

## TT REPORTS 2022-23

updated 27/06/23.

**TT No.176: *Brian Buck*** - Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> June 2023; **West Row Gunners v AFC Lakenheath**; Friendly Match; Venue: played at Mildenhall Hub 3G pitch, Sheldrick Way, Mildenhall; Result: 2-4; Attendance: 30 approx.

This match had appeared on *Twitter* a few days earlier, so being the closest game to home, I went for it. Although not all of this site is new, my sat nav didn't recognise the post code, but it's on the West Row road coming out of Mildenhall.

Although the 3G pitch is brand new, the site also encompasses a sports centre, a library, a school and some NHS facilities. The Gunners will be playing all their home games here in 2023/24, while some unspecified problems are sorted out at their usual Beeches Road ground. It was here where I saw them beat Newmarket Snooker Centre & Bowl 4-1 in a Kershaw League Senior 'B' Division match on 27 April 2000 (att: 30 approx). The new season sees them switch from the Cambs County League to the Central & South Norfolk League, whilst AFC Lakenheath are staying put in the Cambs League.

The 3G cage is typical of many I see these days, in that the official viewing area is restricted to part of one side only. Outside of the cage there is long grass on three sides, which made retrieval of 'lost' balls a bit tricky. The game seemed to be refed by a 'proper' ref, although he wasn't exactly dressed for the part. Overall, he did a good job, except perhaps for the game's only controversial moment, on 37 minutes, when he called for a Lakenheath player to be subbed following a seemingly dodgy tackle. But at half time, following an intervention from a loud Lakenheath follower, it was suggested to him that he apologise to the 'sent off' player and speak to the recipient of the tackle, who may have made a meal of it. This action happened and afterwards everyone was friends again.

As for the match itself, West Row looked good when they were either in the lead or not conceding. They took the lead on 31 minutes, but it was 1-1 by the 55<sup>th</sup> minute. But they regained the lead on about 65 minutes and looked set to win the match, until Lakenheath made it all square on 79 minutes. They then scored again ten minutes later and got a fourth one right at the end, the goal initially coming from the spot, but was eventually headed home after the hard-hit shot came down off the crossbar. Soon afterwards they were nearly given another spot kick, but this time the ref wasn't so convinced, causing a teammate to tell his colleague to "Go down more theatrically!"

*contributed on 27/06/23.*

**TT No.175: *Brian Buck*** - Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> June 2023; **International Surrey Football v Alexandra Knights**; Friendly Match; Venue: played at AFC Whyteleafe; Result: 2-1; Attendance: 40 approx.

I was looking forward to attending this game for two reasons. Firstly, because I haven't seen a game here since my only other visit, on 28 May 1977, when I watched BROB Barnet beat Ulysses 4-1 (aet) in the London Spartan League Cup Final and secondly, after having to drive nearly everywhere because of train strikes this season, it gave me a chance to have a leisurely day out on the trains and then whack down a relaxed couple of pints before the match started. But soon the problems mounted up.

Over the past couple of months, I've been beset by problems and today my blood pressure soon began to rise. My train was over half an hour late arriving at East Croydon, which had the effect of reducing my drinking time at the ground by 50%. From Whyteleafe South station, although it was only a ten-minute walk to the ground, half of it was up a very steep hill and I struggled with this, as a sympathetic fox noted on the way. I arrived at the ground half an hour before kick-off. Time for a couple of pints. All of us, mainly Groundhoppers, who bar one, I didn't know, were shunted into the boardroom bar because there was a kiddies' party going on in the main bar. They were taking your orders and money from here but phoning them through to the other bar. It was the barmaids first day here, which didn't help and as I waited for my two pints to appear, eating my sandwiches while I waited patiently. Then, with ten minutes to go before kick-off, I went into the main bar to find my drinks. It seemed that it was this frustrated barmaid's first day as well, as it took her twenty minutes to produce two pints of Guinness! So, I had less than ten minutes to knock them back, but recalling the day in 1984, when after arriving at Droylsden 15 minutes before kick off after walking to there from Manchester Piccadilly station, I knocked back two pints of Boddingtons (when it was good!) in the about the same amount of time, the first, while the second one was being poured, I proved today that I hadn't lost my touch, although this was now sadly a quick pre-match chuck down, rather than the slow slurp I'd hoped for!

But it turned out that I had more time than I thought as the match kicked off 22 minutes late, because the home team weren't ready! I still don't know who International Surrey Football are. If you google their history, they don't tell you much. It's not clear, but they may just exist to raise money for charity. The visitors meanwhile play in the Barnet Sunday League.

The ground here, complete with a 3G pitch, is surrounded by tall trees on three sides. It is lovely and far improved from when I last came here and they have worked wonders to carve it out of the side of a hill. It has cover on all four sides and seats along one side and behind one goal. Staring at all this during the game was the best part of my day out. The game was good though and some decent football was played. The hosts quickly went into a 2-0 lead with goals on 12 and 14 minutes, with the visitors getting their goal on 56 minutes, in this friction free game, well controlled by the limping ref, who eventually struggled with the searing heat. Getting home was problematic as well, although this time the train was only 15 minutes late.

*contributed on 13/06/23.*

**TT No.174: Brian Buck** - Bank Holiday Monday 29<sup>th</sup> May 2023; **Allenburys Sports v Lemsford Reserves**; Herts Senior County League Division 3; Result: 0-3; Attendance: 35 approx.

Despite the din of the passing traffic on the adjacent A10, I tend to enjoy my visits here, as the venue is an old-fashioned sports ground which caters for cricket (not today) as well as football and it's even more serene around this time of the year, as it is tree lined and they were all at their best about now. It is also bordered by the River Lee and if you had come by train to the match then it would be possible to walk most of the way back to Ware station alongside the river.

I think that the ref might be an airline steward in real life, as before the start he introduced himself to us select band of Groundhoppers, by telling us, "Hello, I'm James, your referee for today!" Before the start of the game Allenburys needed four points from two matches to finish third, which was one of the automatic promotion positions. Easier said than done though, as I'd seen Lemsford Reserves play a few weeks back and they weren't a bad side. This Allenburys side wasn't the same side that I saw play at the end of the 2020/21 season in the Hertford & District League. They folded. No, this is Mill Lane, from Cheshunt (also ex-Hertford & District League), who moved here and renamed themselves, presumably so they could use the club's facilities.

As for the game, nothing much happened in the first half. Allenburys didn't play like a side going for promotion, but they did create some limited chances, one early on and three in a five-minute spell just before the break when they also had five corners, almost in a row. Despite creating nothing, to me Lemsford looked the side most likely to win though and in the second half I was proved right. On 50 minutes they opened the scoring from a breakaway move with the home defence going AWOL, adding a second goal four minutes later. Thereafter Allenburys had their moments and they nearly scored on at least two occasions. But Lemsford had the final say with their third goal on 90(+2) minutes.

*contributed on 31/05/23.*

**TT No.173: Brian Buck** - Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> May 2023; **Shefford Town & Campton Development v Sporting Carpathians**; Bedfordshire County League Division 2; Venue: played at Shefford Town Memorial Association Ground, Hitchin Road; Result: 4-1; Attendance: 20 approx.

Bearing in mind that I've lived in the area for over 35 years now, I find it surprising that I've never seen a game on this ground, which is less than 15 miles from my home. The main reason for this is, despite this recreation ground possessing a full-size pitch, it rarely has adult football played on it. There is an abundance of youth football played here though, mainly under the umbrella of Shefford Saints, who have loose connections with Shefford Town & Campton but to my knowledge, despite the name of the ground, Shefford Town & Campton adults have never played here before, although I stand to be corrected on this.

So, on a warm and sunny day, unless you sat in the shade, I managed to bag the last parking space in the car park to this picturesque set up, not realising at this

point that parking was actually allowed on the grass inside the ground. This ground is midway between Shefford's old Ivel Road ground, now built on, and their current ground. The game attracted several groundhoppers, most of them local, bringing an assortment of different makes of garden chairs with them to watch the game from. The days of standing up to view games for seasoned Groundhoppers like myself, are becoming numbered whenever possible, as we move into our advancing years.

The ref was keen to start the game some 15 minutes early so he could get home to watch the Luton Town versus Coventry City play-off match live on the TV, but his plan was largely thwarted because the players were in no particular hurry to start and the best he got was starting a couple of minutes early. Personally, I believe that starting a game early should lead to a fine! He could have helped himself though, as a drinks' break halfway through each half wasn't really needed.

As for the game, both sides gave it a go, playing the game as it was always intended to be played when it was first invented, over 150 years ago now, which is as a sport, rather than by cheating your way to a win using 'a win at all costs' attitude. Unfortunately, in the first half we didn't get any goals to savour, but on 49 minutes, a cross-cum-shot from the wing saw Shefford score first. They scored again on 65 minutes with a goal I didn't see because I was looking at the pretty different coloured trees in the park and then further goals, which I did see, on 80 and 85 minutes completed their scoring, but despite fading in the closing stages Carpathians had a goal in them and this arrived on 87 minutes, to bring to a close the season's last Bedfordshire County League match to be played.

*contributed on 31/05/23.*

**TT No.172: Craig Dabbs** - Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> May 2023; **FC United of Wrexham** v Ruabon Rovers; North East Wales League Championship Division; Venue: Bronwen's Green; Result: 2-7; Admission: Free; Programme: 8pp, £2; Attendance: 79.

Another season drew to a close yesterday in Brymbo, not far from Wrexham. I heard about this fixture just over a week ago and when I first started thinking about it, I thought it was at the ground where I had seen Brynteg Village play many moons ago. I was wrong. I know this area quite well, but Bronwen's Green was a new one on me and of course a new ground, so North Wales it was.

Bronwen's Green is located on the very edge of the village on a lane called Mount Zion. I'm so pleased that we have Sat-Nav in this day and age because it would've been a tricky one to find for sure. This is the bottom end of the pyramid in this area and the ground is basic. Although the pitch is railed there is little else other than a pleasant setting to get the hopping juices flowing. The changing rooms are set away from the ground, down a pathway behind the goal which lead to three shipping containers on a small car park.

FC United of Wrexham is a relatively new club having been around for just three seasons. This is their second season playing at Bronwen's Green after taking it on from the defunct Brymbo Victoria. The club is not so much a football club but a

futsal club, founded when Brickfield Rangers disbanded their futsal section, and three chaps broke away from Brickfield to set this venture up.

Unlike FC United of Manchester who were set up as a sort of protest club, FC United of Wrexham are nothing of the sort and fully embrace Wrexham FC. Indeed, Ryan Reynolds has shown his support to the club by donating to it's Under 12's futsal team. The club are ambitious and have a twenty-year plan to reach the upper levels of Welsh Football with a seven-year plan to reach the UEFA Futsal Champions League. I have no idea how feasible the latter is and the former, well twenty years has a degree of modesty to it, for a side that has struggled this season finishing third from bottom and shipping 121 goals in the process which includes this match.

The game itself, well much like a couple of weeks ago on a visit to Stamford Lions, where Sawtry needed to win by three goals to clinch the title, Ruabon just needed a win. Wrexham didn't read the script causing the Ruabon manager much frustration in the process. However, after a rocky first half Rovers got the show on the road and ran out comfortable winners in the end.

*contributed (via Brian Buck) on 28/05/23.*

**TT No.171: Keith Aslan - Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> May 2023; HANGLETON v SCAPE; Brighton, Worthing and District League Invitation Cup Final at Ringmer AFC; Kick Off: 14.59; Result: 4-1 to Scape; Admission & Programme: £4; Attendance: 81 (30 Hangleton; 30 Scape & 21 neutral).**

This one has always been at the top of my to do list since it opened a couple of years ago. It's probably the most built-up ground in the south east yet to have the pleasure of a visit from me. Ringmer AFC (uniquely the AFC comes after the place name, not before) don't issue but the Brighton League were playing a cup final here, and they do. So, presuming they are better organized than the shambles of the Wearside League last week (they are), today was the day for a trip to the Sussex countryside.

Disaster struck early. Train to London cancelled due to a bus interacting with a bridge somewhere along the line. Information was sparse, never did find out where the collision was, and nobody to ask as Broadstairs is a staffed station that never has any staff. The alternative to travel to London on the slow line was a non-runner, being a weekend, it was shut. Nothing for it but to wait and hope. Fortunately, the next train an hour later was the first one to start running and was rammed with three trainloads of passengers. I've never travelled on a more crowded train in my life, and I hope there was somebody on it from the 'Guinness Book of Records'. It was a relief to get off at St. Pancras and onto the haven of peace and tranquillity that is the Victoria Line.

Rest of the journey was hunky-dory with Southern Trains having one of their better days. Lewes is the station you want with a half hourly service dropping you off at the entrance to the ground. I shared my bus with eight Scape fans. Plastic pitch, and although I assume they had to build a green mesh fence to get planning

permission, this is a proper ground. Two *Atcost* stands along the touchline, separated by the changing rooms and above them, the clubhouse, which has a veranda with heightened viewing facilities. A really good set up. A wide variety of food was available, the cheese and onion toasties were my favourite, and the lunchtime football would have been showing on a big screen if there had been any.

The crowd self-segregated with the fans of each club taking over one of the *Atcost* stands. I watched most of the game with the Hangleton supporters which contained a large proportion of WAGS which greatly enhanced my matchday experience. A lot of local hoppers were present who I'd never met but they immediately identified me as a Traveller. I really must try to change my image. There was one other national groundhopping heavyweight (in every sense of the word) present, who tended to keep falling asleep during the match. It's probably an age thing.

This was an entertaining game and having hit the net three times Hangleton must have been disappointed to go into the break 2-1 down, with two of their 'goals' being allegedly offside. Scape upped their game in the second half and there were no arguments about the final outcome. Scape deserved to win due to having a manager with a fabulous name. How many Cletus Zidane Vaz's are there in football? The Hangleton keeper was the smallest man on the pitch by some inches, but he did the business. The fourth official looked like his day job was playing in a ZZ Top tribute band. And a shout out to those unsung heroes, the matchday stewards. Two of them in sensual high visibility vests who's only function throughout the entire afternoon was to move the retractable tunnel backwards and forwards so the players didn't have to see any fans when they came on and off the pitch.

I'm a bit of an aficionado of wooden bus shelters and the one outside the ground was a pleasant place to commence my journey home. Also waited for my train at Lewes in the 'Passenger Lounge' which before privatization, was strangely called a 'Waiting Room'. How passe. Return trip went as planned, and after a beastly beginning, it was a case of all's well that ends well.

*contributed on 28/05/23.*

**TT No.170: *Brian Buck*** - Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> May 2023; Larkspur Rovers v Indian Gymkhana; Cherry Red Books Middlesex County League Premier Division; Result: 2-3; Attendance: 25 approx.

This game was actually Indian Gymkhana's home game, but it got switched to Larkspur Rovers usual home venue at Lord Halsbury Playing Fields, presumably for cricket reasons. Although I drove here, the ground is a short walk from Northolt tube station on the Central Line. Come out of the station and head south until you reach Eastcote Lane. Follow that road without turning off it, even when it becomes Abbott Close. Now the road looks like it leads into a dead end, but soon a school appears on your left by a roundabout. Go over it and keep to the right of the school and follow a narrow track, called Priors Farm Lane, with the tube railway line now appearing on your right. After a short drive you find the ground,

which opens up in front of you and there is a large clubhouse and plenty of parking.

There was a kiddie's party going on in the main hall, but there was also a bar open. Another part of the complex housed a boxing club and on one of the outside walls was a large mosaic spotlighting everything which goes on here. It's a hidden community centre really. As for the pitch surrounds, the very bumpy pitch was loosely enclosed by rope and posts but apart from being there you could easily step over the ropes. Nonetheless this was a surprisingly rural location, with fields surrounding two sides of the ground. Also, you could watch tube trains pass by in one corner.

As for the game, both sides put some energy into it to try and prevent it from looking like the end of the season match which in reality it was. In the first half Gymkhana seemed to want it more than Rovers, especially as they took the lead with just 23 seconds played. Then further goals, on 14 and 30 minutes, put them in the driving seat. In the second half Rovers managed to turn things around a bit though, or it could be argued that Gymkhana 'managed' their lead, perhaps conserving their energy! On 75 minutes a 30 yarder gave the hosts hope and a spot kick two minutes into added on time, reduced the arrears further, but that was it and the ref soon brought to a close a match played out mostly in a decent spirit and without too much gamesmanship which blights so many games these days. So, this meant that I enjoyed my short sojourn here, which I shared in the company of a pleasant local football follower whom I don't think I'd met before!

*contributed on 23/05/23.*

**TT No.169: Keith Aslan - Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> May 2023; DARLINGTON TOWN v FC Hartlepool; Shipowners Cup Final; Kick Off: 14.03; Result: 5-1; Admission: Only a quid for people of my vintage; Programme: Yet another tale of despair; Attendance: 348 (290 home, 18 away & 40 neutral)**

It's the big one in the North East, the Shipowners Cup Final, always played at the home ground of one of the finalists and always produces a programme. Until today!

Darlington Town's ground is handily placed around a 22-minute limp from the station but fans of football architecture might want to give this one a miss. Plastic, green mesh fence, standing down one side, not much to get the juices flowing here. What is different is that the changing rooms are in a different time zone, miles away, so the teams braved the outdoor elements at half time and remained out on the pitch for their mid-match water consumption, which made for an agreeably short break. Next door you can see the ground they hope to be moving into, this looks much better but plenty of work is needed to be done on it, and still a long way from the changing rooms unless they're going to build some new ones. For those of you who've never watched a match with 347 other people in a ground that only has a path down one side for viewing facilities, I wouldn't recommend it.

Tragedy struck on arrival with a league official saying there wasn't going to be a programme today. 'Nothing to do with me, the home club were supposed to do it' So that's all right then. Could you not have liaised with Darlington prior to the final

and explained to them it was their responsibility to produce the paper? Apparently not. Darlington have acquired a man that is to football secretaries what Liz Truss is to Prime Ministers. He decided he couldn't be bothered and that was that. The legendary Stockport hopper had phoned him up a fortnight before the match when he said he was going to do one. Then changing his mind, and to avoid any questions, he went off grid the week before the game and refused to answer his phone or respond to any e-mails. The secretaries' job is a voluntary position, and given his lack of interest, it does make you wonder why he volunteered. I've already had a sneak preview of Len's issue which he is compiling for the game, probably better than anything Darlington would have come up with, but it shouldn't be left up to him.

Darlington are the Cup Kings having won the other big one the previous week at Windscale (who managed to issue). They were somewhat flattered by today's score, mid-way through the second half they were only 2-1 up with Hartlepool looking as though they were going to equalize, then Darlo made it 3-1 and ran away with things from there. In spite of a six-minute half time the referee impressively kept the match going until five to four, with a fifth goal and a sending off in added time making the extra eight minutes all worthwhile.

LNER management have gone the extra mile to enhance the train travel experience. Passengers have become customers, guards have become train managers, but the boys from East Coast have really excelled themselves. Every train has a 'Quiet Coach'. But in a spectacular piece of rebranding, they are now referred to as 'Quieter coach' I wonder how much someone got paid for that one?

*contributed on 22/05/23.*

**TT No. 168: Brian Buck** - Monday 15<sup>th</sup> May 2023; **Elstow Abbey** v Riseley Sports; Bedfordshire County League Premier Division; Venue: played at Meltis Sports & Social Club, Miller Road, Bedford; Result: 2-3; Attendance: 20 approx.

This was an end of the season match which had to be fitted in before Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> May, apparently to comply with some little known or heard of rule, that all Step 7 games must be completed by this date. Why? With the league champions pitch being claimed by the cricket club, the game was switched to here, which has also been home to many other teams over years, which gave me the chance to watch the trains pass by during the match, except that there weren't any tonight, presumably because of a rail strike. However, it didn't stop a small posse of Groundhoppers turning up and we had guests from Ely, Ipswich and Ramsgate present.

Bearing in mind that Elstow had an important Britannia Cup Final to contest against Sharnbrook on the following Wednesday, I questioned the strength of their side for tonight's match and was told that none of tonight's players would feature in that game. In fact, we recognised most of tonight's squad, as they had played for their reserves against Sandy first team on the previous Monday, losing 3-1 at Bedford Road. Tonight, they went a goal down on 4 minutes after the ball was looped over the keeper from just outside the area. But Abbey equalised from the spot on 32 minutes, following a foul. Then Riseley regained the lead on 42 minutes

when the ball was swept home from a corner. Two minutes later Abbey pulled another goal back, again from the spot, following a disputed handball, but this time with a different player taking the kick. Then on 54 minutes Riseley got what proved to be the winner, when from a short pulled back pass the ball was powered home from the edge of the area. Thereafter although the visitors created more than the hosts, possession was fairly even, but the Elstow players must take some credit for playing creditable Premier Division football with their usual Division 3 side.

*contributed on 16/05/23.*

**TT No.167: Brian Buck** - Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> May 2023; Kibworth Town v Ashby Ivanhoe Knights; Everards Brewery Leicestershire Senior League division 1; Result: 0-2; Attendance: 30 approx.

There was something on this game, which gave me confidence to travel to it. Knights needed four points from their last two games to win the league. With the previous day's wet weather local to me, I did speak to the home secretary before I left home to confirm that the game was still on. He put me on hold for a moment before coming back to me, telling me that he had just checked the weather station in his garden and that it hadn't rained at all there.

It took me just under 90 minutes to get here and the ground can be found, with difficulty, off the Fleckney Road as you come out on the western side of Kibworth Beauchamp which is just off the A6 heading towards the south of Leicester. Keep looking to your left and drive slowly and you will see a property called Birds Barn. Here there is Kibworth Town sign and another for Leicestershire Wildlife Hospital. Drive down what was today a bumpy, dusty road for a couple of hundred yards and then the spacious ground, with numerous pitches, opens up before you. Essentially you have arrived at a ground surrounded completely by fields.

There are changing rooms here, and today, a non-operational tea bar. The pitch was to be found at almost the far end of the complex, about a hundred yards away from the dressing rooms, but it was fully railed off and judging by the colour of the mold on the posts, it looked as though the pitch had been railed off for many years.

As for the game, it was really done and dusted within the opening twenty minutes. Knights dominated the early stages and on 12 minutes they took the lead when a bouncing ball, played forwards, was nodded over the advancing keeper from just inside the area. The lead just then doubled on 18 minutes when a cross from the left was diverted into the net by the hosts best player on the day, when otherwise it would have missed the target. But despite this they have given the goal to one of their players on *Full Time*.

The Knights effectively then saw out the rest of the game without time wasting too much. Kibworth put on a decent show, but you had the feeling that Knights could and would have stepped up the pace had they needed to do so. After the game had finished, I needed the toilets before I made my way home, so along with the Knights players and management and the ref, we made our way back to the

dressing rooms, which we found on our arrival were locked. The keys to it were with the home side of course, but rather than return to unlock then their officials stayed out on the pitch to have a post-match conflag on the pitch. So instead, I decided to inspect the rear of the changing block and then suddenly I decided that I no longer needed to make use of the toilets in the changing rooms after all! My lasting memories of the day were that not, for the first time this season, things went better than expected, especially as the driving aspect of the day out wasn't particularly onerous.

*contributed on 16/05/23.*

**TT No.166: Craig Dabbs** - Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> May 2023; **Stamford Lions** v Sawtry; Peterborough & District League Division One; Venue: Empingham Road Playing Fields; Result: 0-7; Admission: Free; Programme: Did not issue; Attendance: 30

Football in its rawest form is the best way of describing this. I've watched the game at much lower levels than Step 8 of course but this was as basic as it gets.

Stamford Lions featured on a hop a few years back, playing on an outer pitch at Stamford FC but now they have a base at Empingham Road Playing Fields which is first and foremost the home of Stamford RFC.

The first thing that strikes you on arrival are the goalposts - well, there isn't anything else really. You can't help but notice that they are too short, something picked up by a Sawtry player, myself and my travelling companion Mitch. Sawtry weren't going to make a fuss though, they needed to win by more than two goals to clinch the title and with the Lions on -2 points it was a fairly straight forward assignment.

