meantime, a game of football has broken out as the highly impressive Alex Mellor, shirt flowing free from his shorts, doubles Bacups’s advantage. This should be game over, but Mahone’s corner is misjudged by Henry Turner and the ball drops into the net. In keeping with the afternoon no one knows whether it’s an own goal or not.

It’s been a little quiet on the bookings front for a while, but Borough’s Michael Gervin livens things up with a second yellow, he’s already half-way down the

tunnel before referee Mr. Kurkiewicz has pulled the card from his top pocket. Celtic have their tails up and Jamie Glover, their towering centre-half, goes twice in quick succession with powerful headers. Glover's height advantage at set pieces is clearly worryingly the home defence and his presence proves too much of a distraction a minute into added time - Jack Conway gets the decisive touch at the far post to earn a point.

As the wind blows across the quickly emptying terrace there is a warm glow to be had from knowing ahead of us [lies](#) another nine months of adventures in the wacky world of non-league football.

contributed on 03/08/21

TT No.5: Keith Aslan - Saturday 31st July 2021; **RHOSTYLLEN v CPD Y Felinheli;** Ardal North West League; Kick Off: 14.30; Admission: Free; Programme: £2; Attendance: 78 (72 home, 1 away & 5 neutral).

Big reorganizations in the principality with the newly formed Ardal leagues which may, or may not, be an improvement on what went before. Ardal as linguists such as myself will know, is Welsh for 'district', and the leagues big selling point as far as I'm concerned is the mandatory programme requirement, although a lot of clubs are only issuing those abominable 'e' things that will be banned when I come to power. No such problems in Rhostyllen where the paper sold out before kick-off, disappointing late-comers, but understandable given the higher than expected attendance. Printer peccadillos meant much of it was upside down but manoeuvring the programme around a bit I gleaned the important information that star defender Drew Wickens favourite team is, surprise, surprise, Manchester United.

Rhostyllen is a ten-minute ride from Wrexham General station with plenty of buses. Having finally got my old persons bus pass (six years after everybody else) it was heart breaking that it's not valid in Wales and I had to pay a ridiculous £4.60 for the six-mile round trip. Mind you the ticket entitled me to travel on buses all day in Wrexham, not that I found that to be a particularly enticing prospect. Facilities at the ground were mostly closed, the toilets weren't in operation due to flooding, and as it was far too dangerous to go into the tea bar due to Covid, hot drinks had to be obtained alfresco. A sumptuous brick-built stand straddled the halfway line which was out of bounds, again due to it being a plague magnet. Apparently, you can't 'social-distance' a couple of a dozen people in a 100-capacity stand. Luckily there was no danger with the five substitutes cramming together in a small dug out. If you didn't know better, you'd think these restrictions had more to do with politics than keeping people safe! The ground was railed in a pleasant rural setting, and free admission is the most the club can hope for as you get a perfect view of the match from the adjacent road. On the club's *Facebook* page, they excitedly announced that this was to be their first league game since March 2019. Lockdown must have started a bit earlier here than everywhere else.

Rhostyllen held out for 20 seconds before conceding their first ever Ardal league goal and spent the rest of the match playing catch up. They had the vast majority

of possession but doughty defending, even doughtier goalkeeping, and the crossbar, meant a single goal 20 minutes from the end was all they could manage and Y Felinheli must have been very pleased to come away with a point. The referee added a total of ten minutes onto the game. If only there was some rule that you could write into a book stipulating how long a match should last. His two linesmen looked about 12, but maybe I'm just getting old. Plenty of helpers around the ground, always a sign of a healthy club, and very friendly they were too. All in all, another fine day out, apart from another dire performance from Avanti.

I owe bearded boy an apology. I've often claimed *Virgin* were the worst train company in the world. *Avanti* have proved me wrong time and time again since they took over the route. Line shut between Stafford and Rugby today for no reason so a detour through the delightful Birmingham hinterland with the train going extra slow to give me time to admire the scenery. And I didn't try their latest money-making whizz, 'Standard premium'. Having took out a bank loan for the fare to start with, why not pay an extra £25 (twenty-five) to sit in first class. Regular travellers must now be thinking they'd have to really cane the free coffees to make this one pay. No free coffees (or anything else) with 'Standard Premium' you are paying £25 just to sit in a slightly more comfortable seat. Having been taken for a ride, literally, by *Avanti*, I got back to my country dacha very late, but every cloud has a silver lining, and I didn't have to wait so long to watch the Olympic Wall Climbing. No, I'm not making it up, climbing a wall is an Olympic sport this year. Think I'll stick with football.

contributed on 01/08/21

TT No.4: Keith Aslan - Saturday 24th July 2021; Cuxton 91 v Sutton Athletic; Friendly; Kick Off: 14.30; Result 0-5; Admission: Free; Programme: £1; Attendance 38 (26 home, 4 away & 8 neutral).