A couple of other observations, Stamford Lions were playing in a Ryhall United kit. Why? Well on route to the game Sawtry realised that the Lions play in yellow and with no time to turn back Stamford had to quickly source another kit, thanks to Ryhall then. The other was the team itself, barely able to field the basic eleven they had an outfield player in goal with the actual goalkeeper on the bench as the only substitute with an achilles injury and, yes, he was called upon despite being lame after the stand-in goalkeeper got hurt in the latter stages of the first half.

If Sawtry had been more clinical in front of goal this would have finished in the high teens or low twenties. They came to do a job and did enough. As for Stamford, well I just hope they can re-group and carry on.

*contributed (via Brian Buck) on 14/05/23.*

**TT No.165: Keith Aslan** - Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> May 2023; Betteshanger Welfare v Your Future; **Whitstable Junior Cup Final at Whitstable Town FC**; Kick Off: 13.00; Result: 3-1; Admission & Programme: £5; Attendance: 92 (45 Betteshanger, 25 Future & 22 neutral)

What could be better than a leisurely bus ride along the coast to watch the Whitstable Junior Cup final. Quite a lot actually, but with our friends from the

unions having another jolly, there were no trains again. After two trainless days 'customers' were looking forward to a service on Sunday, except that this time, Railtrack had cancelled everything, and Thanet was cut off from the rest of civilization for the third day running. If this happened in France there'd be rioting in the streets, but the English are too apathetic to do anything. Only a bloody coup can save this country now.

In truth, providing your life isn't time sensitive, the bus journey from Broadstairs to Whitstable is rather enjoyable. I stopped off at Herne Bay for refreshments and a peek at the country's second longest pier (after Southend). You can see the end of it out to sea in the distance. A pity that these days it's on its own and not connected to anything with the middle bit having long since been blown up. On to Whitstable for another intake of provisions. In spite of the dodgy weather both places were teeming with day trippers. Like all of the resorts along the Kentish Riveia not called Margate, these are quality family tourist destinations.

If you visit the ground when there are some trains running, it's a 12-minute walk from the station. It's a proper ground with covered terracing at both ends and a stand along the side that must pre-date *Atcost* by a couple of hundred years. The opposite side contains the changing rooms and club house which was showing 'Overweight Sam's' latest adventures at Leeds United. Food was available. A fitting venue for the Whitstable Cup Final although neither of the contestants come from anywhere near the place. Betteshanger play in Deal while Your future's ground is a half hour walk from my country dacha in the heart of the Thanet National Park.

I was surprised to see a match already taking place when I arrived. While we still kicked off on time, the players had to change in the clubhouse with the dressing rooms still under occupation. Apparently, nobody knew anything about the earlier game. Without wishing to be over critical I would have thought Whitstable should have known who they'd hired their pitch out to?

This was a good game of football. Your Future had the best of the first half and scored one goal, Betteshanger had the best of the second and scored three. Half time lasted all of 11 minutes, a period of time everybody seemed quite happy with. Unfortunately, the digital clock wasn't switched on today. It is the only one I have ever seen that keeps on going to the end of a match and doesn't stop on 90 minutes.

Another pleasant ride home, this time via Canterbury for a bit of variety. Got plenty of value from my old folk's bus pass, which I might have mentioned I got six years after everybody else.

*contributed on 14/05/23.*

**TT No.164: Brian Buck** - Bank Holiday Monday 8<sup>th</sup> May 2023; **Sandy** v Elstow Abbey Reserves; Bedfordshire County League Division 3; Kick-Off: 2.30pm; Result: 3-1; Attendance: 40 approx.

For my afternoon game today, I picked the closest match to home. The reason for this being that as I am also head chef in our household, before setting out for my

evening game, I needed some time to prepare, eat and digest a two-course evening meal.

Although I haven't seen a game here for a few years, Sandy is my 15<sup>th</sup> most visited ground and today it was my 111<sup>th</sup> match I've seen here. First-time visitors are often surprised when they come here, expecting more when they find that the venue is little more than a non-roped off pitch in an attractive looking recreation ground, whereas a couple of miles down the road the likes of Biggleswade Town and also United, offer better facilities. Somehow over the years, this former South Midlands League Premier Division side has got left behind. But it's still 'home' to all those who have been connected with the club over the years and they do have a small operational bar in the clubhouse/dressing rooms building.

Anyway, today's mid-table hosts had a rather easy win against their lowly visitors. They got off to what some would consider to be a fortunate start, when they took the lead on 9 minutes when a shot bounced off the crossbar and allegedly over the line off the keeper's back. But although no one disputed this, some watching weren't convinced that the ball actually crossed the line. For a while Elstow were unsettled and they could sometimes be found to be arguing with each other. Then, for a while we had no more goals or serious goal attempts, but plenty of corners. Then, on 40 minutes, Sandy doubled their lead, this time from the spot, after a rather obvious push. In the second half the visitors played better and on 62 minutes they pulled a goal back after the scorer was allowed to run on unchallenged after being played in. Any hopes of them making a full comeback were thwarted when Sandy got a third goal on 67 minutes. Three minutes later, in this otherwise decent and sporting game, there was a brief kerfuffle, the outcome of which saw a home player booked and an Elstow player sent off. Overall, this was a pleasant afternoon out, watching the game amongst friends.

*contributed on 09/05/23.*

**TT No.163: Brian Buck** - Friday 5<sup>th</sup> May 2023; **Cambridge University Press** v Wisbech St Mary; Cambridgeshire County League CS1 Premier Division; Result: 3-3; Attendance: 30 approx.

What an evening this was! Once I remembered where the entrance to the playing area was in this large complex, I arrived on site about 20 minutes before kick-off. As visiting players were still arriving come kick off time the game kicked off late enough for it to be rescheduled as a 40 minute each way match. It was a big ask for them to make the two-hour trip in the rush hour on time. While we waited for the game to start, I got talking to another spectator and we agreed that the league table suggested that if Press won this game, then they would finish second, one place ahead of Great Shelford. But that never happened, for various reasons.

I think that I am right in saying that Press are the last remaining works side in this league who have their own private ground, but whatever, with it being railed off behind one goal and on the far side where the dugouts are, it's a lovely place to play football. Behind the other goal was out of bounds tonight, with the side where spectators stood, being roped off.

While the visitors were probably still leg weary, Press took the lead on four minutes, when from a through ball, the scorer drew the keeper out wide, slotting it past him in the process. A second goal followed two minutes later when the ball was touched home from close range following a teasing cross from the right. Then worse still from the visitor's point of view, a third goal followed when the offside trap, if there was one set, was sprung a further two minutes after that. Then a dark cloud started to head our way, quickly followed by thunder and lightning and soon the inevitable rain, some of it very heavy, followed. Complete with my garden chair, I headed to the clubhouse bar balcony in the corner of the ground and watched the game from there until the rain ceased at half time, by which time Wisbech had just pulled a goal back with a precision across the face of goal shot.

In the second period Press still looked comfortable in the lead, but that confidence was dented a tad when on 57 minutes Wisbech scored again when out of sight of the home custodian the ball was curled into the top right hand of the net. Then with the last move of the game the visitors were awarded a disputed corner. They brought their keeper up for it and when the ball was played in it seemed to hit just about every player on the pitch before going slowly over the line just before the ref blew the final whistle. Then when I checked the league table the next day I saw that it now showed Press still in third place, same points as Shelford, who had one game left to play!

*contributed on 09/05/23.*

**TT No.162: Keith Aslan** - Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> May 2023; **CENTRAL AJAX** v DSC; Midland League Division 3; Kick Off: 15.02; Result: 1-3; Admission: Free; Programme: £1; Attendance: 28 (12 home, 0 away & 16 neutral).

A great day for the nation, we've waited almost three quarters of a century for this moment and the crowds were out in force to pay homage to our great leader. Yes, today is Tony Blair's 70<sup>th</sup> birthday and there were celebrations across the land. The greatest living statesman once said, 'Vote for me and I'll renationalize the railways'. I did, he didn't. Also, a momentous day for football with Frank Lampard, the Avanti of football managers, gaining the victory for Chelsea that ensures Premier League football at the Bridge next season. Even the evil Oir FC put in an appearance today for the return fixture with Clapton CFC. If I'd have been Clapton, I'd have phoned them up a couple of hours before kick-off and told them they weren't bothering to turn up. See how they like it.

On such a momentous day there was only one place to be as Central Ajax needed a victory, coupled with a Coventrians defeat, to win the league. Ajax play in the proverbial 'middle of nowhere' deep in the Worcestershire countryside. Warwick Parkway is a 45-minute limp away and I was grateful to a fellow hopper for a lift back to the station after the game with my knees quite adamant they'd had enough exercise for one day. A clubhouse was serving hot and cold drinks as well as gravity burgers. There was a large tele. showing some shindig going on at Westminster featuring the most famous German since Jurgen Klopp. Static dugouts and a rope made up the outdoor facilities. Should Ajax wish to put up floodlights, a three-tier stand or build a leisure complex, they won't get any complaints from the

neighbours. There aren't any.

Founded in 1978, Central Ajax moved here in 1989 when their previous abode was turned into, surprise surprise, houses. They are named after their former ground, Central Park, and the changing rooms which used to be cleaned with Ajax. I might have made the second bit up. DSC as I'm sure your anxious to know, stands for Denbigh Snooker Club. Once again somebody must have tipped people off that I was going with over half the attendance of the travelling fraternity.

This was a wonderful game, hardly a foul worthy of the name. There was no time wasting and everybody accepted the referees' decisions (those 'Respect handshakes' are starting to pay dividends!). This was proper football, how it should be played but very rarely is. Well done to both teams.

Still waiting to receive last weeks 'Traveller', the postal service down here is rubbish since privatization. At least I won't have to worry about privatization messing up the trains next Saturday. There aren't any.

*contributed on 07/05/23.*

**TT No.161: Jon T Green** - Friday 28th April 2023; **LLANFAIR UNITED** v Cefn Albion; Ardal North East League; Venue: Mount Field; Result: 2-1; Admission: £5; Programme: online only; Attendance: 112.

Now call me slightly naive if you will but the walk from the centre of Llanfair Caereinion to United's aptly named Mount Field seemed decidedly uphill. Maybe it was the warmth of the evening, or the quick visit to the Red Lion, but I could have sworn that the stroll down only an hour or so previously was along a gently sloping street rather than the hike up a mountainside which I was now enduring. Not that the climb isn't worth it because the ground is an absolute beauty; entering the spectators car park you're greeted with a view of The Ivor Owen Stand - cut into a steep grass bank, it's reached by a flight of metal steps and contains 150 dark blue seats. To its right, and at the top of the bank, is an uncovered hard standing area (essentially you are now watching from the players car park) but the view back over the town with its two churches nestled in the River Banwy valley is quite sublime. There is a tea hut, toilet block and changing rooms on this side of the ground but no actual clubhouse. This is a shame because the lack of one clearly denies the club a useful revenue stream; not that they seem particularly bothered about financial matters as there aren't any turnstiles either; admission money being collected on a seemingly ad hoc basis by a chap with a plastic tub. Hard standing (albeit extremely narrow in places) is provided behind one goal and this extends around to the public car park where two pre-fabricated seated stands, each with four rows of 50 bright blue seats, have been built. In common with a number of Welsh League grounds there is no covered standing available which, to my mind at least, would seem to be a slight oversight in the grading requirements.

The visitors from Cefn Albion sit second in the table, just three points behind Caersws but having played a game more. United are back in sixth place but, having defeated the leaders 2-0 just a few days ago, Albion know that this is going to be a

tough encounter. On a difficult bobbly surface Cefn elect to hold a very high line which is giving the home forwards plenty of room to run into. Owain James is the first to try his luck, moving onto a through ball he sees his effort well saved by the advancing Josh Roberts. The 'keeper is called into action again and produces a fine reflex save from Matt Spencer's shot on the run. It comes as a bit of a surprise that the first goal goes to Cefn but, on 26 minutes, Luke Griffin smashes an unstoppable drive from around 30 yards which fairly whistles past Lee Andrew in the home goal. United should have been level a few moments later but Spencer can't convert after being beautifully set up by Zimbabwean Nyasha Mwamuka. Half time is reached without further incident and the match lacks some of the pace and passion associated with the Welsh game.

Cefn might have wrapped up the points just after the break as Ryan Kehoe strikes the bar with a fierce shot from the edge of the box - it's a chance they rue as, on 54 minutes, Llanfair are level. Once again, the high line gives United space to work in; Paul Griffiths finds himself in acres of space on the right and when his lob hits the crossbar, Kyle Capner is on hand to slide home the rebound. The woodwork continues to take a hammering as Spencer thumps a 25 yarder against it at the mid-point of the half. The same player is then involved again but somehow, he and Mwamuka get in each other's way and the moment is lost. Albion's Jordan Williams is having an ongoing "chat" with the crowd on the near side and it's one which seems to be having a detrimental effect on the full back's play - not that any of the home fans mention this to him!!! Williams' discomfort is soon matched by his team-mates as Llanfair take the lead with 15 minutes remaining. Unsurprisingly it's the ball over the top which once more does the trick; this time Karl Seliarts is the beneficiary as he gives the exposed Roberts no chance with a coolly executed finish. Cefn push hard for an equaliser with Kien Morris losing his footing at the crucial moment (much to the increasing delight of the home fans) before Andrew makes a solid block from Nick Jones' well executed half volley. In the end it's a deserved victory for the home side and one which perhaps spells the end for Albion's title challenge.

*contributed on 02/05/23.*

**TT No.160: Steve Hardy** - Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> April 2023; **Cresswell Wanderers v Florence Colliery**; Staffordshire County Senior League; Result: 1-9; Admission: Free; Programme: No Attendance 7 h/c.

A revisit to my nearest non-league ground today, reached by catching the number 25 bus to Hednesford, yet coming home on the number 26 bus. What fun eh?

Cresswell Wanderers are hiring the 5's Pavilion and sports ground this season. This posh name is in fact a 3G pitch in a cage and, er, that's it. A more learned local once told me that this ground was once the home of Hednesford Progressive and had a small stand along one side, but I am far too young to remember that!

What can I say about the match? Well Cresswell were shocking but did at least get a consolation goal in the second half. Florence barely needed to get out of first gear and scored at ease to lead 4-0 at the break (not 3-0 as the web site says). After half time they scored twice more in the first five minutes and then made

hundreds of substitutions to give everyone else a go. Their seventh came from a goalmouth melee on 63 minutes and was a shame for the Cresswell keeper who had made at least four brilliant saves during the scramble to keep the ball out as his defenders stood watching. Then came the Cresswell goal on 69 minutes and we sat back waiting for the comeback. No chance of course, with Florence getting two more on 71 and 90 minutes.

There is no cover at the ground, so I got absolutely soaked. Only managed to take seven photos and two of them I deleted for being too blurred to make out what was going on. I arrived home to discover we Biscuitmen supporters had still not been put out of our misery and we have to wait over a week for our deserved relegation to be confirmed.

At least the bus home was full of drunken women of a certain age to entertain me. Singing and shouting in the back of the bus, they looked like they were drinking pink slushies to me, with something of an alcoholic nature added presumably.

*contributed on 01/05/23.*

**TT No.159: Brian Buck** - Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> April 2023; **Park Farm Pumas v Deeping United**; Dor-Jan Windows & Doors Peterborough & District League Division 2; Venue: played at Cardea Playing Fields, Bellona Dive; Result: 2-0; Attendance: 30 approx.

Plans for a day out on the trains had to be put on hold because I couldn't contact the home team to find out precisely where the venue was that my chosen game had been switched to, meaning it was a late choice to come here today. On my arrival, my first thoughts were that I had come to a not particularly exciting new housing estate ground on the south-east side of Peterborough. But not wishing to upset the Apple Cart, which coincidentally is the name of the nearby pub, the day went better than expected and in the next few years I may be able to say that I had ticked off a new UCL ground today.

First of all, there is a Morrisons just across the road from the set-up which you can reach by taking the half hourly Bus 5 from the city centre. The players changed in the Cardea Community Sports Pavilion which has Park Farm Pumas information displayed prominently over much of it. Spectator facilities are sparse though. When I needed a toilet pre-match, the ref (already completed 135 games this season!) found me the one for disabled people, which was used more as a storage room, and I had to clamber over items in there to do my business!

The reason why Park Farm Pumas had so much logo daubed on the pavilion is that I was told that their owner has bought the site, which suggests that at the time the estate was built, this must have been private rather than public land. Cardea has a team in the Peterborough & District League, but they play elsewhere in the city. It seems then that there are plans to lay a 3G pitch, costing £400,000, on site and gradually develop the ground up to UCL standards. A start has been made and the pitch is partially railed off on most of one side, with brick-built dugouts on the opposite side.

As for the game, it was a good quality encounter and was one in which the nailed on second in the league visitors were expected to win comfortably. Furthermore, when the game started, I don't think that the hosts had any serious expectations of winning it, despite being in a respectable sixth position. But when the game started Pumas were at least the visitors' equals, despite the constant shouting at them by their manager. Then, on 31 minutes Pumas took the lead with the scorer latching on to a through pass to score. At half time the Deeping manager took his players into a quiet corner for a chat. Judging by the way his side played after the break, I suspect that he told them something like, 'If you can't be bothered to do what I tell you and match my enthusiasm, then I can't be bothered to coach you!' I suggest this because he hardly uttered a word after the break and on 81 minutes Pumas sealed their win after the scorer dribbled past a few players in the area before beating the keeper in a one on one, to bring to a close a day out, which like many others for me this season, went better than I expected.

*contributed on 01/05/23.*

**TT No.158: Craig Dabbs** - Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> April 2023; **Quedgeley Wanderers** v Little Stoke; Gloucestershire County League; Venue: Waterwells Sports Centre; Result: 1-5; Admission: Free; Programme: 20pp, £1; Attendance: 87.

Quedgeley is a town in its own right and is found near to the southern tip of Gloucester where the Waterwells Sports Centre is home to the town's side, the Wanderers.

Normally when you attend matches held at Sports Centres you find it's very much the leisure operators first and the football just so happens to be played there but here it's a different story. The Sports Centre which in truth is little more than a sports hall appears to play second fiddle to the football. Quedgeley have their own room, it's the only other room to the hall where they operate the food hatch along with stronger refreshments and sell the programmes too. The walls are full of QWFC bits and pieces, and the trophy cabinet is in there as well. Outside there is a fully railed and filled in barrier around the main pitch and, whilst it's devoid of both cover and hard standing, the club have installed lights which gives them a degree of flexibility in staging games. There are some more smaller pitches before you find another railed pitch over the far side, in addition to this is a 3G cage and a play area.

Quedgeley Wanderers, formed in 1994 as a under 14's side, has now grown to a club which operates 23 sides with their reserves in the Stroud League. They've been members of the County League since promotion from the Gloucestershire Northern Senior League in 2019 and are currently in a two-way fight with Patchway Town to avoid a return.

This result didn't help that cause, outclassed throughout. Wanderers did have some chances, indeed they scored, but on the whole, they were made to look second best.

*contributed (via Brian Buck) on 01/05/23.*

**TT No.157: Keith Aslan - Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> April 2023; OIR v Clapton; Middlesex County League; Kick Off and Match Details: We didn't get that far!**

This used to be one of my favourite leagues, for around 20 years programmes were nailed on, usually just a dodgily photocopied 4 pager, but that's all you need. Times change and very few produce the paper these days and what I would have given for a 4 pager today. What I got was 10 colourful sheets on a computer. Somebody who knows about these things said it is in an awkward format and very difficult to paperise. Digital programmes, what is the point of them. I was anticipating a long summer trying to find someone to print it out for me, but in the event, it was all superfluous.

Clapton CFC needed a point to win the league and I was looking forward to joining in their celebrations when they achieved it, as they surely would.

OIR play a 13-minute walk from Southbury Station. It took me a long time to find the ground and I spent 45 minutes aimlessly wandering around the Southbury hinterland. It shouldn't be too difficult to locate for someone with all their faculties, but a combination of dodgy knees and senility tend to make things problematic these days. On arrival I met someone who informed me that OIR had called the game off at midday for 'unspecified reasons' Oh joy.

There was a big Muslim festival in London to mark the end of Ramadan, and while I have no problem with the players having a knees up in Trafalgar Square, I can't understand why they didn't tell anybody until a couple of hours before kick-off. I must stress this is supposition on my part, it could have been something else entirely, they aren't letting on.

Too late to get anywhere else so straight back home. I suppose I should be grateful this was a London match, and I hadn't travelled up to Newcastle for it. My season is going out with a whimper not a bang, and with forthcoming rail strikes, not much else is going to happen before the tedious summer break. Hey ho.

*contributed on 29/04/23.*

**TT No.156: Brian Buck - Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2023; Blackmore v Hutton 'A'; Mid-Essex League Premier Division; Result: 1-1; Attendance: 13.**

As I was feeling rather tired, I elected not to go too far today and so after checking out the match with the home fixture secretary, I ended up here at Blackmore, which is roughly equidistant from Chipping Ongar and Ingatestone as the crow flies.

On my arrival, about half an hour before kick-off, I found the place a hive of activity and both the car park and the overflow one were packed full of cars. I partially put this down to the sign saying that there was a farmers' market going on here, although I didn't see any evidence of this. Perhaps all the farmers had been sold! Slightly more worryingly, as I got out of my car, I could hear that there was a game going on. Had I got the kick-off time wrong? I went to investigate and found that this was a well-attended Over 45's Vets game. But after breathing a

sigh of relief I was then told that Blackmore had a Reserves match on this pitch immediately after this one had finished. I was now worried especially as my informant told me that he believed that the first team were involved in a cup final somewhere else. With my back up match 15 minutes' drive away in my mind, I rang the hosts fixture secretary again and he assured me that my game was still on here at 3pm. I then returned to the playing area and now saw two teams warming up on the back pitch and soon my informant came up to me, apologizing for getting his facts wrong! Phew! Still, it was quite impressive that a club I knew little about could manage to field three sides here.

So, after purchasing a cup of coffee for £2.80, the price of a pint up north not so many years ago, I made my way to the playing area, complete with my garden chair, confirming that I was about to watch the 'right' game with the jovial, old school, ref on the way. This was a match between 6<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> in this eight-division league, who were basically just here to enjoy themselves. Some of the players of both sides looked old enough to qualify for the Over 45's match I'd stumbled upon earlier and there was little spectator interest in this game, with all the activity confirmed to the Reserves game taking place on the pitch in front of the clubhouse, where adults and children alike were involved, either watching or just socialising.

As for my game, I thoroughly enjoyed it. It featured a bunch of players, not particularly brilliant ones at that, but who gave their all. Also, the ref made mistakes, (he may have had to borrow a whistle before the start!), but you could see too that he was enjoying himself. He was sensible as well. When a player became injured(?) near the touchline he asked for him to be rolled off the pitch. As for the game, Hutton started well but it had become even by the break. At the beginning of the second half their manager told his players that they would start as they finished and just 19 seconds later, they took the lead with an in off the post shot. Then Blackmore again worked their way back into the match, finally equalising on 90(+4) minutes. I thoroughly enjoyed this match. It was the type of game I originally signed up for that first got me interested in watching football many years ago. On the way home I was given a further reminder of the good old days when as part of a bus rally some old double decker number 339 buses came towards me on their way to Blake Hall station, reminding me of the days when I first visited Ongar Town (25 May 1982) by using the Central Line tube, which in those days extended from Epping to Ongar, stopping at Blake Hall on the way!

*contributed on 25/04/23.*

**TT No.155: Craig Dabbs** - Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2023; **Earsham** v North Walsham Town; Anglian Combination Division Two; Venue: Earsham Playing Field; Result: 2-4; Admission: None; Programme: 16pp, £1; Attendance: 26.

I think this was my fourth attempt to get to Earsham FC this season. Various things have prevented it until now. However, as I drove into the small car park this afternoon, I found it was all locked up. This didn't fill me with joy but luckily a quick check via *Twitter* confirmed that the game was on. After about 20 minutes a player showed up with the keys to open up what I thought was a clubhouse, but it was just a changing room block with a kitchen attached. Soon the programmes

arrived, a badge was purchased, and the kettle was on making it a much happier place to be.

The Playing Field has been home to the club since its formation in 1946. They have played at Wortwell before when the ground has been unavailable. The pitch is partly roped down the one side and permission has been granted to install a rail around it. There is also a small area of cover on the playing ground side of the field for around thirty or so, with a nice bit of signage across the top.

The match was very much a tale of two halves. North Walsham Town, who still have a slim chance of promotion, were dreadful in the first half. Earsham surprisingly are still not safe at the other end of the table. On this viewing you would've expected their current league positions to be reversed. North Walsham Town however managed to scrape one home in the dying minutes of the first half to give them a slim lead.

Clearly words were said at the break because it was a very different performance by the visitors in the second half and more reflective of the table. They did the job required to keep any hopes of going up alive despite a late consolation for the Otters.

*contributed (via Brian Buck) on 23/04/23.*

**TT No.154: Steve Hardy - Saturday April 22nd 2023; Coundon Court Old Boys v Craven Athletic; Coventry Alliance Division Two; Result: 1-4; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 33 H/C**

A case of confusion all round today. My plan was to go and watch Coundon Court but arriving at the ground I found it locked up and no sign of anybody. Luckily, I had remembered that Coundon Court Old Boys were also at home today, so I crawled through all the traffic heading for Coventry City and zoomed into the car park having missed just 10 minutes.

Old Boys play at the Jaguar Leisure Centre in the Allesley area of the city. Today's game could turn out to be the runners up decider, as 2<sup>nd</sup> place Old Boys were playing 5<sup>th</sup> place Craven who have loads of games in hand and on today's showing looked a class outfit.

It was fairly even in the first half with Craven breaking the deadlock on 43 minutes. The second half was one way traffic though, as Craven took advantage of a spill from the OB keeper to double their lead on 49 mins before making it three on 65 mins. OB pulled one back on 75 minutes, but the three-goal cushion was restored on 80 minutes.

Club linesmen in this league, and the gloss was taken off the Craven win for me when the OB linesperson shouted play on when a Craven player ran through to score, only for him to change his mind under pressure from his teammates and wave for offside. The Craven players were really upset at this decision and spent the rest of the game calling the lino a cheat amongst other rather ruder names too. It got so bad that a Craven official went round and relieved the poor lad from

any more abuse. Even then the Craven players started shouting 'where has the cheating \*\*\*\* gone' to his replacement. There was absolutely no need for all that in my opinion as Craven were coasting to victory, and they should take a collective look at themselves and consider what they have done to a lad doing his best. Rant over.

Poor old Sarah Satnav was not pleased with me as we crawled from one side of Coventry to the other. In fact, when I asked her for directions to go home, she refused to help. Women, eh?

*contributed on 23/04/23.*

**TT No.153: Keith Aslan - Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2023; AFC Normanton v Long Bennington; Abacus Lighting Central Midlands League Macron Store Nottingham Division 1 East; Kick Off: 15.01; Result: 3-0; Admission: Free; Programme: £2; Attendance: 35 (19 home, 0 away & 16 neutral)**

I've got Sheffield United to thank for this trip. Trains out of St Pancras are a thing of the past, but with the Blades unexpected Wembley appearance they asked if East Midlands trains could make an extra effort and actually run a service today. As a special treat the obliging railway company cancelled the cancellations and while it's a bit of a stretch to call it a service, they ran 50% of the timetable. With only two tracks open we passed the engineering work, the same engineering work they were going to shut the whole line for and will be doing so again next day. So, you can run trains while all this nonsense is going on, as British Rail used to, but it's just too much effort.

A half hour ride from Nottingham and you arrive at the station formerly known as Alfreton and Mansfield Parkway. Now just Alfreton, a bus every 15 minutes takes you on the six-minute ride to the ground, operated by my favourite bus company, Trent Barton. They've never let me down (famous last words) and their routes have exotic names like 'black cat' 'comet' and 'harlequin' The bus to the ground is 9.3, and when I asked the driver why such an unusual number I was told it was to distinguish it from 9.1 and 9.2. Can't argue with that.

AFC Normanton have come a long way very quickly. Hard to believe they were playing Sunday football last season. The roped off ground will soon be replaced by metal barriers and a food hatch was churning out bacon rolls among other goodies. The hot drinks came in a club mug, and a 12-page programme was the icing on the gâteau. The serving hatch used to be a referee's room, and the chairman and secretary cut a hole in the wall without any building experience. If I'd have tried that, the whole lot would have ended up a pile of rubble. With league officers having paid a social visit to the ground they confirmed everything is hunky dory for promotion which will surely be achieved in their final game of the season.

Some people eat to live, others live to eat, but I just like stuffing my face. Started off with a gravity tick in the Greggs next to the bus stop, then a cheap(ish) steak dinner in the pub 50 yards from the ground, and I still found room for some bacon baps at the match. An inordinate number of hoppers attended this one. It could have been because there was something on the game, it could have been the

programme, but most likely somebody must have tipped them off that I was attending.

Woodhouse Colts are top and have completed their fixtures. Normanton had two games left and were six points behind with a superior goal difference. So, today's match was what is known as a 'must win game' and they did so with the minimum amount of fuss. Now Normanton only need to repeat the feat next Saturday away at Mansfield Hosier Mills to win the championship after only a few months playing Saturday football.

Have a look at the AFC Normanton *Facebook* page and you will see a fabulous photograph of me. My fans might like to use it as their screensaver. The club insisted they take the snap; they were so amazed that somebody should travel all the way from the Kentish Riviera to watch them play. A bit disappointing, they put that I came from Margate. Broadstairs is to Margate what paradise is to Croydon.

*contributed on 23/04/23.*

**TT No.152: Jon T Green** - Saturday 15th April 2023; **WOMBWELL TOWN** v Stocksbridge Park Steels Reserves; Sheffield and Hallamshire County Senior League - Premier Division; Venue: Recreation Ground, Station Road; Result: 1-0; Admission: Free; Programme: £1.50; Attendance: 62 headcount.

Wombwell Town's clubhouse was in a state of flux; the main seating area had been cordoned off for a private wedding anniversary party later that evening. Chairs and tables had been carefully rearranged, food was already being prepared and a seemingly never-ending supply of helium balloons were being brought in from the car park. In the smaller function room, there were freshly wrapped sandwiches and cakes sitting on the pool table whilst club officials desperately searched for a spare surface to complete those all-important pre-match forms. With extensive building work being undertaken on the changing rooms, the club's physio was also having to work in this rather public space. Players came and went dressed only in T-Shirts, sliders and the tightest of shorts which haven't been seen on the field of play since around 1982 - it was enough to put any normal bloke off his corned beef cob. Striker Connor Pearce was one of those receiving treatment - "I haven't played four games on the bounce for months" he explained to the young lady who was busy pummeling his calves and thighs. Outside work was still underway on the pitch as, despite a mercifully dry morning, after a week of heavy rain there were a number of decidedly boggy areas in the centre circle.

For a Step 7 the Recreation Ground is a superb facility which makes it even more remarkable that the club offer free admission. A stats filled programme (£1.50) is issued which should be more than reason enough for all of you "paper chasers" out there to get this well-run club onto your "to do" list. They share the site with the South Yorkshire Kart Club whose black tarmac track snakes around two sides of the pitch. A high net fence has been erected on the far side of the ground atop a whitewashed perimeter wall the like of which was once a common feature at many grounds. Currently there is just the one stand, set back around twenty yards from the touchline across what appears to be the remnants of an old, curved track. The stand itself contains 113 red seats arranged in three rows with, at the far end, a

section of concrete terracing. Inner walls are painted red with those on the outside in white, combined with a grey roof and bold signage this really is a superb little set up.

After their promotion last season things have been pretty positive on the field this term as well with Town occupying fifth place in the table. The reserve side of Stocksbridge Park Steels (SPS) arrive four places, but only three points, behind their hosts and, having beaten Wombwell 3-1 earlier in the campaign, it looked like being a close encounter. It's the visitors who open the brighter with Declan Childes firing over from 25 yards. They go even closer a few minutes later but with almost disastrous consequences: Town create space on the left wing and when the ball is crossed it's Steel's Aaron McHale who makes solid contact. Unfortunately, the full back is facing his own goal and it's with a sense of relief that he sees the ball thud against the crossbar with 'keeper Dan Emery rooted to the spot. Childes is having an influential game in midfield but with attacking options ahead of him severely limited SPS are struggling to create too many chances. For their part, Town are keen on the long ball but with SPS holding a straight defensive line they are all too often caught offside. Early into the second period SPS have shouts for a penalty turned down as Dillon Gregory sees his shot blocked by some unspecified part of a defender's anatomy. At the other end only some resolute defending prevents Wombwell from opening the scoring; Peace goes one on one with the keeper and when the ball rebounds from Emery only a superb sliding block from McHale prevents a goal. If that was a warning to SPS then they didn't heed it as on 67 minutes Peace once again breaks clear, this time he makes no mistake and finds the bottom corner with a clinical finish. Things then turn a little silly with a touchline fracas between the two managers. Referee Miss Megan Wilson, who had only finished her night shift at 1am that morning, (as a police officer I believe but was too afraid to ask!) is not in the mood for such behaviour and banishes Wombwell's boss to the stand. This gives me the chance to hear first-hand pearls of wisdom such as "get up Chunky", "Nobs, hold your position" and the insightful "five minutes to go Bradley you lazy knacker". Returning to the game, SPS should have drawn level, but Gregory fails to make a decent connection when just six yards out. Luckily for them Town are as wasteful as Bradley "lazy knacker" Kerr drags his shot wide. Tempers flare again, with SPS's Elliot Rogan being red carded for a high tackle, which leaves Will Harling requiring lengthy treatment. Kerr again goes close to extending the lead but in the end one goal proves enough to secure the three points. All that then remained was for me to find the physio and have her take a look at my groin strain which I mysteriously picked up in the half time tea queue; this groundhopping lark can be a strenuous business...

*contributed on 19/04/23.*

**TT No.151: Brian Buck - Monday 17<sup>th</sup> April 2023; AFC Caddington v Bovingdon; Spartan South Midlands League Division 2; Result: 2-2; Attendance: 74 (and nowhere near my headcount of 45 approx!)**

With little else on tonight I returned to a ground that I last visited 32 years ago, almost to the day, when on 16 April 1991, I saw Caddington, as they were then known, draw 2-2 with Buckingham Athletic in a Key Consultants South Midlands League Division 1 match (att. 30 approx).

Of course, these days this recreation ground wouldn't be acceptable for Step 6 football, although the ground has been spruced up a lot since I was last here. These days the club plays on the pitch nearest the clubhouse, which has a 3G enclosure style fence on this side and is partly railed off behind one goal. There is no spectator cover behind the far goal and the pitch is roped off on the far side. The last time I came here, they played on the far pitch and the brick stand to it behind the goal is still there. I don't count different pitches as new grounds, so this was cheerfully a revisit here for me. However, I don't remember the planes passing overhead to land at nearby Luton Airport on my previous visit though. They were low enough to generate a chilly blast of air as they passed over though.

As for the game, the ball was kicked out of the ground with about thirty seconds played. Then, on 7 minutes the Caddington keeper arrived! Both sides tried to play football, but for the most part Bovingdon looked more enthusiastic than their hosts did, but it came with a lot of baggage. After taking the lead on 31 minutes, a tap in saw them get a second goal on 43 minutes with a near post tap in. The second half saw Caddington marginally improve and, on 53 minutes, they pulled a goal back from the spot. I didn't see what the penalty was awarded for as at the time one of their players, who had just been sin binned, was walking past me. In the last 15 minutes of the game Caddington went for it. If only they'd played like this for the whole match! So, it was and with their last attack and with their keeper now joining in, the ball was forced over the line with the very last kick of the game. Splendid stuff.

*contributed on 18/04/23.*

**TT No.150: Brian Buck - Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> April 2023; Shirebrook Rangers & Juniors v Mickleover Athletic; Midlands Regional Alliance Mel Williams Premier Division; Result: 1-3; Attendance: 20 approx.**

Today I was kindly dropped off here by my chauffeur before he went off to watch his match at Sherwood Colliery, about five miles away. Pre-match there was considerable doubt as to if my match would be on, partially because of the previous evening's rain, but more worryingly because the hosts had been unable to fulfil their previous two fixtures, calling the previous one off just 90 minutes before kick-off. But in the end, there was nothing to worry about. After getting stuck in traffic in Newark, we got to the ground about ten minutes before the start.

As it turned out it would have been pointless to get there any earlier, as there were no spectator facilities here at all. Another team, Shirebrook Soldiers, of the Notts Alliance, also play here. Although there are two pitches here it seems that neither side plays at home at the same time, possibly because there is only one set of dressing rooms. But both sides play on both pitches, depending on what condition they are in. But the pitch used for today's game was the better one, even though it was long and narrow. Apparently, the whole set up, including the adjacent cricket pitch, is going to get an upgrade soon and after this is done facilities should be much improved.

As for the game, strangely watched by quite a few people standing outside the ground, even though it was free to get in, top of the table Mickleover, playing uphill in the first half got off to a slow start and it was Rangers who scored first, on 28 minutes, but their lead lasted just three minutes before a bobbling 30 yarder saw Athletic equalise. Then a deflected shot six minutes later saw them take the lead and a third goal, a 25 yarder saw them score again two minutes after this. There were no more goals to come after that. Rangers played a lot better after the break but couldn't score again against a visiting side who kept trying, but with that two-goal cushion advantage they didn't need to worry too much.

The day's amusing moment came during the second half, when in the distance I heard some brass band music. I thought that it might be the Shirebrook Colliery band warming up. The music slowly got closer and louder and then I realized that it was actually an ice cream van playing the Blaydon Races! After the game had finished, I then walked to the Shirebrook Miners Welfare Centre, where I joined in with the players from both sides in post-match refreshments, whilst I waited for my lift back home. Mickleover didn't stay that long, so I was invited to help eat the plates of sausage rolls and chips, which these days is one of the few things I'm still very good at, although I don't like to make a meal of this!

*contributed on 18/04/23.*

**TT No.149: Craig Dabbs** - Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> April 2023; **AFC Normanton v Mayfield**; Central Midlands League Division One Cup Semi-Final; Venue: The Boundary Recreation Ground; Result: 3-2; Admission: Free; Programme: 12pp, £2; Attendance: 51

This wasn't the plan today; I simply hadn't spotted it. My mate Chris alerted me to the fact they were issuing, and the plan changed after a bit of research to make sure they weren't a South Normanton Athletic FC reserve or development side in disguise, they aren't at all.

The club were formed as recently as 2018 and have their own little set up in the Broadmeadows area of South Normanton. The ground is neatly signposted and found behind some commercial units where there is a changing block with a tea bar and two pitches. The club very occasionally issue programmes and badges were also available. As well as hot food, hot drinks were served out of large travel mugs with the club logo on the side. Why am I mentioning this? Well, AFC Normanton are a nominal step 8 side and to be honest the number of clubs that do this at this level is somewhat limited. I have to say they are keen on getting their club crest and identity out there as they try and establish themselves in the community.

The main pitch is to the left and has dugouts but little else at present. I am led to believe that a rail around the pitch is planned as the club clearly want to progress. It already looks step seven compliant and the position in their respective division lends itself well to promotion prospects.

The match was superb, played in the right spirit with the two sides testing each other throughout. The visitors looked the better side early on but that changed as

AFC Normanton came to the fore. With extra time looming, thankfully the hosts snatched a late winner to reach the final and meant I got home at a decent time.

*contributed (via Brian Buck) on 16/04/23.*

**TT No.148: Jon T Green** - Friday 7th April 2023; **NEWENT TOWN** v Long Crendon; Hellenic League Division One; Venue: Wildsmith Meadow; Result: 2-2; Admission: £5; Programme: included with admission; Attendance: 55 headcount.

Newent Town chairman Dennis Stringer is a man who likes to get his hands dirty and this morning they are certainly that. Sitting astride a large green ride-on mower he points at an already immaculate pitch and says that he “just wants to give it a quick cut” before this afternoon’s game. Dennis, a native of Cambridgeshire, moved with his family to Gloucestershire over 50 years ago and has been involved with the club for half of that time. “I started as a player and have gradually moved onto other roles. My son is now here and works as joint first team manager. “It’s been a difficult season for us”, he explains “we simply haven’t had any Saturday home games and, although we’ve spoken to the fixture secretary about it, the lack of qualified referees means that games are more and more being moved to a Tuesday night. We are a little way out of town (the ground is actually situated in the neighbouring village of Malswick), so people won’t drive over during the week. It really affects our bar takings”. Dennis goes on “we have just bought 3.5 acres of land and want to use that for developing our Youth Team, we are going to amalgamate some of the youngsters from the surrounding villages and have them play here”.

It’s evident that the club have worked hard to improve Wildsmith Meadow and today it’s a neat and tidy ground boasting a modern 61-seater brick and metal stand. There is hard standing on two sides and a clubhouse which has a large, covered porch giving a great view of the near goalmouth.

Town sit eight points clear of the relegation zone but with Kidlington Reserves having three games in hand they are not quite safe. There are no such problems for Long Crendon who are comfortably mid-table and it is they who come closest to opening the scoring after just four minutes as centre half Kyle Bestley heads narrowly wide. The let off spurs Newent into action with Jordan Cooper’s low strike rebounding off the foot of the post with ‘keeper Josh Cullen well beaten. Newent have some big solid lads and their physical presence is causing Crendon some problems. When midfielder Ollie Price intercepts a poor goal kick, he fends off a challenge before finding the bottom corner with a slightly undercut shot which seems to deceive Cullen. The lead, which has come after 26 minutes, doesn’t last long as James Hawkes hammers in a superb left footed curling free kick from all of 25 yards. With added time being played the home side retake the lead; a long free kick is swung into the box, Cullen comes off his line but appears to be impeded by his own defenders and, when the ball drops, Danny Gayner has the easiest of finishes. Once again, the lead barely last five minutes as parity is restored early into the second period: Aaron Kay is bundled over and Nathan Brownswood dispatches the spot kick. On a warm afternoon the tempo of the game

drops amid a raft of substitutions and petty fouls (including the dismissal of Bestley for a second bookable offence) with both sides looking pretty happy with a point. The match only sparks back into life in the last few minutes as Alex Gayner plants his header just over the crossbar and Liam Gale sends in a tantalising low centre where, frustratingly, no one is able to apply the finishing touch. Handshakes are exchanged at the end of the game but in a bizarre quirk of the football calendar the teams will meet again for the return fixture in just four days' time...

*contributed on 12/04/23.*

**TT No.147: *Brian Buck*** - Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> April 2023; **Watlington SSC** v Thorpe Village; Fosters Solicitors Anglian Combination Division 5 North; Venue: played at Runcton Holme Social Club, School Lane; Result: 5-3; Attendance: 60 approx.

Today I was going to have a day on the trains, but feeling rather tired I settled for this game, a 75 minutes' drive away, instead. Actually, I could have got here by public transport as well. Although the ground is about a three mile walk from Watlington station, you can get a number 37 Lynx bus, which runs hourly from Kings Lynn to Downham Market and passes about half a mile's walk from both the station and the ground.

Watlington have moved to here from their own ground in the village because apparently their dressing rooms aren't up to Anglian Combination standards, a fact which surprised me, because when I saw a game there in November 2019, not only was a nice ground to visit, but they also had a lovely social club, where I was made to feel most welcome. So, they will stay at Runcton until they meet league requirements. It was much the same here today as Runcton Holme also have an operational social club, despite having no Saturday football team at present. It amazes me that in this part of Norfolk, many of the villages which have football teams, also have thriving social clubs, something which is not always matched elsewhere in the country, particularly in the metropolis.

Today the weather was mild, with little wind, which meant I could make use of my garden chair, which I always keep in the car and from which I had an uninterrupted view of the game, which I watched from the roped off clubhouse side of the pitch. Behind both goals were rows of leylandii trees and the opposite side to where I was sitting offered great views of fields interspersed with the occasional tree. The attendance was greater than I had expected and included loads of kids. But rather than bugger around and cause a nuisance they sat in rows on the grass and behaved themselves impeccably as they watched the game. Truly remarkable!

As for the game, it was truly remarkable as well and it turned out to be one of the best games that I've seen this season. Watlington are, as I write, second in the league and possibly they might end up winning it, whereas their spirited visitors are in the lower places. The first half of this match was curious in that for the first half hour or so, Watlington were the better side. But on 33 minutes Thorpe took the lead when the scorer stooped low to head home a cross. Then on 40 minutes they scored again following a couple of deflections and then yet again on 42

minutes to make the half time score 0-3. At this point a full comeback seemed unlikely. But they became fortunate as today we had a ref in charge who dealt with time wasting which the visitors employed. On 61 minutes the hosts pulled a goal back through a header from a deep cross. Then on 73 minutes Thorpe had a player sent off for getting a second yellow for kicking the ball away. Five minutes later the hosts scored again from the spot following a push and then they equalised on 84 minutes when the ball was stabbed home at the far post from a cross. Then two minutes later they took the lead with a shot from 25 yards out through a ruck of players and in added on time they scored again from the spot, following a trip, all of which added up to a fantastic game.

*contributed on 12/04/23.*

**TT No.146: Keith Aslan - Monday 10<sup>th</sup> April 2023; SOUTHAM v Littleton; Hellenic League Division 1; Kick Off: 15.00; Result: 3-1; Admission: £4; Programme: £2; Attendance: 231 (64 home, 6 away & 161 neutral).**

I've always maintained this country has a third world train service and today the Indian Railways look positively luxurious compared with the disorganized chaos at Marylebone. It's a bank holiday, no trains out of Euston so anybody going to Birmingham, or anywhere in the Midlands, were crammed onto two six car trains an hour. My train was hideously overcrowded, unlike many I just about managed to get a seat, my knees may be falling apart but there's nothing wrong with my elbows. We arrived in Leamington Spa 21 minutes late and I marvelled at the array of rail replacement buses mustered in the courtyard to go to Stratford, another destination Railtrack weren't bothering to run any trains to today.

Had a carefree wander round this very pleasant town and the wonderfully ornate park. Visited the Sensory Garden, the Japanese Garden and the hothouse, just like Kew Gardens. Loaded up with coffee and cake at the cafe then sat by the boating lake and built up a rapport with the ducks.

The buses go to Southam and on to Rugby (no trains today from there of course) and while they were only every two hours on a bank holiday, shouldn't be a problem for a Saturday match. The new stadium is on the south side of town, and I had a walk out to see the old ground which is still there. Bobby Hancocks Park ticks all the boxes, *Atcost* stand one side with a raised viewing veranda outside the clubhouse on the other. A wide variety of food on offer though I suspect that was just for a 'hop' match. They had the lunchtime football, and while the Southam game being played in the afternoon if it got a bit boring you could go inside and watch Coventry v Watford on the big screen, but I don't know quite how boring the match would have to get for this to be a good alternative. Southam handled their big day very well, with plenty of helpers, always a good sign. A club I feel that are going places.

Southam were good value for their victory, the Littleton goal being no more than a consolation late doors. Typical English weather which varied between heavy rain, biting winds and warm sunshine. The first half saw a biblical hailstone attack, sitting in the stand offered no protection, but I quickly dried out in the half time heat.

A lift back to Banbury from a fellow hopper saved a very long wait for a bus. With the direct train to London being delayed I jumped on a standing room only train to Oxford (running 37 minutes late) and caught a train back from there. Some passengers/customers on the X Country train would have been standing for hours, but their ordeal was nowhere near over as -surprise, surprise - all out at Oxford for a rail replacement bus, line shut to Didcot. You've got to laugh.