Happiness and joy, my first trip since 'Freedom Day' and a train ride without being persecuted for not wearing a mask. When you are as handsome as me it's a crime against nature to cover such beauty with a piece of cloth. Not that didn't stop the frequent announcements 'advising' me to wear one. To quote an old Chinese proverb 'A wise man always listens to advice, but only a fool always takes it'. And where better to celebrate my liberation than Cuxton who, for some unexplained reason, were issuing a 20-page programme covering their four pre-season friendlies. They haven't issued before to my knowledge and speaking to one of their officials, aren't likely to for the coming season either. I had intended to visit the previous week, but that match was pinged off, along with half their friendlies meaning there was a large box full of programmes as you entered which just aren't going to get shifted. A shame.

Situated on the River Medway a couple of miles south of Rochester the station for this one is, no surprises here, Cuxton, from where the 'Smartdeskers Community Ground' is a 15-minute walk. Cuxton is a village containing a pub, a Chinese Restaurant, a Co-op, a post office and strangely, two hairdressers. They must be very big on personal grooming round these parts. The ground was a groundhoppers'

delight. A wooden rail on two sides with a path leading up to an elevated vantage point along the touchline. But if it rains you will get wet. A nice clubhouse (no food) was showing the Olympic swimming on TV. I don't get swimming. Sploshing around to see who's going to get from A to B the quickest, I'm with that. But then they hand out medals for going slower if you do fishy strokes or on your back. Usain Bolt might be pretty quick at going forward, but I reckon the Brits could beat him at backward or sideways running.

Cuxton don't appear to have copped on to the concept of a 'Friendly'. The first sending off was for a dodgy tackle. Often in friendlies the referee will just order the player to be substituted, and while I didn't see the tackle myself, the referee decided its dodgyness quotient was sufficient for a straight red. Second sending off came with a Cuxton player mouthing off about some decision or other, the ref sin-binned him but the player continued his tirade as he walked off and his departure was made permanent. This is what happens when you don't have those 'Respect' handshakes. Deciding to make it a hat-trick, a punch was thrown at a Sutton player while the referee wasn't looking. The linesman was, and Cuxton were down to eight players. With the game becoming a bit silly the ref blew for time on 39 minutes so the hoppers had no problem catching their trains.

A momentous day today, it's the 40th anniversary of the release of 'Escape to Victory' and to celebrate ITV 4 showed it again this evening. A film that stars Sylvester Stallone and John Wark can't be bad. Yes, it can!

contributed on 25/07/21

TT No.3: Steve Hardy - Saturday 17th July 2021; Berks County v Yateley United; Pre-Season Friendly; Result: 3-0; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 21 h/c.

On the hottest day since Hades was built a few thousand years ago, where is the one setting you should never consider watching a game? Yup, a 3G pitch in a cage. No surprise then that that was exactly where I ended up today for only my second game in the whole of 2021.

The plan originally was to watch Slough Town v Hayes & Yeading, but that was called off on the Friday evening for 'a reason'. So Ryish Green Leisure Centre it was. The Leisure Centre is based in Shinfield, where the facilities consisted of said plastic pitch in a cage, and possibly two grass pitches as well. There is the usual spectator area along one side in the cage but apart from a very brave walk up and down it to get some photos, I and most of the other spectators headed for a very small area of shade behind one goal. As the sun moved along, we shuffled with it until some of us found ourselves back in the sunshine again.

Berks County are new to the Co-Co league this season with visitors Yateley being in the Hellenic league. I learned that this was Yateley's first game of the season, whereas BC had played several, all at this same venue. The first half was all Yateley, but they began to flag in the searing heat and conceded the first goal right on the stroke of half time from a header at a corner.

After the break BC took control and with both sides wilting, they scored a couple more and could have had a few others with a bit of luck.

So, another season unfolds. Don't think I will be going to quite as many games as I usually do this season, as my depression is making that very difficult. We will see.

contributed on 19/07/21

TT No.2: Mark Jones - Wednesday 8th July; **Prestatyn Sports FC** - new ground review of The Meadows.

The North Wales resort town of Prestatyn hasn't seen a new football ground (or any kind of major sports facility for that matter) since 1969 when Prestatyn Town moved a couple of hundred yards from their old Bastion Road ground, tucked away behind a large and imposing nursing home, to their present site on Bastion Gardens.