*contributed on 11/04/23.*

**TT No.145: Steve Hardy** - Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> April 2023; **Central Ajax v Balsall & Berkswell**; Midland League Division 3; Result: 1-1; Admission and programme: Free; Attendance: 17 H/C.

And with that the sun came out, and so did my shorts for the first time this year. The match de jour today was in Warwick where Central Ajax are based. They have a pretty good set up too, with an excellent club house/changing room block at the end of the drive from the main road to the club car park. The grass pitch is on a plateau in front of the clubhouse and is roped off along one side and with a high net behind the goal where the club house is to stop stray balls smashing through the clubhouse windows.

The match itself was a promotion six pointer with both sides jostling for a place in division 2 for next season, and what an excellent game it was too. Ajax absolutely bossed the first half but wasted three clear one-on-ones, hitting the post and the bar once as well. As so often happens when one team is in complete control, the opposition sneak a breakaway goal, and that is what Balsall did on 22 minutes, totally against the run of play. 0-1 at the break then.

The second half was a lot more even as Balsall's confidence grew but when Ajax equalised on 55 minutes it was game on. Either side could have won it as they were both attacking at every opportunity, but neither side could find that vital breakthrough, so a draw was the fairest result in my opinion.

The visitor's club linesman came in for a lot of flak for his liberal interpretation of the offside rules. I stood behind him in the second half and thought he did a good job although a couple of his decisions were a bit iffy.

By my reckoning that means I have now completed all the senior grounds in the Midland League. Still a couple to go in the U21 divisions though so, as you know, being a completist, I will have to do those as well before the champagne can be uncorked.

*contributed on 09/04/23.*

**TT No.144: Keith Aslan** - Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> April 2023; **HALLS ATHLETIC v Kings Hill**; Kent County League Premier Division; Kick Off: 14.47; Result: 2-0; Admission: Free; Programme: to follow, hopefully; Attendance: 38 (33 home, 4 away & 1 neutral)

Easter Saturday, most of the railway shut down, so it's a local trip for me to Dartford where a crooner called Mick Jagger was born and brought up. His name is all over the town including the Mick Jagger Performing Arts Centre. My train arrived on platform 2, the platform Mick first met Keith Richard, they were both travelling to Sidcup. Now that's what you call research.

Halls play at a ground outside Dartford FC. I would imagine it all gets a bit frenetic when their fixtures clash. Fast buses every 12 minutes virtually door to door, travelling for the most part along designated bus roads. When I did Dartford, I walked it in about 45 minutes. I had two fully functioning knees then, nowadays the bus option is far more attractive.

I liked this ground, appealing white painted barriers along two sides with an *Atcost* stand along the far touchline, it looked the biz, and in spite of being plastic, the surrounding fence was a seductive black not boring old green. There was a separate entrance to get to the stand, through a gate that was locked, and you needed to walk across the pitch to gain access which you obviously couldn't do while the game was taking place. With a quick exit required I watched the second half from a raised hill outside the ground with three picnic tables strategically placed along the top for the optimum viewing experience. Hot and cold drinks plus grub were available from the adjacent Dartford clubhouse, which was doing a roaring trade in spite of them not having a game this afternoon.

The day looked as though it was going to fall to pieces when I discovered there was no programme in spite of the secretary telling me there was going to be one earlier in the week. But I was quite laid back about things when he sought me out (not the other way round) to apologise saying the stuff had been sent to the printers on Friday only to be told they weren't working on a bank holiday. Who'd have thought it? I would normally regard this as a pretty rubbishy excuse but as far as I could tell, the secretary genuinely didn't realise it was Good Friday. But he said they were still getting some printed, and he would send me a copy. This all had the ring of truth about it and I'm fully expecting to receive some paper through the post sometime in the future, although I know not when. Postal deliveries are few and far between round my way at the moment. I acquired a copy from the previous game, 12 pages, glossy, colour. Looks good.

An entertaining match, Halls were always in command, and only dodgy finishing prevented the margin of victory from being any greater. When I left Broadstairs it was overcast and cold. The match was played in glorious warm sunshine, and I was decidedly overdressed. It did not detract from a stress-free afternoon just a few stops down the line from my country dacha.

*contributed on 09/04/23.*

**TT No.143: Brian Buck** - Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023; **Match One** - Cranfield United v Sharnbrook; Bedfordshire County League Britannia Cup Quarter Final; Kick-Off: 2.30pm; Result:0-1; Attendance 35 approx. and **Match Two** - Biggleswade United v Queens Park Crescents; Bedfordshire County League Premier Division; Venue: played at Cranfield Pavilion 3G, off Pincords Lane; Kick-Off: 3.10pm; Result: 4-2; Attendance: 30 approx.

This was a day when things didn't go quite as well as I hoped it would. The idea was to watch the first half of the game at Cranfield United, before leaving at half time to go on to see the advertised 3.30pm kick off next door. I arrived at the latter ground about 15 minutes before kick-off, which can be found at the bottom end of a new housing estate and where there is plenty of parking available. The 3G pitch here is parallel to that of Cranfield United's and although only a few yards away from each other, you can't really watch games on both pitches at the same time, as the two are separated by either the back of Cranfield United's stand or a row of trees either side of it. But there is a pathway between the two grounds, which is through the gated access from the 3G pitch. Often this is locked though, but not today, because there was no access to the grass parking at Cranfield United because it was soddened, and patrons were advised to park at Cranfield Pavilion instead.

As for as much of the game I saw, it was quite competitive. On 25 minutes a Cranfield player got injured and the ref called the trainer on, but as no one came on, he had to get up and continue playing! Then about ten minutes before the break, my view of the whole of the pitch was partially blocked by two spectators when they moved forward to talk to a Sharnbrook sub for about five minutes. I asked them to move, but selfishly they refused, and an annoying argument broke out, although I will concede that play was down the other end of the pitch while this was happening. Eventually a late second half goal won the match for Sharnbrook. I only know this because I heard the shouts of celebration coming from the crowd whilst watching my actual chosen game.

I left the previous match on 45 minutes, without waiting for the half to finish as I was hearing shouts coming from my 'main' game of the afternoon, the type of shouts suggesting that a game was in progress! And so, it was! Despite this being an advertised 3.30pm kick-off, they had actually started 20 minutes earlier. The league secretary was here, and I suggested to him that the teams should be fined for kicking off early, as once happened in the South West Peninsula League! After heavy rain (mainly only in Bedfordshire it seems) throughout the previous day, United took the decision to switch their home game to here, approximately 20 miles away. This 3G pitch here is a big one and I was told that it's the same size as the one at Wembley Stadium. The setup has its own dressing rooms, so the facilities here have nothing to do with Cranfield United. The Beds County league also holds their committee meetings here. Spectator wise, there is viewing inside the cage down most of one side.

Today's match was controlled by three match officials from Norway on an exchange deal, although we have yet to send anyone to them. Names and addresses on a postcard please! They could all speak perfect English. By the end it was hard to work out who learnt more, them or the players! In all there were 12 of them here, doing games throughout the county over the weekend. The reason this game kicked off early was that there were originally two games planned here for today, with the earlier one probably intended to start at 1pm, but as that didn't happen, this kick-off, unknowingly to me, was brought forward by 20 minutes and so I missed almost ten minutes of it. I await sentencing by the Groundhopping

Police, when I reveal that I will still be counting this game in my records, but not the first one. I didn't miss any goals in this one though.

Generally, though, Biggleswade were the better side in both halves but in the first half, with goals scored on 25 and 38 minutes they found themselves 2-0 down before they pulled one back just before the break. Problem was United were missing their chances created. After the break the northerly wind into our faces made it feel very cold. On 52 minutes United equalised on 52 minutes before further goals saw them take the lead on 74 minutes and seal the points from the spot on 87 minutes. Then on 90(+8) minutes there was a punch up which the eagled eyed match officials resolved by showing two Crescent players red cards and a red and a yellow card to two United players. During the game we had watched various small aircraft take off from the adjacent Cranfield Airport but couldn't spot any going to the Sandy Airstrip! Lucky, I had come by car then!

*contributed on 04/04/23.*

**TT No.142: Steve Hardy** - Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023; **Wyrley United** v Wellington Amateurs; West Midlands Regional League - Division One; Result: 2-3; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance 41 H/C.

Bloody rain! I had a fairly easy triple lined up for today based around Hartpury University, starting at 11.00am with Forest Green Rovers U18s who are based there, followed by Hartpury University v Milton United at 1.00pm and then up to Worcester Raiders at 3.00pm. Two of those games actually went ahead in the end, but with no information appearing on social media I decided not to risk it.

Instead, I ended up going just 4 miles down the road to Wyrley on their fairly shiny new ground. Free admission today was a bonus, but the super programme they used to issue is a thing of the past unfortunately.

The visitors today are Wellington Amateurs who are flying high in the league. They brought a good, few fans with them too but in the first half they just couldn't get going and it was no surprise to anyone that Wyrley took the lead on 20 minutes. They should have had a couple more goals too but went in at the break 1-0 up.

It was a completely different story in the second half though. Ammies equalised straight away on 47 minutes and then took the lead on 58 minutes followed by a third on 68 minutes. A bit of controversy then followed immediately after this third goal. From the kick off, Wyrley noticed that the Ammies keeper was tying his shoelaces and blasted a shot over his head from the half-way line. Uproar followed, but the Ref decided it was a fair goal, although not a very sporting one.

It didn't make any difference to the result however and Ammies thoroughly deserved their 3-2 win.

As well as this ground on Long Lane in Essington, Wyrley also own the former Harrisons ground opposite what is now Wolverhampton Sporting's ground. Wyrley intend to fix this old ground up to make a base for their numerous youth teams.

So, not what I had planned, but in the end the Wyrley game was excellent entertainment, and I am glad I chose it.

*contributed on 03/04/23.*

**TT No.141: Jon T Green** - Saturday 1st April 2023; **SHAFTESBURY** v Hamble Club; Wessex League Premier Division; Venue: Coppice Street; Result: 0-2; Admission: £7; Programme: £1; Attendance: 122

The Saxon hill top town of Shaftesbury was founded by Alfred the Great in 878AD and, as a choice of location, the King clearly knew what he was doing. Even on a soaking wet day the views of the surrounding hills are spectacular with long aspects to the three neighbouring counties of Somerset, Wiltshire and Hampshire. However, all of this pail into insignificance with the image of a small boy hauling his heavily laden delivery bike up a steep cobbled hill - the Hovis advert, an absolute classic of the 1970's, wasn't filmed in Accrington, Blackburn or Darwen but right here on Gold Hill in North Dorset. I grew up whistling the theme (somewhat tunelessly I might add) and doing the voice over in an equally bad mock Lancastrian accent, so to stand on the actual site provided an instant flashback to a near-forgotten childhood memory.

Returning to the present, and with seemingly most of the southern half of the country under water, attention again turned to a match on an artificial surface. Luckily this is no 3G "cage" and, with Coppice Street being within easy walk of the town centre shops and cafes, it's a good "tick" even on a day when the rain isn't sheeting down. Entrance to the ground is via a small car park where a car wash service was doing a brisk trade despite, or perhaps because of, the weather. To your left is a modern sports bar, plenty of room and plenty of large screen TVs, whilst the ground itself is accessed via a gate in the perimeter fencing. You enter at the changing room end of the ground which also includes a very competitively priced tea bar; the covered veranda here proving a popular spot to watch the game from. Although not immediately apparent, due to the sunken nature of the pitch, this end of the ground is a few feet higher than the far goal with the players entering via a short set of wooden steps. Presumably at one stage the grass pitch sloped, but now the playing surface is flat with only the spectator areas being uneven. Accommodation is provided by a long low Main Stand which holds 230 red plastic tip-up seats arranged in three rows beneath a gently pitched roof. Opposite is a small two step covered terrace: it's white washed walls providing a nice contrast to the dark grey steelwork. A large conifer hedge surrounds the ground on all sides and, although the roofs of nearby houses are just visible, it does succeed in giving the stadium a nicely enclosed feel.

We've reached that time of the season when teams find themselves playing only for pride and that's certainly the case here with Shaftesbury sitting in 10th place with their visitors three places and 11 points better off. It was a close game when the two sides met back in October with Hamble winning by the odd goal in five and a similar encounter was expected today. In truth it doesn't turn out exactly like

that as, other than a 20-minute spell towards the break, the visitors largely control the game. They might have taken the lead as early as the third minute when Brandon Douglas finds room on the right, only for centre forward Will Gange to get his feet in a terrible muddle before dragging his shot wide. Another Gange, this time Mackenzie, goes even closer a few minutes later as his deflected shot seems to be tipped onto the post by the diving Harry Dillon. The pressure continues on the home team and, when Harry Bunce fails to deal with a bouncing ball, only a last-ditch tackle denies Clayd Roach. For their part Shaftesbury are looking to right winger Ash Pope for inspiration and it was he who sends in a long cross from which Claudio Herbert's full length diving header only just goes wide. There is an increasing sense of frustration amongst the home players and management that Hamble's players are "going down" a little too easily and by the break three players have been carded by referee Mr Robinson.

The second period begins in staccato fashion with bookings, injuries and substitutions all doing their best to break up any real rhythm and it isn't until the 61st minute that the deadlock is broken. Shaftesbury initialled seem to have dealt with a free kick but, when the ball is returned, Brad Johnson shows some quick feet to create half a yard before neatly finishing beyond Dillon. The goal sparks the home side into action but too often they over play and attempts on goal are too infrequent to suggest that an equaliser is imminent. Douglas might have made it two, but fails to put his far post header on target before Jack Barnes finally puts the game to bed with six minutes remaining; Roach breaks away down the right and Barnes, adjusting his body shape well, half volleys into the far corner. Only the dismissal of Johnson in injury time, for a second bookable offence, takes the shine slightly off what has been a thoroughly competent win for the Hampshire outfit.

With the skies now finally clearing to reveal a bright sunlit evening I stop at a local petrol station for fuel and a snack before beginning the drive home. Five minutes later I have a tank full of unleaded and a ham and cheese sandwich - made with Hovis bread of course....

*contributed on 03/04/23.*

**TT No.140: Keith Aslan** - Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023; **DUNSTABLE TOWN** v Biggleswade United; Spartan South Midland Premier Division; Kick Off: 15.01; Result: 1-1; Admission: Donation; Programme: £2; Attendance: 165 (130 home, 21 away & 14 neutral)

Train strike cancelled so trains running today. Not if you want to go to Nottingham they aren't. In any other country this would be an April Fool, no trains, yes there are, no there aren't. But in this third world state it's no joke, the privatized railway really isn't running any trains from London to Nottingham because.... well because they don't have to. So, my eagerly anticipated visit to Hucknall's new ground will have to wait until next season, assuming they start running some trains

by then. A more prosaic destination today was the outside pitch at Dunstable, being used as Creasey Park was waterlogged. It looked quite playable to me, but what do I know.

Bus from Luton, well it would be if the place had any trains, so today it was a bus from Leighton Buzzard, slightly longer but on the plus side, you give Luton a miss. They seem to be every half hour no matter which direction you come from. I have vague recollections of doing Dunstable's ground in my youth. It was dark but I do recall an old stand along one side. *Atcost* has done for that. Food, drink and Liverpool's latest tonking were available in the clubhouse before the long trek up to the match being played on the imaginatively named ATP 2 pitch.

Pay what you want with a beefy programme accompaniment that provided plenty of reading matter for the journey home. Plastic, green mesh fence, standing down one side, seen it all a million times before. Dunstable Town are the real Dunstable with AFC Dunstable the interlopers formed from Old Dunstablians, although the latter have risen higher up the pyramid and play in the Southern League. The two clubs share Creasey Park as well as an unhealthy disrespect for each other. Geoff Astle, Kerry Dixon, George Best and Barry Fry have all turned out for Dunstable with the Chelsea striker being a native of the town. Not a lot to say about the match, two first half goals was about the sum of it, but a cheer went up when the floodlights were pointlessly switched on at 4.43! The hopperatti were out in force eager not to miss the opportunity of ticking off another green mesh fence. Usual rubbish conversations including one hopper who seriously thought that at this level it was compulsory to go back to the changing rooms at half time. The plastic brings them all out.

A quick word about attendances. Me and another hopper did totally independent crowd counts and came up with a figure that was one different. The 'extra' must have been in the toilet when I did my count. If two people come up with virtually the same number, it must be pretty accurate. So I don't know where Dunstable found an additional 63 people for the official attendance of 218. Some clubs inflate attendances, others deflate them. Why?

All in all, a good day out in good company but I couldn't help thinking I should have been somewhere else more meaningful.

*contributed on 02/04/23.*

**TT No.139: Craig Dabbs** - Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> March 2023; **Match One - Stanway Pegasus** v Basildon Town; Eastern Counties League First Division South; Venue: Stanway School; Kick-Off: 3pm; Result: 1-2; Admission: £5.00; Programme: 12pp, £2; Attendance: 114 and **Match Two - Stanway Rovers** v Redbridge; Essex Senior League; Venue: The Hawthorns; Kick-Off: 6.30pm; Result: 0-1; Admission: £7; Programme: 16pp, £1.50; Attendance: 175.

There are two clubs in the village of Stanway these days in the pyramid. With them both being at home on the same day and less than half a mile apart, I thought it would be a good move to drive down to the outskirts of Colchester to see new boys Pegasus followed by the much more established Rovers.

Pegasus can trace their roots to the Colchester Sunday League having been created in 1985 as AFC Pegasus out of a youth club, Pegasus Youth. The club were extremely successful in Sunday football picking up sixty-four different honours during that time so perhaps it was no surprise that in 2018 the switch to Saturday football was made.

The club started out in the Essex and Suffolk Border League in Division Two, which they won, and this was the start of a fairly quick climb to where they are now, at Step Six.

The club currently plays at the Stanway School. It's a two-sided cage with a fifty-seat kit stand which is far from ideal and not really a long-term solution for the club. The obvious choice would be to share with Stanway Rovers but as the two clubs don't exactly see eye to eye it might not be viable.

The match itself was an important playoff clash for both sides and it delivered. It was a very entertaining game with Basildon bossing the first half only for Stanway to really come at them in the second. However, despite the late consolation, they simply couldn't break the visitor's defence.

From the clean crisp straight lines of Pegasus, it was to something so much better, as I made my way to the rather ramshackle and downright lovely Hawthorns.

Football has existed in the village since the turn of the last century. Rovers reformed in 1956 and entered the Colchester & East Essex League. By 1975 they were in the Essex & Suffolk Border League where Pegasus have come from.

The club moved to a piece of land off New Farm Road after the local authorities agreed a 99-year lease in 1979, named The Hawthorns after the shrub which was prolific in the area. After the club moved in they started to develop the ground.

The Hawthorns today is quite marvellous. A mass of corrugated metal sheeting is the order of the day here with six home-made stands to accompany the seventh main stand, a kit one which has been altered enough to make it look much better. This provides shelter on all four sides of the ground with full cover behind both goals, although very narrow.

The match pitted a Rovers side who are in the mid to lower half of the table against the Motormen who are vying for promotion. Rovers didn't read the script and were much the better side for nearly the whole game. Redbridge snuck a goal and hung on whilst Rovers caused all sorts of problems. Perhaps it was the inflated crowd attracted by the 18.30 kick off, part of the "*Non-League Groundhop Day*" organised by the league.

*contributed (via Brian Buck) on 26/03/23.*

**TT No.138: Brian Buck** - Saturday 25th March 2023; **Debden** v Hardwick; Cambridgeshire County League CSI Senior B Division; Venue: played at Lime Avenue Playing Fields, Saffron Walden; Result: 2-3; Attendance: 25 approx.

Today, as I wanted to stay fairly close to home, I chose this match, partially because it gave me a chance to complete seeing games on all the grass pitch venues in the entire league. The venue for this ground is relatively new. To get to it take the B1052, Little Warden Road north out of the town centre and Lime Avenue soon appears on your left. Take this road and the ground appears on your right just as it bends left. As a point of interest, if you continue along this road you end up in the car park of nearby Saffron Walden Town!

The ground was better than I expected. It features two pitches cut out of the side of a hill and both are landscaped and therefore they are flat and on a plateau. There are portakabin dressing rooms and separate public toilets (used!) around the back which were spacious and clean. Debden have become nomadic these days until something is done about the dressing rooms in the village, which I was told have been condemned. Many years ago, they were programme issuers and I'm told that once a Groundhopper got one there which was so up to date that it had the result of the earlier lunchtime kick-off on Sky in it!

Today, they were up against the slightly surprisingly unbeaten league leaders, not that I realised this until I checked the league table when I got home. I watched the game from a slightly raised bank, from which not only a decent view of the countryside in the distance could be had, but also of the towering Saffron Walden parish church, distant to my left. The game was a physical one and the young referee looked like he might struggle with controlling it, especially towards the end when both sides threw their toys out of their prams. But he stuck to his task and didn't bottle any decisions when the proverbial hit the fan.

A shot from about 30 yards out saw Hardwick take the lead on 16 minutes, but the hosts were level four minutes later when the ball was headed home by the taker of a spot kick after his initial shot was blocked. Then as the moaning towards the ref started to kick in, Debden regained the lead, before Hardwick equalised four minutes later. In the second half Debden had a player sin binned on 61 minutes as the taunting of each other by the teams worsened. Then on 79 minutes a close-range header from a corner gave Hardwick the lead. On 90(+4) minutes Debden had a player sent off for getting a second yellow.

Then after the match had finished there was a punch up, with the ref seemingly showing another red to the sent off player, who had returned to the pitch and also seemed to show another one to one of his teammates. Hardwick weren't an innocent party to all this, but they avoided the reds, settling for a few yellows instead! My hat off to the ref though, who remained calm throughout! These two sides are destined to meet again at Hardwick, on this coming Saturday!

*contributed on 28/03/23.*

**TT No.137: Keith Aslan - Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> March 2023; REDCAR TOWN v Willington;** Northern League Division Two; Kick Off: 15,00; Result: 6-0.; Admission: £3 for geriatrics; Programme: £2; Attendance: 66 (65 home, 0 away & 1 neutral)

Last season I wrote this was the only club I needed in the Northern League, but it couldn't be done due to programme cessation. Obviously someone at the club read this and fearing they'd miss out on a visit from me, this season they've re-introduced the paper courtesy of 'Footie-print' and today they got their reward with a guest appearance from yours truly.

While the club is situated 20 minutes from Redcar Central when you get there add on another 7 or 8 minutes for the walk round the ground to the entrance which isn't really where it should be if you're coming from the station. Redcar itself was not looking at its best today. Overcast, drizzly and very, very cold. The sea front could be described as bracing.

The ground has cover behind both goals with a mixture of seats and standing. Food available from the clubhouse which they are currently raising funds to finance a much-needed renovation. Town are the new kids in the Redcar football firmament having been formed as recently as 1994. Willington by contrast have a long and illustrious history that goes back to 1906 with the highlight being the Amateur Cup win in 1950 in front of an 88,000 crowd. Sad then to see their current plight, bottom of the table with a minus 104 goal difference and of the nine points they have accrued, six have been deducted for misdemeanours.

In truth this wasn't the most riveting game of football I've ever seen. Redcar were 4-0 up by the break and both teams just went through the motions in the second half, which did produce an unusual substitution. The reserve goalkeeper came on for Willington and the first team keeper moved to centre forward for the last 25 minutes. I suspect this was just to give everybody a game rather than some sort of tactical masterstroke.

The trains were brilliant today, everything spot on time. No engineering works. No staff shortage. No cancellations. No signal failures. It's days like this that remind you how good the railway system could be, but very rarely is.

*contributed on 26/03/23.*

**TT No.136: Brian Buck** - Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> March 2023; **Finmere** v Deanshanger Athletic Reserves; North Bucks & District League Division 1; Result: 6-6; Attendance: 15 approx.

I'd had my eye on visiting this ground all season and by ticking this one off today, I believe that I have now been to every ground in the league. Checking to see if the match was on was almost near impossible, but during the morning I noted somewhere on the club's Facebook site, a link to their squad for today's game.

The ground is right on the Buckinghamshire/Oxfordshire border and on my Ordnance Survey map the thick black dot dash line seems to almost go through someone's house at one point. On my way to the ground the weather was of a concern to me, as it absolutely bucketed it down in the Bedford area. However by the time I reached Milton Keynes the rain had stopped and furthermore, by the time I reached the pretty little village of Finmere, just off the A421, it hadn't

rained all day. In fact, when I spoke to the ref, when he arrived ten minutes before kick-off, he told me that he had been told that this was a very good draining pitch.

The ground can be found up a narrow lane by the village hall, on the Water Stratford road. In fact, it was so narrow that when I encountered a large green tractor on the way, it struggled to fit into it and I had no choice but to reverse (badly) to get out of his way. On my arrival, about half an hour or so before kick-off, the car park was almost full, but I got a space behind the goal and I think that it was hit by the ball to enhance its value a couple of times during the game. The reason why the ref was late getting to the ground was because he told me that the ground has the same sat nav postcode as nearby Tingewick does!

As recreation grounds go this was quite a pleasant one. The game kicked off a few minutes late, but no one was too fussed. Nor was anyone concerned that the ref wasn't able to run very much and so spent the afternoon without straying too far from the centre circle. I watched the first half, sitting at a trestle table near the kiddies play area.

The game had been billed as a top of the table clash, although it was actually fourth versus second and it was the visitors who started the game the best, having three shots to one in the opening 25 minutes. But at that point Finmere scored and apart from two shots just before the break, Deanshanger never threatened again. On 40 minutes the lead was doubled by way of an effort from close to 50 yards out.

At the start of the second half a few drops of rain saw me scurrying to the wooden changing rooms (complete with overhang) behind the goal, close to the corner flag. I watched the rest of the match from here, mainly because Finmere were now kicking into this goal, but partly because the home entourage of management, players and spectators had moved onto the side of the pitch I had been watching from and would have blocked my view. The hosts rattled in four more goals, one of them being a long range direct free kick and two others coming from Ewan Barnard, to complete his hat-trick. He looks too good to be playing at this level. The game was over by 4.42pm, not bad for a 3pm start. A minute or so before the full ninety minutes were up, I was able to get home before it got dark, to bring to a close an uncomplicated day out.

*contributed on 22/03/23.*

**TT No.135: Jon T Green** - Saturday 18th March 2023; **HAY ST MARY'S** v. Knighton Town; Central Wales League - South Division; Venue: Brecon Road; Result: 4-0; Admission: £3; Programme: No; Attendance: 54 head count.

Now here's a thing which has been perplexing me. If a supermarket wants to build a new superstore and clog up every road in the area, they get permission. If a builder wants to put up a hundred new houses on a green field site, they get permission. However, if a football club wants to build a small stand on their own land, then there are multiple council meetings, and a residents committee is formed to object. Noticing something wrong here? I know it's our passion and

therefore there is a small (large) degree of bias but truly football is the pariah of our society.

Such a ludicrous situation has befallen Hay St. Mary's; the club are currently working towards their Tier 3 licence in the Welsh pyramid but have had to undertake a ludicrous semi re-location to achieve it. The current changing rooms are situated close to one of the three pitches, which make up the Brecon Road facility, but due to the proximity of the nearby housing estate, the new grandstand could only be situated on the far pitch. Several problems arise: 1) it's too far for the players to return to the dressing rooms at half time, 2) a crowd funding scheme has needed to be put in place to build a new club house and 3) the pitch is slightly too narrow and short. The former can be overcome but the latter is more difficult as there is a ditch at one end and a considerable slope at the other. Much of this could have been prevented if the club had been allowed to use one of the nearer pitches but that would have meant a stand within eyeline of the houses. Hardly the Empire State Building blocking out the sun now is it...?

The ground itself is still relatively basic (as you would expect) with the new 100 seat capacity pre-fabricated stand providing the only cover. The seats here are in a green and white chequered pattern which neatly reflects the team's shirts. Between the entrance gate is a container which serves as both a refreshment hut and a make-shift game day office. The pitch is bordered by a metal rail with hard standing on three sides; players arrive via a five-bar gate which wouldn't look out of place on a farm. Behind the top goal is the previously mentioned ditch (complete with small homemade bridge) then there is a steep bank of silver birch trees, whilst the lower end backs onto one of the other pitches.

On the playing side of things, it has been much smoother with the team sitting comfortably in second place just three points behind Radnor Valley. Having lost to the leaders recently they are now dependent upon their rivals slipping up and, with only a handful of games left in a somewhat unbalanced league, this looks a little unlikely. The visitors from Knighton Town recently only lost to Radnor by a solitary goal but today they put up much less resistance. As early as the second minute Matt Tong draws Jack Davies into a sprawling safe but the keeper can do little to stop Brendan Hackett opening the scoring. Jack Biggs slides a pass through and Hackett smashes it into the roof of the net. Within ten minutes it's two nil as Jake Cleeves sets up Tong who gets behind the Town defence before calmly lobbing the stranded Davies. Knighton do create a chance of their own when Will Hyett breaks forward; his pass finds Sam Hoyle but the striker can only blast it over. A little after the half hour mark the game is all but won; Knighton defender Harry Hurst is pressurised into an under hit back pass and Biggs nips in to score.

Unsurprisingly the second period is a fairly tame affair and on a heavy pitch it's clear that the home players are not going to over exert themselves. They do add a fourth as a neat interchange between Biggs and Cleeves leads to Tong clinically finishing left footed into the far corner. On as substitute for Town, Connor O'Connell (not the best choice of christian name from the parents is it?) has a great chance to reduce the deficit but shanks his shot horribly wide. The lad does show a great attitude though and a few moments later he goes much closer with a fierce drive. The only downside of the day is the second yellow card dismissal of

Matt Venables, booked earlier after he angrily reacted to a trip, he then somewhat needlessly fouls an opponent way out on the touchline. He removes his shirt on the way off the pitch which presumably is also a cautionable offence...

It's been another great day out in the Welsh leagues although a glance at the map will tell you that Hay is only a hair's breadth away from being part of the English pyramid system. It's a quirk of geography that will perhaps allow them to progress to a higher standard than had they have been located a mile to the East.

*contributed on 21/03/23.*

**TT No.134: Keith Aslan** - Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> March 2023; **Match One: PEEL AFC** v Laxey; Canada Life Isle of Man Premier Division; Kick Off: 14.30; Result: 3-1; Admission & programme: £1; Attendance: 82 (71 home, 9 away & 2 neutral) and

**Match Two: FC ISLE OF MAN** v Longridge Town; North West Counties Premier Division; Kick Off: 18.01; Result: 3-5; Admission: £3 for pensioners; Programme: £2; Attendance: 627 (594 home, 29 away & 4 neutral).

No trains again on Saturday so another trip that would take a weekend to do anyway, and a rare mode of transport for my groundhopping. I am a very infrequent flier, my mum always used to say that if God had meant us to fly he'd have given us the plane tickets. Back in her day it was an expensive way to travel, but good old EasyJet, £60 return was far cheaper than you could do it by train and ferry. Virtually all my previous air travel has been with Aeroflot, and while their aircraft have a reputation for falling from the sky it always amused me that passengers break out into applause when the plane lands safely. No clapping on EasyJet which would have been far more deserving when we touched down in the Isle of Man, as it was a feat very few planes had managed over the past week.

Ronaldsway Airport is having its radar system upgraded which involves closing a runway and planes can only take off and land in perfect visibility with no more than a gentle zephyr blowing across the Irish Sea. For the previous week the place was in chaos, FC Isle of Man had two flights cancelled coming back from their match at Northwich, and they had to make a mad dash for a ferry, arriving home 26 hours after their game had finished. Delays were anything up to 8 hours and one flight circled the airport for half an hour before returning back to Liverpool with conditions on the island unlandable. I was lucky, the weather changed on Friday and my plane hit the tarmac spot on time. On Saturday the place was covered in thick mist and virtually nothing went in or out, then Sunday morning was beautiful, and EasyJet did the business for me again. If perfect weather conditions were needed while the runway was shut, wouldn't it have been better to have done the radar upgrade during the summer, or am I missing something?

Railway stations are my happy places, but I can't get my head round airports, however I do realise these days you have to have stringent luggage checks. No liquids allowed, but once your bag has gone through security you are let out into a retail complex as big as Westfields where you can stock up on liquids to take onto the plane to replace the ones that have been confiscated! Having put most of my belongings in a tray to be scanned it went into the naughty lane meaning it needed

to be examined for illegal items. Turned out I was trying to smuggle a tube of toothpaste on board. Mr. Security guard put it into a machine which confirmed there was only toothpaste within, and he let me through. Superdrug would have been hearing from me when I got home if he'd found anything other than Colgate Triple Action in the tube. The airline was most insistent that I have some form of photo identification and the only thing I had was my bus pass. Didn't know if they'd accept it but I needn't have worried as nobody at any stage of my journey checked to confirm that it was actually me who was flying. So, if the Managing Director of Al Qaeda wants to take a flight under another name he'll be o.k. as long as he doesn't try to take any toothpaste on board.

Buses on the Isle of Man are excellent with a 20-minute service from the airport to Douglas. You must have seen photos of the bay; it looks even better in the flesh particularly at night with the lights stretching for a mile and a half along the Victorian promenade. I booked into my hotel in the north of the town, before getting one of the myriad buses back into the centre for food, drink and a photo op. at the Bee Gees statue (Who I always thought were Australian, but apparently, they're pure Manx).

Saturday was supposed to start with a ride on the Manx Electric Railway up to the summit of Snafell, but not running up the mountain today due to non-existent snow. But it was operating to Ramsey, a wonderful ride for anybody even the slightest bit interested in railways. Then a bus across the island to Peel. Although the bus pass I got six years after everybody else isn't valid on the island, there is currently a fare cap of £2 in operation which saved me a small fortune.

AFC Peel play on the edge of town on the road out to Douglas with a bus stop outside the ground to take you back to the capital. Steeped in history this is the best ground on the island. A large main stand with the changing rooms underneath, and another stand on the opposite side of the ground, all built with white painted stone and aesthetically pleasing to the eye. A burger van dealt with the food situation. They are the only club in the league that issue paper which was free with the measly one pound admission. I was mentioned in the programme and I will be selling autographed copies for my fans to enjoy. All proceeds will be donated to my bank account. Football on the Isle of Man goes back a long way with the programme cover stating Peel were formed on Monday October 1st. 1888. The place was buzzing with the club on the cusp of winning the league for the first time in twenty years. They must be surprised at their position given in their opening two games they dropped 4 of the 6 points they've lost all season. One all, down to 10 men with 15 minutes left to play, Peel hit the post three times and scored twice in the last bit which according to the league table in the prog. almost, but not quite, gives them the title.

A half hour bus ride took me to the Douglas Bowl. A weird ground, fully seated which I reckon can hold around 4 to 5 thousand. Half is technically under cover, a unique marquee type structure with no back and I would suspect that you are still likely to get wet if the rain falls at much of an angle. There has been debate about the programme situation here, but on this evening's visit a pile greeted you as you entered the ground. Pulled Pork rolls were the main attraction on the food front, very tasty but very expensive. A cracking game for the neutral as well as the

vociferous Longridge contingent. Sean Doyle and Dean King, the two clubs centre forwards, both got hat tricks. I.O.M. went 1-0 down, 3-1 up before 4 unanswered goals gave the away side the points. Didn't have to wait long for a door-to-door bus back to my accommodation and I drifted off to sleep praying the weather was going to improve for my departure next morning.

It did. Never have I been so pleased to see blue sky. The plane took off half an hour late but that wasn't EasyJet's fault. Our landing slot at Gatwick had vanished into the ether due to a shortage of air traffic controllers. As the pilot sarcastically added to his apology 'summer is almost upon us' which suggested that further 'staff shortages' were in the offing. I knew I was back in blighty when it was announced there were no Thameslink services from Gatwick to St. Pancras due to engineering works. A fab. weekend, the Isle of Man lived up to my expectations, EasyJet surpassed them. They also fly to Jersey and there's another train-less Saturday coming up in a fortnight. I wonder if the Bulls are at home?

*contributed on 20/03/23.*

**TT No.133: Steve Hardy** - Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> March 2023; **Wellington Amateurs Development** v Brown Clee; Shropshire Football League Division One Cup; Result: 2-3; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 17 H/C.

With just 8 clubs in Division One of the Shropshire League, most clubs have already finished their fixtures for this season. What to do to pad the season out a bit? I know, a completely useless Division One cup should use up a few Saturdays and one of those was what I decided to go to today.

The match was played at SCAT (Shrewsbury College of Art and Technology) on the London Road in Shrewsbury. I counted at least 6 grass football pitches there, two rugby pitches and one 4G pitch in a cage which is where my match took place today. As far as I can see, nobody is actually based at SCAT on a regular basis this season, but several different clubs have used it as a one-off venue.

Having mocked the idea of a Division One cup in my opening paragraph, I have to confess to really enjoying today's game. Both teams played some excellent footie with Clee playing mainly on the counter-attack, and it worked well for them too. They took the lead on 13 minutes and held that lead at half time. The Amateurs equalised on 55 minutes with a blatantly offside goal before a defensive error gave Clee the lead again on 70 mins. Back came the Amateurs to equalise from a free kick on 77 minutes and both sides then went for the winner. Clee got it near the end to round off a super afternoon's entertainment.

No need for Sarah Satnav today either. The ground is just opposite the wonderful Shrewsbury Cricket Club where she and I have been several times over the years.

*contributed on 19/03/23.*

**TT No.132: Jon T Green** - Friday 10<sup>th</sup> March 2023; **CAMBRIAN AND CLYDACH VALE BGC** v. Trefelin BGC; Cymru South; Venue: King George V New Field; Result: 6-0; Admission: £5; Programme: Online only; Attendance: 69 headcount.

“It’s always cold down here” says the lady on the gate as she accepts my fiver “last summer there were people sunbathing up in town and we still had hoodies on”. “You’re lucky that the game is on as the pitch was covered in snow this morning” she reaches for her phone and scrolls through a dozen or so photos proving that indeed things did look pretty dire. “It rained during this morning and most of it went” she adds “a local ref came and inspected at lunchtime and helped us clear the remaining ice from the far side. We just can’t do it without help like that”. The club were awarded a Tier 1 licence last year granting them the ability to play in Cymru Premier “it’s a nice thing for us to have even though we may never actually use it. We are still in the middle of more work and have just opened a new clubhouse which has a classroom up on the second floor”.

The ground is situated on the outskirts of Tonypany in the Rhondda Valley, a traditional mining area albeit with the local colliery, which was known for its high production figures, having closed over half a century ago. Entrance is via a small car park and leads you down a walkway set in the middle of one of the two stands that have been built behind the goal. It’s the largest of the four prefabricated stands spread around three sides of the ground giving the King George V stadium a total capacity of nearly 500 royal blue seats. A training pitch is located at the far end with this area effectively out of bounds for spectators. A steep wooded slope rises behind the Main Stand and gives the ground a nicely enclosed feel, there is still snow visible amongst the trees as the players run out on a chilly, but mercifully, windless night.

The visitors from Trefelin are in an unusual grey and luminous yellow strip with their ‘keeper decked out in “Cadbury” purple. At best you can say that at least he doesn’t clash with the outfield players.....Cambrian sit fifth place in the table and, although promotion looks beyond reach this season, they are in good form and would expect to beat a team six places below them. Employing an element of surprise, Trefelin start at a blistering pace with left back Zac Brown bombing forward at every opportunity. He and Josh Owen are involved in a great battle with the home man just about coming out on top. Owen shows his skills in an attacking sense as well with Liam Eason going close with a header from his right wing centre. The visitors are taking no chances defensively and are happy to concede a multitude of throw-ins. There is no “Row Z” but if there were that’s where the ball would be!!! With Cambrian now beginning to assert their authority they open the scoring on 26 minutes; Mervyn Bennett swings over a cross from the right and this time Eason makes no mistake as he guides his header beyond the reach of David Devonald. The breakthrough leads to an explosion of shots on the Trefelin goal with Ceri Morgan and the floppy haired Shane Morgan both going close. Only a free kick from the highly impressive Brown threatens to draw the visitors level as half time is reached with only a solitary goal between the teams.

If the first half was a relatively even affair, then the second is a landslide as the hosts run in five unanswered goals. Things start relatively calmly and, although full back Kieron Coles scores from close range after Devonald fails to hold Davies’ low free kick, the score is still only two nil with less than 20 minutes to play. That all changes though as Cambrian add three in a frantic eight-minute spell: first Eason converts from the spot after Sam Johnson is fouled and then completes his hat

trick as once again Devonald fails to hold onto a free kick, this time from Cameron Keetch, and the predatory striker has the easiest of finishes. Eason is then substituted, but within a few seconds his replacement Oliver Amos chases down an over hit pass, beats his full back and fires right footed into the far corner for his first senior goal. With added time being played, Trefelin's misery is complete as their defence fails to clear and Keetch smashes his shot into the roof of the net. There is just time for home 'keeper Morgan Davies to preserve his clean sheet as he produces a fine save to beat away McCauley Power's well struck free kick. It's been a sobering night for the visitors who's defensive and goalkeeping frailties were ruthlessly exploited by a Cambrian team who look like they are going to be a force in this league for some time to come.

*contributed on 14/03/23.*

**TT No.131: Brian Buck** - Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> March 2023; **Eynesbury Rovers** v Milton Keynes Irish; uhsport United Counties League Premier Division South; Result: 0-1; Attendance: 129.

Today I stayed local, partly because I didn't feel well enough to be standing in a muddy field to watch a game which might or might not be on by the time I got there, bearing in mind the horrendous weather two days earlier. I think that as the years go by and as I grow older, there will be more Saturdays like this to come. So, my choice today was a revisit to Hall Road, home of Eynesbury Rovers, a club I like a lot, but don't visit enough.

My first ever visit here was on 30 November 1981 when I saw Luton Town beat them 7-1 in a floodlight opening match with Rovers' goal being scored by Croker-White. Over the intervening years the ground has been evolved, partially to meet the needs of the ground grading people, but it hasn't detracted from its beauty, with perhaps the exception to the stand behind the goal, which after it was built a few years ago, everyone thought that the scaffolding used to build it would be removed. But it has remained and is part of the structure of the stand. But it has been a success and is used by some of the club's supporters, who sometimes bring a drum with them.

I got here early enough to have a couple of pre-match pints, supped as I and the club president chatted. But by the time I took my seat in the stand, I noticed that something was missing, namely my hat, which should have been on my head. So, I watched the game with my hood up. It was only after the game had finished that eagle-eyed Rovers secretary, Cathy, located it for me. She had been (wisely) keeping an eye on me and found it close to where I had been sitting in the bar, telling me as she did so, "Perhaps you should stick to tea and (her) cake in the future."

As for the game, it wasn't great. This was a 15<sup>th</sup> versus 6<sup>th</sup> match, but throughout the match, possession was roughly even. The only clue that Irish were higher placed came when they had five first half goal attempts to one. But it wasn't until the 73<sup>rd</sup> minute when either side got a shot on target. While all this was going on the good officers from the Environmental Health turned up and inspected the

kitchens, which turned out to be fine. The second half saw both sides raise their game a bit. A goalless draw would have been the right result, but on 85 minutes Irish scored the only goal of a not particularly good game, which the ball was curled in from just outside the corner of the six-yard box.

*contributed on 14/03/23.*

**TT No.130: Keith Aslan** - Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> March 2023; **STOCKPORT GEORGIANS** v Abbey Hulton; North West Counties First Division South; Kick Off: 15.00 on the dot; Result: 3-3; Admission: £3 for the elderly; Programme: £2; Attendance: Official: 114 - Actual: 75 (63 home, 6 away & 6 neutral)

No trains on two of the next three Saturdays, so today Broadstairs got into the swing of things with; no trains. But at least we got a rail replacement bus today. Avanti surprised everybody, with all of their cancellations announced in good time and the trains that did run all behaved themselves.

Dodgy weather led up to this one, but thanks to a combination of Mr. Secretary and the Stockport Weather Centre operated by the world's most famous groundhopper, I set off in the fairly certain knowledge that the game would be on.

Woodsmoor is the station you want for this one from where the ground is a 10-minute walk away. This is a dinky little stop adorned by flowers and signage relating to the history of the place. A plaque is proudly displayed for winning 'Northern most improved station award'. And well deserved it is too. This is quite a posh place, not at all what you would associate with an area of Stockport.

Much work is being done to the ground, with new changing rooms under construction. There are a couple of small iron stands, but no seating as yet. The clubhouse has picnic tables outside and for the hard of standing the game can be watched from these. Pie, peas and gravy was the food on offer which I got stuck into, washed down with a pint of unpronounceable lager which was surprisingly tasty.

Player profile in the programme was a bit different and featured President Cliff Arden who describes his time with the club as '38 years of pleasure' Favourite all time player: Pele. Fair comment. Favourite all time film; Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid. No problem with that. But Favourite all time T.V. programme; The Chase? Come on. It's always good to read about somebody older than me that's still got a pulse.

Lots happening in this match with all of the goals coming in the second half. Stockport went one up, two one down then three two up before Abbey Hulton equalized with an own goal in the 92<sup>nd</sup> minute of the 90. As soon as they scored the referee blew up for full time. It's almost as if he was playing on to give Abbey the chance to equalize, and when they did his work was done.

A wonderful bus ride round Kent to finish off the day. Definitely one for my book of 'Great Rail Replacement Bus Journeys'.

*contributed on 12/03/23.*

**TT No.129: Brian Buck** - Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> March 2023; **Clenchwarton** v Ingoldisthorpe; North West Norfolk League Division 1; Result: 0-5; Attendance: 25 approx.

Today I took the short and cheap train journey from Cambridge North to King's Lynn to tick off another ground in this league. The views across the Fens as you go are stunning, as is King's Lynn itself if you have time to look around. From the railway station it was just a few yards to the bus stop to pick up the half-hourly number 505 Spalding bus which drops you almost outside the ground about fifteen minutes later. On its way the bus passed the ground of West Lynn, visited on 16 May 2008 and which is still there and also that of Foster Athletic, visited on 31 August 1999, where the site of the pitch still seems to be there, but with no evidence that football is played here any longer.

I arrived at the ground about an hour and a half before kick-off and at this stage the players were just starting to arrive. I thought that the game would be played on the pitch between the clubhouse and the main road, but it was played on the furthest pitch out the back. As there was no bar or anywhere to sit here, after sitting on a park bench to devour my sandwiches, I headed off to the pub, about a ten minutes' walk away. I had a problem here, as being an 'Egon Ronnie' pub, there was nowhere for casual drinkers to sit. Being a food orientated pub, although the staff were pleasant enough, I got the impression that they would have preferred it if I hadn't been there. So, they offered me a stool to sit on. This had the effect of doing my back in and I didn't feel well again until I caught the bus back to the station afterwards. There was no TV to watch football on either.

I was back at the ground in plenty of time for the match. The pitch they played on had two dugouts and was 'railed' off by way of advert hoardings for a few yards either side of them. The other pitch in the complex was similar, but the railings were longer. The club is officially called Clenchwarton Football Club, so these two back pitches have been added at a later date to cater for all their teams. The visitors came and left here top of the league. I had been to their ground a year earlier when they were top of Division 2 and was made to feel most welcome. I was hoping to bump into some of their people today, but if any of them were present then the connection wasn't made.

As for the game it was rather strange in that it was played almost entirely without any friction and there was rarely a foul committed. I would have thought that the hosts would give it a go against the league leaders, but they seemed to accept defeat before a ball was kicked. This had the effect of nullifying Ingoldisthorpe and they knew that they didn't have to try too hard to beat them. The visitors took the lead on 7 minutes, doubling it on 24 minutes. Then a third goal followed on 39 minutes. In this half the hosts had no serious shots at goal at all. But after the break, on 55 minutes, they did manage one effort. This half was mainly a non-event. The hosts did play slightly better but not enough to disturb the hosts who comfortably saw out the game, adding two further goals, on 89 and 90(+1) minutes right at the end.