But 2020 saw Prestatyn Sports - relative newcomers to the scene having only been formed in 2010 - move into their long-awaited new facility on The Meadows, a project that has been some seven years in the making and seen a lot of blood, sweat and tears shed along the way.

Sports had previously played their games in nearby Gronant village, but the public pitch and infrastructure left much to be desired with matters coming to a head in October 2017 when Caersws refused to play a Welsh Cup tie there claiming the facilities were 'inadequate and dangerous' forcing Sports to withdraw from the competition.

The club then launched a major series of improvements which saw them rail off the pitch, radically overhaul the dressing rooms and generally tidy the area up. A couple of years later, the political restructuring of Welsh football dealt them another blow when Gronant, which is geographically in Flintshire, was deemed to fall under the jurisdiction of the North-East Wales FA meaning Sports would have to quit the North Wales Coast FA and join one of NEWFA's leagues which would have trebled their travelling distances and also their costs.

Thankfully, sense was seen, and Sports were allowed to remain in the Coastal set up and the decision spurred them on to find a new home in Denbighshire where they had already identified the Meadows as a preferred option.

After years of wrangling with planners, local residents, grant funding authorities and the like, permission to go ahead and develop the site was given in 2019 and 12 months later the Meadows was ready to host games (until the pandemic stuck its oar in and scuppered everything for everybody),

The ground is very rural and very verdant being surrounded by open land and lying in the shadow of the hills that provide a backdrop to the town.

Fully railed off with dugouts, the main structure at the ground is a large vandal-proof cabin housing impressive dressing rooms and showers for players and officials, an equipment store and Davey's Tea Bar which provides matchday refreshments.

Everything is painted dark green which blends in with the surroundings nicely and contrast is provided by signage in Sports' red and white colours.

There is no hard standing or cover at the moment, (though both are planned for the future), so this is one of those grounds best visited in early or late season when the Welsh weather is better.

Reaching The Meadows is a bit of a trek from the town's railway station (a good 45-minute walk at least presuming you know where you are heading) so the best option for non-motorists is to pick up a bus for Meliden from the central bus station and alight near the Miners Arms pub from where The Meadows can be reached in five minutes via Roundwood Avenue. A taxi from Prestatyn station to the ground will set you back around £5 or so.

Both the Miners Arms and the nearby Red Lion serve excellent pub grub and have a choice of real ales while Meliden village itself has a very decent Chinese chippy and a large Spar convenience store - these are the nearest facilities to the ground so fill up or stock up before the match is my advice!

If you are driving to The Meadows, please be aware that parking is very limited and Roundwood Avenue doesn't offer much in the way of places to pull up, being quite rural with no pavements for much of its length.

I am happy to offer help with any advice or local information to hoppers wanting to visit Sports so feel free to drop me a text or call me on 07753 966805. Diolch yn fawr iawn pawb! Mwynhau!

contributed on 08/07/21

TT No.1: Brian Buck - Thursday 1st June 2021; Duxford United v Histon Hornets U18; Friendly Match; Result: 2-11; Attendance: 60 approx.

So, with the end of my season being 24 hours earlier, the start of my new season commenced the next day. This was my first visit here since 2nd May 1997, when I saw Duxford United lose 2-1 at home to Sawston United in the Cambridge Invitation Cup Semi Final (attendance: 65 approx).

Since then, although there has been no change to the Hunts side road of the ground, a large Community Centre, complete with sizeable car park, has been recently built and it opened around a year ago. I reckon that if there was an emergency the whole population of the village could fill this building, with room to spare.

Anyway, from the hosts point of view, this was rather a strange evening in that their Twitter feed stated that their pre-season training wasn't due to start until

6th July. But despite this I still expected them to see off a genuine youth team. But soon it was obvious that this was not going to happen, and they shipped their first goal on 7 minutes. But it was all square on 16 minutes. Then Hornets were back in the lead three minutes later, from the spot. We were expecting a free kick the other way following an injury, but we weren't watching properly! By the break, the score was 1-4 with the fourth goal being another spot kick, following a foul. The score then became 1-5 and then 2-5 by the 57th minute, when the ball was nodded home despite the visiting keeper for some reason trying a scissor kick to prevent this happening. A minute later it was 2-6 and then starting on 73 minutes Hornets scored four times in four minutes. Meanwhile in the Community Centre a brass band was practicing, but playing funeral music was perhaps a step too far! A final goal arrived on 85 minutes and soon the ref brought an end to proceedings a few minutes early. It seems that Duxford must have blamed their excellent pitch for their defeat tonight as next day they revealed that they had been accepted for a £10,000 grant for a pitch maintenance programme over the next 6 years from the Football Foundation!

contributed on 07/07/21

End