The game finished in plenty of time to allow me to catch the bus back to King's Lynn. It ran a few minutes early, thus doubling the train connection time from five minutes to ten minutes from the bus station, which meant that I easily caught the train that I thought I would miss, thus allowing me to get home an hour earlier than expected and thus allowing me to rest my poor back!

*contributed on 07/03/23.*

**TT No.128: Jon T Green** - Saturday 4th March 2023; **MIDHURST AND EASEBOURNE** v. Roffey; Southern Combination League Premier Division; Venue: The Rotherfield; Result: Match postponed; Admission: £7; Programme: Online only; Attendance: N/A

I would like to preface this week's report by saying that after many years of watching our great game I am still as much in love with football as on the first day I saw it. Moaning about lack of programmes, less than helpful club officials, poor refereeing and, heaven help us, a goalless game is not in my nature but the events of Saturday did strike a rather sour note.

It's an occupational hazard of our hobby that games are postponed through bad weather, moved to another day after our travel plans have been sorted or, in worse cases, abandoned due to serious injury or lack of discipline. We may not like it, but it does happen and almost everyone reading this website will have had one or more of those experiences. What I am struggling to come to terms with is seemingly a blatant disrespect for the paying fan and the game in general.

The facts, as I understand, are as follows:

Midhurst have a player who was getting married last weekend and asked Roffey FC to postpone the fixture. The visitors declined, for an unspecified reason, as was their right. On Saturday morning Midhurst advised Roffey that there was "no power or water at the ground" and that the match would have to be postponed. I had been at the ground around 10:15am on Saturday where a small training session was taking place with some youngsters. Now maybe you don't need power or water to have a kick about with the kids but certainly there was nothing to suggest that a postponement was imminent. Midhurst made no statement on the club's official Twitter feed, so it was not until considerably later in the day did I become suspicious and double check with Roffey. The whole episode leaves a bad taste in the mouth, and I would certainly think twice before planning a re-visit.

All of which is a shame because The Rotherfield is currently a nice venue, albeit one which is in the midst of being upgraded. A former dual cricket and football venue, the site is now purely used for the winter game. As you would expect, the changing rooms are some distance from the pitch with the players entering the field through a long line of metal barriers. To the left of the near goal is a prefabricated covered metal terraced stand which looks as though it's been installed solely for the purpose of meeting ground grading requirements. The Main Stand, on which some remedial work has taken place, is due for replacement in the very near future. The wooden structure, which includes rows of benches, is not in the best of shape but another prefabricated structure will do nothing to

enhance the ground. Currently the pitch is surrounded by a rather jarring blue mess fence and, whilst I appreciate this is the club colour, perhaps green or brown would have been rather more sympathetic. Near walkways are planned along with an upgraded turnstile block.

As a footnote I understand that the Southern Combination League are looking into Saturday's debacle but whether we will ever be privy to their findings is another matter...

*contributed on 06/03/23.*

**TT No.127: Keith Aslan - Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> March 2023; GURU NANAK GURDWARA OADBY TOWN** v Histon; United Counties League Premier Division South; Kick Off: 15.05; Result: 0-4; Admission: £3 for bus pass holders; Programme: £1.50p with laminated cover; Attendance: 51 (32 home, 14 away & 5 neutral).

What a week it's been and on Wednesday Postwoman Patricia popped a professionally printed programme through my letterbox for the Nailsea and Tickenham v Longwell Green match. My life is complete, and they are now my favourite ever football club. I was racked with guilt the rest of the week for ever doubting them.

Today was my second visit in three months to Leicester. Loads of buses floating around the place but none of them stop anywhere near the station, leastways not the ones I want. So, it's an enervating yomp from one end of the city to the other, but on my trek I did discover a new Greggs, my third tick here. Also visited the Tourist Information Office and got a postcard of the City Centre to send to an old work colleague with the ironic message 'wish you were here'. Mind you, as he lives in Swindon, he'd probably regard Leicester as an upgrade.

A fifteen-minute bus ride brings you to the Riverside Stadium, a rather strange title for a ground that is nowhere near a river. Arriving early there was nobody about, but inside the gateman's hut was a sealed package with a label reading '25 programmes Oadby v Histon'. So, I could relax in the clubhouse with a cappuccino and the first of many samosas. Samosas were the only food on offer. I wasn't too sure if I would like them, but after my fifth I came to the conclusion that I did. Very filling.

Oadby used to have a nice ground in Oadby until they sold it to an Arthur Daley character who threw them off for unknown reasons. He now has a worthless piece of real estate, houses cannot be built on it, and an empty crumbling football ground that can only be used for playing football. Fortunately, GNG took them in and the two seem to have a very good relationship. GNG still exist as a separate entity in one of the Leicester leagues. If you want to visit the ground Oadby are at home now every single Saturday up to April 22nd. Histon are riding on the crest of a slump, as recently as 2014 they were playing in the Conference, and I recall seeing them on TV not so long ago beating Leeds United in the F.A. Cup. So, both of today's teams have recently seen better days.

Always going to be a comfortable win for Histon with Oadby having many first teamers missing. They were fielding their second-choice goalkeeper who made Geoff Capes look malnourished by comparison. There was too much bitchiness in the game with one Oadby player managing to get booked, substituted then sent off in one fluid move. Referee Amy Keir could do with fine tuning her timekeeping. Five late start, she added seven minutes onto the end. It was 4-0, what an earth did she think was going to happen in that seven minutes which was going to make any difference to the outcome. The rules state, 'time MAY be added on at the referees discretion' Where's the discretion? In the 95th minute Oadby got a penalty, which in keeping with the rest of their play, they missed.

With the stop a four-minute walk away, even these days you would expect to get the 5.02 bus. My expectations were left unfulfilled and so began the start of a pretty grotty return journey with train cancellations meaning a lot later arrival back at my country dacha than I was expecting. Train fares rose again on Sunday, and to celebrate, down my way you'll get extra value for money with a rail replacement bus ride added to your journey. I might have mentioned it before, but privatization really isn't very good.

*contributed on 05/03/23.*

**TT No.126: Brian Buck - Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> February 2023; AFC Wimbledon v Stevenage; Sky Bet League 2; Result: 2-3; Attendance: 6,936.**

This game was the one rearranged from Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> December, which I had got tickets for, but which was postponed due to a frozen pitch. Getting to and from here was easy. The closest station is Haydons Road, but it is not the quickest way to get there. Instead, we took the Victoria line from Finsbury Park (Krapy Rubsnif backwards!) to Stockwell (20 minutes) and then from there on the Northern Line to Tooting Broadway (10 minutes). From here it was about a twenty-minute walk to the ground although there are buses available for most of the way. The actual ground is not easy to spot as it's hidden behind towering flats and possible office blocks.

The next problem was to pick up the tickets which were supposed to come by post, having been ordered two weeks before the original game took place, but never arrived. They don't have a main ticket office here, just a few tables in the entrance hall to the hospitality area. We got the tickets eventually, but only after being redirected to the wrong collection place by the clueless stewards. From here team sheets were available and paper programmes were also on sale. I liked the ground as it was better and bigger than I imagined it would be. The only problem I had was with two nutters sitting in front of me, but as there were some empty seats behind me available, I moved to sit there instead.

Early on Wimbledon were all over Stevenage who hadn't won since Saturday January 21<sup>st</sup> when I saw them beat league leaders Leyton Orient 3-0. Generally, they were poor in the first half, looking more like a side fighting relegation, rather than a side going for automatic promotion. So, perhaps it was no surprise when the hosts took the lead on 40 minutes. A deep cross into the back post caused

problems for the Stevenage keeper, as it slipped through his hands to leave the scorer with an easy chance to tap the ball home.

At half-time Stevenage made a triple substitution and now they had more urgency about their play. On 55 minutes they levelled things when the ball was sent into the area, from which a header found the bottom corner of the goal. Six minutes later, Boro took the lead after a shot deflected off a Dons' defender and crept into the goal. Then Stevenage elected to sit on this lead rather than go for a third goal and it cost them, as on 74 minutes Wimbledon equalised from a close-range tap in. This forced Stevenage to change tactics again and on 83 minutes they got what would be the winner when, from a free kick, the ball was nodded on to the unmarked scorer who had time to strike it low and hard first-time into the back of the net, thus enabling them to return to second place in the league.

Getting back home was easy. By a combination of walking and catching a bus, we were back at Tooting Broadway before 10pm and getting home from there was straightforward, bringing to a close an enjoyable evening out from the Stevenage perspective.

*contributed on 01/03/23.*

**TT No.125: Brian Buck** - Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> February 2023; **Heyford Athletic** v Corby Stewarts & Lloyds; Chromasport Northants Combination Premier Division; Result: 0-2; Attendance: 15 approx.

Today, after many years of waiting, I finally ticked off this ground which is fairly close to home. This club is not to be confused with that of the same name in Oxfordshire, who this season find themselves in the Witney & District League after spending a few years in the Hellenic League.

Today's ground was easy to find. Come off the M1 at Junction 16 and follow the Nether Heyford signs and the entrance to the ground is signposted and is on your left just after you cross the River Nene and before you enter the village itself. The set up here was clean and tidy, although the completely railed off pitch could do with some white paint to cover up some of the rust. There are two brick dugouts here as well. Cricket takes place on a separate pitch in season, and they also have a bowls club and some floodlit tennis courts. When I checked out the game before travelling, I asked about parking availability, as aerial photography suggested that it was limited; you could almost hear the muffled smirk of laughter in the background, when I was told that parking has never been a problem here in the past!

It wasn't today either, especially as it was so cold that some people parked on the grass near the pitch and watched the game from their cars. They have a clubhouse here, but one strange rule they have here is that spectators are not allowed to use its toilets for the 15 minutes before and after games! But there were some outdoor toilets somewhere in the complex. I did though, but there was no one present to stop me! In fact, there were hardly any officials around at all. I could have sat in the clubhouse pre-match, but the bar wasn't open, and it was warmer in the car.

Overall, I got the impression that there was a lack of enthusiasm here, but perhaps this was just seasonal. Certainly, had I come here when the trees on the far side of the pitch were leafed up the ground would have looked more attractive, although the surrounding fields offered good viewing.

As for the game, it featured fourth from bottom versus bottom. The visitors are ex-United Counties League, where they used to be known as Stewarts & Lloyds Corby. A small point, but the 'Corby' part has since been moved from the end of their name to the front! In the first half the hosts just shaded things, although we did get some 'Premiership' style histrionics from their bench and their players from time to time. But although the ref made a few mistakes he was generally up to the task and kept good control. In this half the man with the shotgun in an adjacent field, presumably after rabbits, had more shots than S & L, two as against none. The second half saw the young visitors up their game and finally they were rewarded on 75 minutes when, following a cross, the ball was stabbed home from 10 yards out. Then finally on 83 minutes, they deservedly sealed the points after an angled shot slipped through the keeper's hands. He then subbed himself, claiming he was injured, but I think that his pride was hurt more!

*contributed on 28/02/23.*

**TT No.124: Jon T Green** - Saturday 25th February 2023; **HORBURY TOWN** v. Worsborough Bridge Athletic; Northern Counties east League Division One; Venue: Slazenger Sports Club; Result: 2-2; Admission: £5; Programme: £1; Attendance: 118.

Set high above the River Calder valley, the Slazenger Sports Club is reached via a narrow bridge across a railway line. The complex includes not only several grass football pitches, but also tennis courts, a bowls club and a well-used artificial hockey pitch. Indeed, if it wasn't for the hockey players the clubhouse, situated a few minutes' walk away from the ground, would be largely deserted before the game.

Upgrade work to the football ground is in full swing with white plastic railings now surrounding the pitch. The turnstile block has been refurbished with a really smart new wooden hut and freshly laid walkways link the changing rooms and tea bar to the main pitch. A replacement 100-seater stand has been installed and, on a grey day, the red and black seats do add a splash of colour against the metal frame. The original prefabricated stand can still be seen barely four feet behind the new one and, with a fresh concrete base having been laid out on the far side of the dugouts, maybe it will be moved there in the future. I am not a fan of these identikit structures but maybe the ability to deconstruct and rebuild somewhere else does have its advantages. Between the stand and the dug outs is a black container which houses the club shop and from the roof of which the PA announcer works. The ground is pretty exposed so you have to admire the chap for clambering up a ladder and dragging behind him a plastic chair and an umbrella. The lengths that some people will go to for a good view of the game.....

Nearby Horbury Bridge is where the hymn Onward Christian Soldiers was first performed but today the team enter to the tones of Two Tribes; whether Frankie's 80's classic is equally popular in church is yet to be determined. The home side start as firm favourites this afternoon having beaten Worsborough 4-1 away earlier in the season. Town sit just a point outside the play-offs whilst the visitors are in the lower reaches of the table, albeit comfortably clear of the relegation zone. It doesn't take long for Horbury to get on top with the speedy Ben Agu almost putting in Sam Kyeremeh and it's no surprise when they open the scoring after five minutes; centre forward James Cusworth guiding his header beyond Josh Womack for his 20th goal of the season. For Bridge their own main striker, Mike Jepps, is battling away against a back four who are occasionally trying to over play. Mick Jones goes close with a neat header as the blue shirted visitors try to find a finger hold in the game but it's the pace of Town which is the dominant force. Sam Awty is super-fast on the wing and with Kyeremeh dropping deep to receive possession before surging forward, they seem to be in danger of over-running the visitors. A second goal arrives after 32 minutes as Horbury break up an attack, the ball is fed wide to Awty whose low centre is swept home by Agu. Jepps is then desperately unlucky to see his shot strike the upright a few moments later and, with half time reached, it's difficult to see anything other than a home win.

The second period proves a very different affair with Bridge playing with a new level of belief; captain Conor Glavin sends in a free kick from the right and Jones heads it in. It's a very tight call as James Smith does hack the ball away but the linesman on the near side signals that it has already crossed the line. Worsborough's bench are urging their side to "just stay in the game", it's something which they are only just achieving as Awty bursts through only to send his shot curling narrowly wide. Cusworth goes down in the box claiming an elbow, he certainly has a bloody nose but there doesn't seem to be much malice or aforethought in the challenge. The same player then appears certain to score with a close range header after Agu sees his shot well parried by Womack. Some of the crowd are already celebrating the goal only to realise a second later that Cusworth's header is off target. It proves to be a pivotal moment as with less than 15 minutes remaining Worsborough equalise: Jepps loops up his centre and Glavin is flattened under the high ball. Queue the normal outburst of arguing as not one but two Town players are sin binned for dissent. Their manager then talks his way into a red card and is sent from the bench. Referee Jamie Cogil comes in for a lot of flak but the official, who has had a good game, is absolutely right in his actions. Eventually calm is restored and Glavin beats Elliot Lightowler from the spot. It's the last meaningful play of the game and, although it's undoubtedly points dropped, spirits rise as news comes in - Wakefield have lost and Town have moved back into the play-offs.

contributed on 27//02/23.

**TT No.123: Craig Dabbs** - Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> February 2023; **Brighton Electricity** v St Francis Rangers; Southern Combination League Division Two; Venue: Withdean Stadium; Result: 0-4; Admission: £5; Programme: 24pp, £1; Attendance: 20.

"Are you here for the indoor climbing?" I was asked when I arrived in the bowels of the Leisure Centre after taking a wrong turn looking for the entrance to the Withdean Stadium. As tempting as injuring myself on an artificial rock face may sound, what I was actually here for was to see the Southern Combination's basement club Brighton Electricity FC in action.

The Leccy have been based at the Withdean Stadium since 2014, a year before AFC Varndeanians who also share the site. Prior to that it was home to Brighton & Hove Albion who used it between 1999 and 2011 with a large proportion of the extra seating used at the time, ending up at Newhaven FC.

The site was first opened in 1936 for tennis. It had a centre court that came with a 2,000-seater grandstand and other outer courts with a small zoo bolted on. Such was the status of the venue it staged a Davis Cup match in 1939 between Great Britain and New Zealand. After its rather sombre use as a mortuary in the war it came back as the Brighton Olympic Stadium. Although that didn't really work out and it was later converted into an athletics venue in 1955. Since then, it's played host to all manner of events owing to its size; indeed, its record attendance for a sporting event is 12,000, for American Football back in 1985. Aside from a temporary home to the Seagulls it's also known for being the home track of British Athletics star Steve Ovett.

Brighton Electricity started out in the 1930's always playing at a local level until moving into the slightly into the Southern Combination League in 2018. The men that play in brown are having a horrible time, having just five points to their name and, for all the world, look destined for relegation at the end of the season. Quite how they can carry on at the Withdean is beyond me. The stadium operators have just put the prices up and it now costs a whopping £300 to stage a game here. The programme edited by two men is also largely devoid of adverts. Someone must have deep pockets because the crowds are woeful too, averaging just 22, the smallest in the league.

The match was a very unsurprising away win. St Francis Rangers are in the top half of the table, probably a little too far away from promotion but a world away from the Leccy. Having said that whilst they dominated the game, they did make more hard work of it than it should've been. One of the St Francis Rangers players said that they were rubbish to me at half time, a little harsh on his own team I feel but, yes, they could've been more clinical at times.

*contributed (via Brian Buck) on 26/02/23.*

**TT No.122: Steve Hardy** - Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> February 2023; **Kiveton Park** v Jubilee Sports; Sheffield County Senior League Division One; Kick-Off: 2.00pm; Result: 0-2; Admission: Free; Programme: £1; Attendance: 28 H/C.

My second match today was in the Rotherham suburb of Wales, where the reformed Kiveton Park have gone into partnership with the local school to set up a new home. The sports ground is on the opposite side of Stone Close from the

school and is called Chapman Fields. Plenty of car parking spaces outside, and upon entering the ground you have a 4G pitch in a cage to your right with the dressing rooms and excellent cafe/bar on your right. Further on down still you have a railed off grass pitch and this was where the game took place.

Visitors Jubilee Sports, who along with five other clubs including Kiveton, are jostling for promotion, brought a good, few supporters with them and despite the biting wind, a good atmosphere was generated by the 27 others watching with me.

The match itself turned out to be an anti-climax really, as Kiveton just never looked like scoring. The outcome was never in doubt after 35 minutes when a Park central defender got himself sent off for hacking down a Jubilee forward who was clean through on goal. Jubilee immediately took the lead when their star player number ten ran through the defence, rounded the keeper and banged it into an empty net. He was at it again after 54 minutes when he played on as the Park defenders cried for offside and beat the keeper once again to score number two.

As mentioned earlier, the club have a wonderful cafe/bar on the site. Programmes are available from next to the serving hatch, and an excellent effort it is too. Some locals spent the whole game in the lounge watching Coventry v Sunderland and supping a good, few beers. Who can blame the though, as it was bitterly cold again outside.

*contributed on 26/02/23.*

**TT No.121: Steve Hardy** - Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> February 2023; **Sheffield United U18s** v Barnsley U18s; U18 Professional Development League North; Kick-Off: 11.00am; Result: 0-2; Admission: Free; Team sheet: None; Attendance: 54 H/C.

After last week's fiasco when I tried to watch Aston Villa U18s (v Fulham U18s) but was turned away, it was good to visit a really friendly club today where spectators were warmly welcomed. Well, perhaps 'warmly' is the wrong word as it was absolutely freezing up on the top pitch.

The club's Academy set up is in the Shirecliffe area of the City off Firhill Crescent. They have a massive building which is where the reception is, with a fabulous cafe to the right. Unfortunately, as we all piled in there to warm up, we were told it was for staff only. Luckily one lady who had already started tucking in was allowed to keep her food! From what I could see, next to this building is a 4G pitch in a cage which housed the U16s of both teams today, with the U18s grass pitch being up a very steep path over the car park. Spectators are only allowed to stand on a path which runs down one side of the pitch and beefy security guards ensure nobody trespasses into any of the other sides.

So far, so good. The problem was we then had a football match to endure, which I can only describe as disgraceful. Barnsley are top of the league, and it was clear from the off that the two teams and their respective management teams can't stand each other. Foul after foul ensued with sly punches, not so sly assaults and verbal abuse. I counted 7 bookings in total which culminated on 89 minutes with a mass brawl between all the players and management. The referee and his lines

people went into a huddle to decide what on earth to do next. Their options were to send at least 9 of the perpetrators off or abandon the game. Instead, they bottled it and blew for full time a few minutes early. Appalling scenes which I hope I never have to see again.

From what little football we had, it was obvious that Barnsley are a class act. They scored after 22 minutes and sealed the game with a second on 55 minutes, but all this was of little consequence given what went on for the other 80 minutes. I really hope both teams have the book thrown at them, but it will all probably be swept under the carpet, won't it?

One final point. United no longer issue a paper team sheet for their games. I was told they are available on-line, but I couldn't find any trace myself. Any Blades know where I can download a copy from?

*contributed on 26/02/23.*

**TT No.120: Keith Aslan - Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> February 2023; CHIRK AMATEUR ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION v Penrhyncoch; JD Cymru North; Kick Off: 13.59; Result: 0-0; Admission: £3 for old people; Programme: £1; Attendance: 54. (51 home, 2 away & 1 neutral).**

A bit of a 'champagne job' as today I completed the Cymru League which for the uninitiated means I've done everything in Welsh steps 1 and 2. Strange this should be my last one given it's one of the easiest to get to with a mere 10-minute walk from Chirk station to the ground. With a train back at 16.05 things were lined up for a day of stress free groundhopping. But of course, 'Avanti trains' and 'stress free' are not words you would normally expect to see in the same sentence. Nor will you today.

Ten minutes late leaving Euston with the magnificent Shelly announcing it was down to 'a rostering failure' Such naive honesty from one so young. Ten minutes I hear you say, what's he complaining about. The train just got later and later and later and by Coventry it was obvious nobody was going to make the 23-minute connection to continue on to Wales. A lot of people were heading for this one but step forward the magnificent Shelly who announced she was getting on to control to ask them to hold the connection. Control said no, although the 4 minutes it would have been delayed was roughly the same length of time the train was due to sit at the next station for no particular reason. The magnificent Shelly than asked if they could let our train out of Birmingham New Street ahead of the Welsh one so passengers (we ain't customers anymore) could pick it up at Wolverhampton. Control said no again. The magnificent Shelly was very apologetic, but it isn't her who should be apologising. So, I had an hour to wait for the next train, in truth no great hardship as I was able to have breakfast in my favourite Wolverhampton trattoria. Not so lucky were the majority of passengers who were going on to Aberystwyth and had a 2 (two) hour wait for their next train. It was tragic to see people piled high with luggage standing forlornly on New Street platform with 120 minutes to hang about and nothing to do. What a way to start their holiday. Railway privatization, don't you just love it!

Chirk AAA has a fascinating history, and like many clubs around these parts they were formed in the nineteenth century. They are five-time winners of the Welsh Cup, although their last victory was in 1894. The clubhouse is awash memorabilia, with photographs of bygone teams, including one of the 1894 cup winners which included Billy Meredith. You could very easily turn the place into a museum.

Everything here is bunched up to the left of the nearside goal as you enter through the spacious car park. First you come to the clubhouse, which along with the previously mentioned football artifacts, was showing the lunchtime football on a big screen. Next up are the changing rooms with a large veranda should you choose to stand in the dry. Adjacent is the refreshment cabin with the usual football fayre at seductively low prices, and next to that is an attractive stand, looks quite new but non-*Atcost*. The rest of the ground is fully railed, no sign of any floodlights happening, I guess you don't need them in Wales. I liked the place.

Just to give you the heads up, on the 25<sup>th</sup> of March you can 'spend an evening with Paul Gascoigne' although at £55 a throw I would hope some food is included. In my top ten of people I wouldn't want to spend an evening with, Paul Gascoigne is right up there.

With both clubs struggling near the bottom of the league Chirk were advertising this match as a six-pointer. Penrhynoch had other ideas and were only interested in the one, and they made clear their intentions from the outset. Time wasting was raised to an artform, and at the slightest hint of a tackle their players would collapse onto the grass and remain prostrate until the trainer strolled over to them, when they underwent a miraculous recovery. Most of the good stuff came from Chirk who deserved to win, but in football, as in life, you don't always get what you deserve. Must admit when the Penrhynoch goalkeeper took time out from his time-wasting duties he did pull off a couple of top notch saves to give the away side the point they so desperately craved.

Diary of a Groundhopper in the *Non-League Paper* next day visited Ashville and gave their programme 2 out of 10 which I thought was a bit on the generous side. Still better than last week's Nailsea programme which has still to make an appearance. I've now got someone involved now who knows what they're talking about, so I live in hope. Chirk's issue was very good, a cracking read for the journey home, which surprisingly took place without incident.

*contributed on 26/02/23.*

**TT No.119: Jon T Green** - Friday 17th February 2023; **PRUDHOE YOUTH CLUB SENIORS** v. Ryton and Crawcrook Albion; Northern Football League Division 2; Venue: Essity Park, Broomhouse Road; Result: 3-1; Admission: £6; Programme: included in admission; Attendance: 362.

With a ceiling festooned with Newcastle United shirts, the Prudhoe (pronounced to rhyme with Buddha) clubhouse is buzzing pre-match. There might be a big local derby about to take place but, with the Magpies soon to appear in the League Cup Final, all of the talk is of tickets and travel to London; this is proper cup fever the likes of which you won't find at many other "big" clubs. It's a cliché that the North

East is a hotbed of football but the passion for the game in this part of the country is tangible. It's in the very fabric of the towns and cities and has, over the generations, seeped into the ground on which they are built. If Newcastle do win their first trophy since 1969 (it's difficult to count the meaningless 2006 Intertoto Cup win) then the party on Tyneside is going to be something to see.

Broomhouse Road (now known under its sponsored name of Essity Park) is situated on the edge of a large housing estate and adjacent to a local authority recycling centre leading some fans to refer to it as "Tip Top". The ground is certainly well used and is currently home to Prudhoe YC, Newcastle University and Prudhoe Town - the latter now functioning as a Sunday League club only. To the left, as you enter, is a terrace with cover at its rear. The snack bar is also here so it's a popular viewing point. Moving along the touchline, there is a supermarket trolley type cover (used as home to a DJ's sound system tonight) before you reach the changing rooms and the large 200-seater main stand. The stand consists of four rows of green seats and is the standard prefabricated structure; of note is the considerable run off area between here and the near touchline. To its left, and even more remote from the pitch, is a brick fronted stand; no longer in use as a spectator facility it's now a general storage area. What isn't immediately apparent is that the entire ground imperceptibly slopes down from the main stand side; only on reaching the opposite side do you notice that the metal bar surrounding the pitch is now at shoulder height. An area of grass bank extends along the far touchline and curves around behind the right-hand goal - access is not strictly allowed on the grass but that doesn't totally preclude it from being used!

Dubbed the Tyne Valley Derby, tonight's match is the most "local" of local derbies with the visitors ground at Kingsley Park barely three miles away. Prudhoe triumphed there 2-1 earlier in the season and, with Ryton 19th of 21 in the league table, they must be confident of completing the double. Not that Harry Poole has read the script as, swooping on a neatly worked free kick, he sweeps his shot across goal and into the far corner to give Ryton a seventh minute lead. Parity is restored five minutes later as Matty Law controls his close-range finish following a long diagonal cross from Harry Mitchell. Despite the presence of some "beefy" lads in the Ryton team Prudhoe are getting on top with Josh Scott exhibiting some great footwork. It's he who goes close midway through the half as he sees his effort deflected wide. The same player is once again involved and only a great clearance from full back Liam Lowery prevents a goal. At the other end ex-Prudhoe man Tom Ions muscled his way through with Thomas White reacting well to push away his shot.

The second half begins with a subtle change of tactic; Ryton new signing, left winger Harvey Walsh, has been giving his full back a torrid time but, now Darren Graham has gone touch tight to his man, the threat has been largely neutralised. 54 minutes have elapsed when the hosts go ahead for the first time; a pass is laid into the path of Mitchell who sends a 20 harder rocketing beyond 'keeper Tom Dawson. Scott almost adds a third, shooting just over after the Ryton defence struggle to clear a high ball before Dawson makes an acrobatic tip over from Law. With two minutes of added played Seniors finally seal the win as substitute Trae Rowlandson gets away down the left before setting up Scott for an easy tap in. It's

been another great night in the North East and with a record crowd in attendance it's not just things at St James' Park which are looking up.

*contributed on 22/02/23.*

**TT No.118: Brian Buck** - Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> February 2023; **Boreham Wood** v FC Halifax Town; Vanarama National League; Kick-Off: 5.20pm; Result: 1-1; Attendance 925.

After the previous match had finished, I moved on to watch the televised match at Meadow Park and arrived about half an hour later. In fact, I had also been here the previous evening to watch Arsenal U21 play.

To be honest I wouldn't normally bother with these matches as in my opinion, at £20 (adults) or £18 (OAP) they are too expensive to watch for matches this level of football. To be fair to the club and their chairman, Danny Hunter, whom I like a lot, have offered free season tickets to all those aged over 70 years old; I took advantage of this at the start of the season and tonight was the first time I used it. So, it was free for me to get in.

The ground is slowly being upgraded to Football League standard and the west stand, seating over a thousand people and the covered terracing at the north stand end are both done. I expect that something similar will be put in at the south end of the ground one day, just leaving something 'special' to replace the rather small main stand. The problems they have though is that although they are on the edge of play-offs, they not only have the lowest home attendances in the league, but they are also joint lowest home goal scorers with several other clubs.

Tonight's match wasn't that exciting and started after the sprinklers had done their work. Wood scored first on ten minutes, after their scorer ran on unchallenged from the edge of the centre circle. Then as the visitors slowly improved, Wood were good in patches and average otherwise. On 31 minutes the ref became injured and was replaced by the fourth official, which had no effect on the match. Then after 61 minutes Halifax equalised with a suddenly hit, in off the post shot, from 30 yards out and by the end a draw was a far result for a game between two sides unlikely to go up or down at the end of the season.

*contributed on 21/02/23.*

**TT No.117: Brian Buck** - Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> February 2023; **FC Wood Green** v Kulture Klub; Cherry Red Books Middlesex County League Division 1 Central & East; Venue: played at Latymer School, Haselbury Road, Edmonton; Kick-Off: 2pm; Result: 4-3; Attendance: 3.

After watching a whole load of matches recently, most of which had been fairly boring, I finally came up trumps today and this encounter was my most enjoyable game of the season so far. I had chosen this match because it was my closest 'new ground' game to Boreham Wood, which I went to after this game had finished. The website said that the game was to be played at ARK Pioneer Academy (Barnet), which is behind Barnet's old, now demolished, Underhill ground and before you get

to The Pad, aka the Wingate & Finchley training ground. I believe that Kentish Town may have played here for a while.

However, in confirming the game I learned that the league website is wrong and that they have been playing at the above address in Edmonton all season. The Latymer School is a selective, mixed grammar school in Edmonton, London, England, established in 1624 by Edward Latymer. According to league tables, Latymer is one of the top state-schools in the country. Interestingly, the 3G pitch which this match was played on is relatively new, as it is not shown on any aerial photography on either of the search engines I use. I've driven down Haselbury Road many times before, using it as a shortcut when attending games at Spurs for many years.

Today I parked behind the goal in the school playground. The 3G pitch is of course in a cage and as with most these days, it has 'spectator viewing' down one side. Apart from myself, the attendance consisted of one away fan and one young lady who I persuaded to come into the cage. But although she reluctantly did, she did not engage with anyone. Only late in the game did some more away fans arrive. The match was played without corner flags or lino's and I spent the first half watching the match in close proximity to the away manager, who was a decent chap. His side did well in the first half, taking the lead on 9 minutes, after the home keeper spilled the ball from a corner. The lead was then doubled on 39 minutes by way of a curling direct free kick from about 25 yards out. According to him everything his side did was 'world class'!

At half time the home manager and I got talking and it turned out that the club, formerly known as J. H. Sports, is now named after the place where he lives. He kindly invited me to sit on one of their sub's seats in the second half. Before the restart he tried to gee up his players by telling them that I had come to see his side win and told them to do it for me! But although they were now creating chances they were being missed and Kulture Klub (ex-Hertford & District League) added a third goal on 63 minutes when the ball was rolled into an empty net. At this point things looked bleak for the hosts and in effect the home manager conceded the game, telling me that although they were as good as the visitors, they weren't taking their chances. But suddenly things changed and on 70 minutes, a header from a corner saw the arrears reduced. Then two minutes later Wood Green scored again after a player ran on to score. Then three minutes after that they equalised from close range. At this point a draw seemed likely as the hosts were still missing chances but on 89 minutes the winner finally arrived, to give them a most unexpected win.

To cap it all, just as I was about to leave, the home players clapped me to thank me for coming to watch and inspiring them to win, which made me feel good. The away manager also thanked me and conceded defeat graciously. The game was played in the good spirit I look for in any game and it was also well refereed by the official who kept a low profile throughout.

*contributed on 21/02/23.*

**TT No.116: Craig Dabbs** - Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> February 2023; **Barnetby United** v Ashby Bowl; Scunthorpe and District League Division One; Venue: Barnetby Parish Field; Result: 4-0; Admission: Free; Programme: 16pp, free; Admission: 5.

I could have easily gone somewhere elsewhere today but I'd made a promise to Lee Fielden who, apart from being the manager of Barnetby United, seems to do just about every other job at the club.

One role is that of programme editor. Any club that makes any effort at this level is going to get my support.

The Scunthorpe & District League feeds into the Lincolnshire League and is a competition very much for players rather than spectators. Indeed, the Parish Field is as basic as it comes with a small changing room block for the club with some toilets attached. It's not good enough for the next level and, to be honest as Lee put it, would be too much for Barnetby.

I arrived as Lee was marking the pitch out and I couldn't help but drawing a comparison to Faringdon Town in Oxfordshire. For sure this is a bit more basic, but with Faringdon you have a town bigger in size admittedly than Barnetby le Wold. Both are limited with what you can do with them but, in terms of football, deserve much more. Barnetby le Wold isn't a metropolis I know but it's big and deserving enough to have better facilities than it currently has.

So once the field was dressed for the occasion me, two ex-players, a young lad who came with the ref and one of the player's fathers settled down to watch a scrappy first half that included a missed penalty for Barnetby. There was little in it with United possibly just edging it before the break.

The second half saw a much more dominating performance by the hosts and, as the game progressed, Ashby Bowl started to lose their focus on the game and also two players, one to a red and one sin binned in the last ten minutes.

With just five non-playing staff or club officials watching this, Lee and the club deserve much more for the effort to keep this 87-year-old club going.

*contributed (via Brian Buck) on 19/02/23.*

**TT No.115: Keith Aslan** - Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> February 2023; **NAILSEA & TICKENHAM** v Longwell Green Sports; Toolstation Western League Division One; Kick Off:15.00; Result: 3-0; Admission: £3 for oldies; Programme: sore point; Attendance: 80 (71 home, 6 away & 3 neutral)

Nailsea & Backwell station is 10 minutes from Bristol and when you step onto the platform that's the easy part of the journey done and dusted. Now comes the 50-minute slog from one side of Nailsea to the other in a town that's far larger than it should be and is full of roads and houses that aren't on my Ordnance Survey map. No buses and my dodgy knees got a much longer work out than I would have wished.

Big things happening at this football club. Debutants in the Western League they currently sit proudly atop of their division. A new non-*Atcost* stand is in the process of being built on the far side of the ground. It seemed to me to be rather a long way from the pitch. There is already plenty of cover on the nearside which contains some luxury chairs at the back of it. Very comfortable but you won't see any football from them. There is a small clubhouse with quality food on offer, burgers, hot dogs and rolls containing large bricks of cheese. On September 27<sup>th</sup> the floodlights were officially switched on, and what a coup for the club, they managed to get the normally publicity shy Tony Incenzo to perform the lighting up ceremony. He was 'humbled and honoured' apparently.

Disaster, no programmes. As they've produced paper for every match this season I didn't bother to check. Today was the first game they stopped issuing as it was losing money. They only cost £1, why not charge an extra quid admission and give it away free, then you'd get 100% sales. A trio of groundhoppers were inconsolable. The club had gone to the trouble of doing something which you could obtain on your phone by holding it up to what looked like a maze. Not on the three groundhoppers phones you couldn't. We left our names and addresses, money and stamps with an official who promised to print it out and send us copies, but time will tell if this actually happens or if the money just goes over the bar. In my experience it will be the latter, but we shall see. I guess this is karma for slagging off Ashville's programme last week.

As already mentioned, Nailsea are top of the league and a relatively stress-free afternoon ensured they stayed there. There was a train back at half past five which even if the referee had managed to cram 90 minutes of football into 90 minutes would have been a struggle to catch. So, it was the next one and a late night home for me. Now to spend the week waiting for my postman to deliver the papyrus. Or not as the case may be.

*contributed on 19/02/23.*

**TT No.114: Jon T Green** - Saturday 11th February 2023; **HOLMER GREEN** v Northampton ON Chenecks; South Midlands Football League - Division One; Venue: Airedale Park; Result: 0-6; Admission: £6; Programme: Online only; Attendance: 41

"I'm in the trees!" came an exasperated voice from somewhere behind the near goal. There was a low murmur of laughter from the spectators at that end of the ground as referee Mr. Daniel Merratt walked over to talk to Chenecks manager Jamie Forrest (you couldn't make this up). Ironically, Forrest had been dismissed from a dugout bearing the slogan "Please do not swear" after a frank exchange of views with the official. The initial incident, a late tackle by Holmer's Adam Riley, had occurred in the 10th minute but, nearly half an hour later, Forrest still hadn't quite left the ground. In fairness, being "sent to the stands" works at Old Trafford or Stamford Bridge but is a bit more difficult to enforce at lower league level when everywhere is within easy shouting distance of the pitch.

Holmer Green's Airedale Park is overwhelmingly green: green entrance block and

hut, green fence posts and a very neat, wooden clad, green and white grandstand. For the players, at least, the pitch is reached via a walkway from the impressive local sports association headquarters which leads through a gap in the high conifer hedge and onto the field. This is the same hedge in which the Chenecks' boss was, rather unsuccessfully, hiding. The sports association building is a modern affair with a spacious clubhouse, tea bar cum cafe and the changing rooms. Back at the ground, fans enter through a wire mesh gate; and once inside a gentle grass slope leads to a well-used memorial bench and an area of covered terracing. A metal roof is supported by, what looks to be, scaffolding poles, but the view from here is surprisingly good. The far side of the pitch is currently out of bounds to spectators but maybe this will change as approval is being sort to install a series of 3G pitches here.

The grandstand, named in honour of Don Want, sits astride the halfway line and contains three rows of wooden benches. Constructed of metal and breeze blocks the outer shell has been clad in wooden planks, set against a background of spruce trees this is a really nice touch and helps soften the outline.

It's not been a great season for Holmer who come into today's game in the relegation zone. In contrast, Northampton currently sit 6th in the table and, with games in hand on the sides above them, will be confident of making the end of season play-offs. The game begins with the hosts on top; Riley looks a real handful up front and is being ably assisted by right back Aiden Ackah-Sanzah. Ben Hodges tries his luck with a dipping effort but Chenecks' keeper Brad Lashey is equal to the task. Riley breaks away down the right and, when Lashey can only parry his shot, the striker only succeeds in finding the side netting with his follow-up. It proves to be something of a wake up call for Northampton as they proceed to score twice within four minutes; Greg Ling whips in a beautiful left footed free-kick and Luke Emery, getting ahead of his marker, steers his header beyond Josh Ameganvi. The same player then executes a perfect long-range chip which leaves the 'keeper flat footed. Alex Rice, who has been putting in some highly physical challenges, is booked and then dismissed and Holmer are down to ten men. Chenecks add a third before the break as Matteo Rinaldi converts from a corner and the game is as good as over.

The second period begins a little better for Holmer with Sean Duodo trying to inspire them from central midfield. Sadly, for the hosts, Chenecks up the anti again and, after an hour, Ling delivers another pin point free kick cross which Emery nods in to complete his hat-trick. A fifth is added when Jake Stronge, who had been fouled on the edge of the box, calmly converts the subsequent free kick with a well-placed left footed strike. Under ten minutes remain when the sixth and final goal arrives; substitute Emmanuel Annan is, a little harshly, deemed to have been brought down by tall centre-half Oscar Raymond and captain Jack Ashton duly dispatches the spot kick. This has been the first 3pm kick-off played entirely in natural daylight and walking back to the car I realise that my fingers are not the normal post-match dumb. Spring is on its way, and I can't wait for it to arrive...

*contributed on 15/02/23.*

**TT No.113: Brian Buck** - Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> February 2023; **Shottermill & Haslemere v Farncombe**; Surrey County Intermediate League (Western) Premier Challenge Cup Group Match; Result: 5-2; Attendance: 40 approx.

Today I was once more grateful to get a lift to my game. But I failed to get to my chauffeur's house on time, because there was a traffic jam near his road. Then once we did get going, I realised that my wallet, containing all my credit cards, had fallen out of my pocket somewhere. We stopped at Colney's Heath's ground so that my driver's wife could go and check my car for me. She found it on the car seat. We then continued to our respective games, which took longer than hoped for because we got stuck on the M25. But we had allowed for this in our travel plans and I was dropped off some twenty minutes before kick-off, with my driver going on to a game at Midhurst and Easebourne.

I'd seen a Shottermill & Haslemere home match once before, on 6 October 2001, at the club's old Woolmer Hill Sports Ground. I can't remember much about the ground, but the game was a 2-2 draw against Sheerwater in an RSR Tyres Surrey Senior League match. The attendance was 3, which probably consisted of the passengers in my car and myself! It was an early kick off because we also took in a Hampshire League game at Kings Somborne afterwards, where I had to call out the AA before we returned home!

These days the club plays at the Haslemere War Memorial Recreation Ground and they share with the cricket here. As I had a few minutes to spare I decided to have a pre-match pint, but once he had poured it out, the barman told me that it was payment by card only, but of course my cards were still in my car! He had the problem though and he had to accept my cash, but I was left with the feeling that as far as he was concerned, proper cash no longer exists these days.

As for the game, it was quite entertaining on this attractive-looking recreation ground, and it was watched by people who looked as though they were having a day off from going to the races at Ascot. The pitch sloped up and down and the hosts kicked downhill in the first half. I watched the game from the raised banking which separates the car park from the pitch. The first half saw the hosts gradually get on top, but their first goal didn't arrive until the 39<sup>th</sup> minute, with their second coming three minutes later. But on the stroke of half time Farncombe pulled a goal back from the spot following a 'milked' foul, given by the, rather erratic at times, ref. Then the hosts scored thrice in the first 20 minutes of the second half before the visitors got the last goal of an entertaining game on 78 minutes. I then walked down a rather steep hill to the attractive town centre, where I holed out in a pub, to wait for my driver to return. Here they willingly accepted cash, but the downside was that I had to watch 'bloody' rugby on the TV screens! Apart from having fun with my credit cards, this was an enjoyable day out.

*contributed on 14/02/23.*

**TT No.112: *Craig Dabbs*** - Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> February 2023; **Prescot Cables** v Leek Town; Northern Premier League Division One West; Venue: Hope Street; Result: 1-4; Admission: £10; Programme: 32pp, £2; Attendance: 649

Civil unrest five miles away in Knowsley the previous evening could've been one of the factors in the club announcing extra security and bag searches, but this didn't impact on me whatsoever as I arrived some two hours before kick-off. This was very much on purpose because parking is awkward, and the ground is a belter.

The club were most welcoming, providing me with a coffee and a little tour before I went off to photograph a ground that was first opened for Prescot Athletic in 1906. The club's unusual name came about in 1928, when the largest cable factory in the world, British Insulated Callender's Cables got involved by virtue of a BICC employee being appointed as Chairman. Indeed there are reference's to Prescot's past on the drive in, a roundabout with large decorative cable drums greets you as you arrive via the M57 and then signposts to the Cables Shopping Park appear, built on the former factory site which closed in 2006.

Back to the club and ground. They applied unsuccessfully for promotion to Division Three (North) of the Football League in both 1929 and 1930. York City were elected in 1929 at the expense of Ashington and Thames Association replaced Merthyr Town the following year. Following those failed attempts, the club didn't try again and concentrated on Lancashire League Football, then briefly, Cheshire League followed by the North West Counties League and since 2003 the Northern Premier League, during this time they have had short periods of being known as Prescot Town and Prescot but thankfully the unique Cables suffix was returned in 1995.

Hope Street has undergone a couple of name changes too. Aside from some sponsorship names, like the current Joseph Russell Stadium named after a roofing company, it's also been called Valerie Park and Sandra Park. The former came about in 1998 when Chairman Ted Mercer named it after his wife and later Sandra Park after Chairman George Glover's wife.

The ground has two areas of cover. The terrace at the Eaton Street end and to the side with the bases of old stanchions still in situ is wonderful in itself but the real gem is that main stand which opened after fire ravaged the previous one in 1960. The current main stand offers an excellent elevated view with the clubhouse, changing rooms, boardroom and various other rooms all housed underneath, something that is becoming increasingly rare these days.

The match was all over in the first half. Following a dubious penalty, a further three goals were scored with Leek Town securing all three points netting the fourth, ten minutes before the break.

*contributed (via Brian Buck) on 12/02/23.*

**TT No.111: *Keith Aslan*** - Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> February 2023; **ASHVILLE** v Sandbach. North West Counties Division One South. Kick Off: 15.00. Result: 0-0. Admission: £2 for coffin dodgers. Programme: £2. Attendance: 103 (88 home - 12 away - 3 neutral)

Took a last look round my home before setting off this morning as travelling on Avanti I didn't know if I'd ever see my country dacha again. Arrived on the concourse of despair at Euston to see 'train delayed' on their brand-new timetable screen. But for regular Avanti passengers/customers this was in fact a good sign. With other services showing as cancelled at least they were intending to run my train to Liverpool at some stage, and sure enough, the best part of half an hour late, we set off for Merseyside. A 20-minute ride from Lime Street on the Metro takes you to Wallasey Village, and it's a 13-minute walk from there. The ground being adjacent to the railway line offered the opportunity for some heavy-duty train spotting with little activity on the pitch to distract my wandering eye.

The ground has everything you would expect at this level, a pre-Atcost stand had a few post-Atcost seats screwed into it to keep the ground graders happy. Burgers, hot dogs and the like were available next to the clubhouse which was showing the lunchtime footy on a big screen. Another winless day for Chelsea, but at least nobody can accuse them of buying success. Puzzlingly half the ground was fenced off. I could see no reason why this should be. Floodlights of course, but it was a mystery as to why they were switched on at half past four, the game finished in perfect daylight.

I'm loathe to criticize any programme, but the editor of Ashville's really does need to up his game. 24 glossy colour pages with only 1 (one) with any text. And that was of the history of the club. This will be in each programme and if you were a regular, why would you want to buy a copy every match. Nothing else in it, no articles, no match reports, no mangers notes, no league tables, zilch. Not even a couple of paragraphs welcoming the visitors. Indeed, apart from the front cover, and the full squad list on the back, there is no reference to Sandbach anywhere inside. Less gloss and more content is needed here.

What a nice surprise, well it was a surprise, to meet up with fellow Thanetarian known to all of his friends as 'Spud'. He had the pleasure of my company back to the Kentish Riviera. Unlike myself Spud is a professional groundhopper and had been up on Merseyside since the previous day. He'd watched Marines Under 18's on Friday afternoon, South Liverpool in the evening, and would have seen another game on Saturday morning if it hadn't been postponed. Here is a man who really does need to stay in more.

The match wasn't great but would have appeared better if you tuned in on *twitter* to 'Gary' who was relentlessly upbeat about Ashville's performance. I assume Gary is their manager. The unhelpful programme lists three managers, none of whom go by that name... Anyway, Gary was overflowing with positives, 'we made plenty of chances'. Very true, but not much use if you're going to boot them all into the Mersey.

Got home when I should have done, to be expected when you travel with a quality railway company like 'Avanti'.

*contributed on 12/02/23.*

**TT No.110: Steve Hardy** - Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> February 2023; **Solihull Municipal** v Glades 'B'; Birmingham & District League - Division 6; Result: 4-1; Admission and Programme: Free; Attendance 15 h/c.

At last, my two readers can relax in the knowledge that there will be no more reports from the wonderful Birmingham & District league this season!! Yes, I finally recompleted it yesterday with another trip to Solihull where I watched new boys Solihull Municipal entertain Glades B team.

The club play at the Solihull Sports and Social club which is a huge complex off Widney Lane. The football dressing rooms are part of the cricket ground and a short walk further along Brick Kiln Lane brings you to the football pitch on your right. Fully railed off with a path around two sides there were dog walkers processing up and down like on the Champs-Élysée on a Sunday afternoon. The only disappointment was the pitch, which resembled a ploughed field. Impossible to play a passing game of footie, both teams resorted to long punts up field, and if you won a free kick in one of the many hollows around the pitch, you needed a sand wedge to get the ball out.

Municipal controlled the game from start to finish. They scored with a header (which I actually photographed for once) after just 3 minutes, and then scored a second on 8 minutes. Credit to Glades who managed to pull a goal back on 10 minutes, but any chance they had of a comeback disappeared shortly after when they had a player sent off for deliberate handball. Municipal then scored a third to lead 3-1 at half time.

After the break it all went a bit flat really with Municipal scoring just once more near the end for a deserved 4-1 win. Like with any good Tesla car, I was able to sit back and let Sarah Satnav take over and steer the car home. I had to speak to her strongly at one point when we arrived in Uxbridge but seven hours later, we duly arrived home.

*contributed on 12/02/23.*

**TT No.109: Brian Buck** - Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> February 2023; **Dagenham United** v Lymore Gardens; Essex Alliance Senior Division; Venue: played at Barking & Dagenham College, Dagenham Road; Result: 3-3; Attendance: 10 approx.

I picked out this game today, because it not only provided me with a new ground, but it also gave me a chance to renew acquaintances with the visitors who made me feel so welcome when I visited their Leyton County Cricket Ground home last season. To get here I used the London Overground service from Blackhorse Road, changing onto the tube at Barking and alighting at Dagenham East. From here I caught a 103 bus to the Easterbrook pub, where I was hoping to have a pre-match pint. But as I hadn't left myself enough time to do this, I caught a 174 bus straight to the ground instead. This drops you right outside the college. On the way home I caught this bus again as it also drops you right outside Dagenham Heathway tube station.

The college is a massive one and it must hold over a thousand pupils if they don't play truant! I tried to get a cup of tea from their café at the front, but it had closed shortly before I arrived. Then came the walk to the pitch at the back where the game was taking place and going from the front to the back, past the college buildings, it must have taken me nearly five minutes to get there and this was the furthest I walked all day in one single movement. To be honest I wasn't expecting too much from this grass pitch as these days for me, I find any game taking place in a school complex, with a few exceptions, a rather soulless experience. But I was pleasantly surprised here as this grass pitch was railed off, although it was plonked inside a rugby pitch. But judging by the lack of pitch markings I would say that rugby hasn't been played here all season. Furthermore, there was some gentle banking with bushes in places to separate it from the college and if you watched the game with the college buildings behind you, as I did, then this venue has a very rural feel to it.

The match itself was excellent, especially in the first half, when it became a candidate for my best game of the season. Also, the ref here was very good and completely opposite to the previous Saturday's official, who was poor. This one, albeit assisted by official linos, was on the ball, confident and treated players with respect, explaining pleasantly to them whatever they had done wrong. It was Lymore who scored first, on 5 minutes, through their number 15 who seemed to want to talk to me a lot while the game was in progress. But then we had four goals in 8 minutes. On 30 minutes Dagenham equalised, but goals on 33 minutes (1-2), 36 minutes (2-2) and 39 minutes (2-3) made things very exciting. Lymore had been the better side in this period, but after the break Dagenham slowly got back into it and by the time they equalised on 83 minutes, it was just about deserved. After the final whistle, and as the ref booked a Lymore player, there was a brief coming together of the players going on behind his back, but it was quickly dispersed by the non-playing officials of both sides. As I made my way home afterwards, I was pleased that my day had gone much better than I initially expected.

*contributed on 07/02/23.*

**TT No.108: Jon T Green** - Saturday 4th February 2023; **SWANAGE TOWN AND HERSTON** v. Westland Sports; Jewson Dorset Premier Football League; Venue: Day's Park; Result: 1-4; Admission: £3; Programme: No; Attendance: 46 (head count)

Standing on the beautifully restored pier and looking out across the mirrored calm waters of Swanage Bay, the cliffs of the Isle of Wight can just be seen in the distance. Even at the beginning of February the town is busy with locals and visitors alike and, despite it being only mid-morning, a central car parking space is becoming as rare as a hen's tooth. Swanage isn't a place that you 'just pass', there are barely any road signs until you are within a dozen miles and even then the magnificent ruin of Corfe Castle vies for your attention before you reach the coast.

Day's Park, hidden behind residential streets and through a large car park, sufficiently far from the sea front to be both empty and free (through all but the

beginning and end of the football season), is a real beauty. It's a ground very much in transition and, whilst so far, the upgrades have been sympathetically carried out, the character of the place may be about to change. The club have their own small car park which leads onto the impressive frontage of the two-storey social club. Behind this is a simply enormous building, once a sports hall but now semi-derelict with a leaking roof riddled with asbestos. Plans have been approved for its removal but it's a big job and is expected to take in the region of five years. Further beyond that is a new small artificial pitch. Entering through the single turnstile block, the ground rises up before you. All of the covered accommodation is on the far side of the pitch but to reach this you first pass a series of benches cunningly fashioned from wooden planks affixed to shiny beer barrels before ascending a short flight of steps. Only from here can you get a real sense of how big the sports hall is, it totally dominates the view and leaves the players with a tricky, and possibly unique, walk down a series of uneven concrete steps from the upper floor of the club house. The gentle curve of the Purbeck Hills is visible and with no passing road traffic it's a wonderfully serene setting. Work has already been completed in this area of the ground with the Derek Marsh stand (named in honour of a former player) looking very smart with its bench style seating. New roof joists are in place and the wooden supports have been repainted. At each end of the seated section are covered shingle filled terraces. The original stand dates from the 1920's but the work has been so well done that there is still a feeling of "age" to it. Alongside are a block of now disused white painted changing rooms and a well-used tea hut bearing the moniker "Lennie's" - Lennie was the brother of Derek Marsh and a former club chairman. Walking further around you'll come to a grass bank where three large stone memorial benches have been placed; on a summer's day sitting under the shade of the trees this looks a great place to have a cold beer and to watch the game.

There is a certain symmetry about the Dorset League table but not in a good way for the hosts. Westland Sports are six points off the top spot (with three games in hand) with Swanage six points clear of the single relegation place. "It's going to be a tough afternoon" prophesied the gateman and he certainly wasn't wrong. The pitch lovingly cultivated by Dorset FA's current Groundsman of the Year is looking in fine condition and perhaps that surface is helping Westland as they begin the game at top speed. Only four minutes have been played when they take the lead; a header from a left wing corner is superbly saved by captain and 'keeper Taylor Hibbs but he is powerless to do anything about the follow up from Phil Ormrod who hammers his shot into the roof of the net. The physicality of the visitors is causing Town no end of problems; Steve Ormrod is a constant menace up front and the tall Callum Gundry decisive in midfield. Only Jack Hughes, working overtime for the home side, and bald headed defender Ogun Gundogdu look likely to repel the tide. The job looks even more impossible when, midway through the half, Jamie Thompson dances past the back line before beating Hibbs with a fierce drive. Swanage are forced to break up the game with some rather strong arm tactics; not pretty to watch but effective as they reach the break without conceding any further goals.

Swanage re-emerge from their halftime cuppa looking a different side; they are now matching Westland with some hard, but fair, challenges and for the first time the visitors are looking a tad unsettled. Both Elliott Steele and Hughes try their

luck from distance and when substitute Cody Moore joins the fray they begin to pose a real threat. Moore is soon involved, setting up Ocean Smith (what an appropriate name for a seaside club player) who brings Mark Cuff into action as the goalkeeper tips over his drive. From the subsequent corner the ball is only partly cleared and Hughes thunders his shot through a crowd of players and beyond Cuff. For a brief couple of minutes it's "game on" but Westland have other ideas; again Hibbs does well to keep out the initial shot and again Phil Ormrod follows up to score. It's a double set back as Hibbs takes a nasty blow to the ribs and is soon replaced in goal by Hughes. It's no surprise when Sports add a fourth as Ormrod completes his hat-trick with a simple finish. "Don't change that ball" he yells as the players return to the centre circle. Ormrod has 12 minutes of added time to endure without the ball being booted out of the ground but when the whistle finally sounds he gleefully grabs hold. With the recent World Cup having set a trend for the length of matches it's nice (!!!) to see such things permeating their way into our domestic non-league game - the suits of FIFA would be so proud.....

*contributed on 06/02/23.*

**TT No.107: Steve Hardy** - Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> February 2023; **Aston Village** v Winsworth Ivanhoe Reserves; Midlands Regional Alliance - Junior Cup; Result: 1-5; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 15 H/C

The MRA Junior Cup is an internal league cup competition open to all clubs who don't play in the top division of the league. My match today featured two clubs who aren't exactly pulling up any trees this season, with Aston next to bottom and Ivanhoe Stiffs lower mid-table. The venue was the Aston Community Sports club, home to both the local cricket club, and the footie club as well. Aston on Trent is a pleasant rural looking village south of Derby just off the A50 and it is surrounded by fields on all four sides.

The roped off pitch is to the left of the car park, with the cricket square to the left of that. The Community Centre itself wasn't open today with just the two dressing rooms available for the players. A healthy crowd of 15 Aston fans assembled to see if the club could record another victory after they managed their first home win of the season the previous weekend.

Did they? Not a chance! To be fair, both sides were dreadful, but I couldn't fault the effort they put in, making it a very competitive game indeed. A complete shambles in the Village defence gave Ivanhoe the lead as early as the 3<sup>rd</sup> minute. I settled back to watch the deluge, but it didn't materialise though as the hosts managed to get a foothold in the game and actually have a couple of shots themselves.

0-1 at half time then, with the turning point arriving on the hour mark when Aston had three shots cleared off the line in an almighty scramble following a corner. Had one of those shots gone in it might have been a different outcome, but that was as good as it got for the homesters. Ivanhoe quickly ran in 3 more before Aston pulled one back, but any hope of a heroic comeback was quashed with a 5<sup>th</sup> Ivanhoe goal near the end.

I have still to see a duff game in this league. OK the standard wasn't that high, but neither team could be faulted for lack of effort. Another super afternoon out with Sarah Satnav very happy to revisit Derbyshire where she has family, she tells me.

*contributed on 06/02/23.*

**TT No.106: Craig Dabbs** - Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> February 2023; **Worsbrough Bridge Athletic** v Wakefield; Northern Counties East League Division One; Venue: Park Road; Result: 0-0; Admission: £5; Programme: £1.50; Attendance: 160

I haven't done a whole lot of grounds in this league so it's always nice to get another one ticked off. The Park Road ground has plenty of character and has been home to the football club since 1947, although cricket has been played here since before the war.

The ground is prone to flooding as the River Dove runs right alongside it and currently, despite a dry spell, it's only a few feet below the level of the ground. Park Road has three areas of cover currently: the main stand which is a 1960's structure mainly built out of brick; a smaller covered terrace over on the river side from the 80's that marks the end of that side of the ground which is just past the halfway line and the final bit of cover is the overhang from the pavilion which is sat up in the far corner of the ground at the Reservoir end. This was built using a grant from the Coalfields Regeneration Trust and is used by the club on matchdays as opposed to the large Miners Welfare Club that dominates the other end of the ground.

This is the Briggers centenary year after starting out as Worsbrough Bridge St James. Since 1923 they've had a few name changes and a few league changes too. They changed to the current name after the war then to Worsbrough Bridge Miners Welfare in 1959 returning to the current name in 2006.

League wise, the club were founding members of the NCEFL when it was set up in 1982 and have been ever present since even through the turmoil of having to play at Grimethorpe and Maltby Main for six months back in 2015 owing to a dispute with the Miners Welfare club. Prior to this they were members of the Yorkshire League since 1971 having worked their way through local football before then.

Worsbrough Bridge Athletic aren't having the best season going and sit in fourteenth place in the division. They look to be safe enough, whilst Wakefield have an eye on promotion to go with a move to Belle Vue next season. The match started with Wakefield flying and threatening to go into an early lead. It didn't happen and Athletic came into the game more although to be fair they looked second best but not by much. In the second half Wakefield went a player down after he lost his cool following a challenge which changed the games dynamics completely with a draw being played out.

*contributed (via Brian Buck) on 05/02/23.*

**TT No.105: Keith Aslan** - Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> February 2023; **COLDEN COMMON** v Denmead; Hampshire Trophy 5<sup>th</sup> Round; Venue: played at Sherfield English; Kick Off: 13.59; Result: 3-1; Admission: Free; Programme: £1; Attendance: 23 (15 home, 7 away & 1 neutral).

Thought I'd really impress my chums by telling them I'm going to watch a match in the hamlet of Sherfield English. Not so. Everybody else seems to have been there to watch Netley play. Like many things, this passed me by. Millions of years ago I saw them play at Station Road in Netley, which is where they still play now! Today it was Colden Common that drew me to Sherfield. Their home ground has plumbing problems and it's going to be a long old job to fix, so there will be further opportunities to tick this ground off in the coming months.

Easy to get to, a 2 hourly door to door service from outside Southampton Station. Very much door to door and you will get a perfect view of the match from the bus stop going back, handy if the game drags on, which this one didn't. The timings fit in perfectly for a two o'clock kick off but can't be done with a three. The X7R is the one you want, the 'R' is very important as an X7 without the vital suffix doesn't go anywhere near the ground. In case you were wondering, the 'R' stands for Romsey. A pleasant set up, although the permanent dug outs might have some health and safety issues if it was a bit windy. A wooden pavilion (wood is good) stood in one corner of the playing fields and that's your lot. Nice scenery but you will need to stock up on victuals before you get there. No shops, and while the hamlet does have a pub, it's a very, very long walk from the ground.

The main attraction of Colden Common is Ian Steele, programme editor extraordinaire, who has been producing paper for the club since 1984, making them by far the longest issuers anywhere at this level. In preparation for today's visit, I dug out the proggies from my previous three visits (they've moved around a bit). Over a twenty-five-year span the quality has remained constant, today's offering containing 24 colour pages with tons of reading, and everything you could want from your matchday accompaniment. The player profile was of midfielder James Barnes who I was fascinated to learn is nicknamed 'Barnsey'.

Today was the 'programme derby' between the only two clubs in the Hampshire League that currently issue. A comfortable win for the home side with Denmead's goal late doors never going to be more than a consolation. There was a certain amount of gratuitous friskiness during the match, and not for the first time I wondered why anybody would want to be a referee. Colden Common are the team to beat, they won the league last year and are second this, coupled with lengthy cup runs. There must be a lot of clubs that enter the Hampshire Trophy as they've had to beat five teams to reach the semi-final.

Train back to Waterloo 19 minutes late, otherwise all good.  
*contributed on 05/02/23.*

**TT No.104: Brian Buck** - Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> January 2023; **Wittering Premiair** v Leverington Sports; Dor-Jan Windows & Doors Peterborough & District League Cup

4<sup>th</sup> Round; Venue: played at Easton-on-the-Hill Playing Field, Ketton Drift; Result: 1-2; Attendance: 10.

Weatherwise today wasn't too bad, so I made the journey up the A1, taking a signposted turn into the Cotswoldian-looking village, just before the Stamford turning. Once in the village keep going without turning off and soon you run out of road and after passing a phone box, you find yourself going down a muddy potholed track, in such a bad condition that it's not even covered by the *Google Street View* cameras. There are signs telling you that pedestrians, horses and just about every other living creature in the world, had priority over car users. So after struggling to turn the car round I put my wellies on and waded through the mud and on to the playing field.

Here things weren't quite so bad. The pitch was reasonably flat, but it was scarred by molluscs and wear and tear from previous games on it. But technically speaking it did have a stand, which would hold about two dozen people at a push, with half of it seating. But it was more geared up for general use really. There was also a gravel pathway which took you right round the perimeter of the playing field taking in the clubhouse in the far corner of the ground, which was open for business today. There was also evidence that you could go on nature rambles, if you wanted to. In short, I suspect that this is a nice place to come in the summer, but not in the winter.

I didn't speak to anyone whilst I was here, so I didn't find out anything about why Wittering and Premiair merged, or why they play here, but I did note that their 'A' team played at Wittering today. Just before the start I moved into a watching position by the halfway line. Here I noted something a bit strange in that the half-way line had been repositioned for this match and on my side of the pitch it had been moved about six yards for the previous match, but not on the other side of the pitch, leaving both lines to meet on the touch line on that side.

As for the game, it was physical, unruly and had so much wrong with it that I could write a book about it. Right from the start these Premier Division relegation threatened sides were flying in with the tackles, but the introverted-looking ref seemed reluctant to do more than just to speak to the players. On 17 minutes Wittering took the lead with a shot from about six yards out. This setback stirred up the visitors and they were in the ref's face over every decision he made which went against them. The mouthy visiting lino didn't help either and at times he didn't seem to get his decisions right. But eventually, on 30 minutes, the timid ref did manage to send off a Leverington player for getting a second yellow, which upset them even more. Generally, the hosts were better behaved, but at times they were no angels either.

The second half saw the visitors take advantage of some slack marking to equalise on 51 minutes and then take the lead on 68 minutes with their only shots on target in the whole match. But two minutes later the ref gave Wittering a spot kick following a ball to arm situation, but the resultant spot kick was saved. Thereafter they pressed forward for the equaliser, but Leverington did everything they could,

much of it illegal, to prevent this from happening. You had to see it to believe it. The ref was very poor and overall was reluctant to deal with problems and he also missed a lot. Where was the ref's observer when you really needed one? All of this and more contributed to making this game exciting to watch, but all for the wrong reasons!

*contributed on 02/02/23.*

**TT No.103: Jon T Green** - Saturday 28th January 2023; **DINAS POWYS** v. Caerau (Ely); Ardal South West League; Venue: Murchfield; Result: 0-3; Admission: £5; Programme: included in admission; Attendance: 43 (head count).

It's 10:30am on a surprisingly mild morning and something rare and wonderful is going to happen in a few hours' time. The dog walkers and scores of parents picking up their under 5's from dance class are, most probably, all blissfully unaware that after an absence of 83 days Dinas Powys FC will finally get to play a game at their Murch Field home. A combination of the Christmas break, frozen and then waterlogged pitches have conspired to enforce a near three-month absence. Not that you would know that a game is about to take place as the community centre is devoid, save from a small handwritten notice, of any representation from the club. The pitch has been freshly marked out but there are no goalposts, and the stand is tightly shuttered down. With no one about, it's time for a fry up at a local cafe and then a quick drink at one of the three pubs which surround the war memorial. Dinas is a dormitory village (albeit a large one) and only five miles from Cardiff but has a more countryfied feel to it than its proximity to the capital would suggest. Back at the ground an hour before kick-off and there has been a magical transformation, club signs have appeared, the stand is open, and the goalposts are in place. The club achieved their Tier Three ground grading licence which enabled them to join the Ardal South West League for the abandoned 2020/21 season and have remained there ever since.

The ground boasts a neat metal and brick stand with 108 red and black seats. On each side are frames for the dug outs over which are stretched removable tarpaulins. Padded benches are then added. A sad fact of football in South Wales is that clubs are often the target for vandalism so everything which can be removed is taken away when there is no match. Dinas feels a safe and pleasant place but clearly no one is taking any chances... Entering through a gate in the perimeter fence, the changing room block is immediately to your left and then, as you pass the corner flag, there is a large container serving as a tea bar and club shop (badges and mugs readily available). At the bottom end of the ground flows East Brook (from which stray balls have to be rescued) and beyond that a busy railway line. There is no spectator access here because the goal is tight up against the fence, but grass standing is possible along the far touchline. The club seem to have no use of the adjacent community centre (community in this sense clearly does not extend to football!) so all social functions are performed at the rugby club on the other side of the village.

On the pitch Dinas are struggling, they sit third from bottom, and today face a

Caerau team comfortably positioned in seventh place. In truth the game is not much of a contest as the visitors are superior all over the pitch; Latham Garrett is a commanding, ball carrying centre half who wins everything in the air; Ethan Hayes has pace to burn on the right wing and, in Liam Bishop, they have a striker who knows where the net is. Dinas resort to getting physical with Hayes and Luke Birnage earns a yellow card for his trouble; it's a foul which will eventually see Hayes leave the field with a back injury shortly before half time. With 20 minutes played Caerau inevitably open the scoring; Jack Ashford sends a deep cross in from the right, Charlie Davies nods it back across goal to where Bishop, picking his spot carefully, finishes from close range. The home side's afternoon is summed up as Joseff Morris reaches the by-line only to find no one on the end of his low centre.

With Daniel Graham on as substitute Caerau double their lead seven minutes into the second period. Graham's ball into the box from wide right is met by the predatory Bishop whose shot is goal bound before Scott McCarthy, in trying to effect a clearance, helps it over the line. Dinas continue to show some battling qualities and Thomas Fry doesn't miss the target by much as he bursts through from midfield. Frustration is beginning to boil over for the home team and James Marr, who has been overly combative at times, talks himself into a caution for dissent. A couple of minutes remain when Caerau make it three; again, the ball is centred from the right and when Birnage and Australian 'keeper Ryan Fleming tangle, Bishop has the easiest job to roll the ball into an unguarded net.

With over half of their fixtures still to be played Dinas still have plenty of time to extricate themselves from the relegation zone. They are a friendly club operating under difficult circumstances so I, for one, sincerely hope that they are still in the Ardal Leagues come next August.

*contributed on 30/01/23.*

**TT No.102: Steve Hardy** - Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> January 2023; **Kingshurst Pavilions** v Birmingham Irish; Birmingham & District League Division One; Result: 4-0; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 7 H/C

The current Mrs Hardy will start to think I have a new lady friend in Kingshurst at this rate, as this was my third visit to the place this season. This time it was to see Kingshurst Pavilions, who my two readers might know better as CT Shush of the Midland League until recently.

Their new venue is the Pavilions Club in Meriden Drive B37. This club is a pretty new build by the looks of things with a very impressive interior where hot drinks were available throughout the match. Outside there are two grass pitches adjacent to each other. When I arrived, one had a girl's match taking place on it and the other was where my match took place. No facilities around the pitch, but access to all four sides made taking a few photos very easy.

Third place Kingshurst were playing next to bottom Irish today. The table shows that just one point separates 3<sup>rd</sup> from 8<sup>th</sup>, so there is a chance for most clubs to

reach the top four, although the top two are some way ahead of Kingshurst and look uncatchable to me.

Today's game looks a bit one sided doesn't it, but it wasn't. A complete shambles in the Irish defence gave Pavilions the ideal start with a goal on just 2 minutes but after that Irish got more into the game with their number 10 having several really good chances which were brilliantly saved by the home keeper. 1-0 at half time then with the home manager unimpressed by what he had seen so far. Luckily for him his team talk worked a treat and Pavilions doubled their lead on 47 minutes after more fun and games in the Irish defence. Irish heads went down after that with the players shouting back at their manager when they didn't like his instructions. Two more goals completed the afternoon's proceedings and there was even time for a mass brawl near the end too.

Nearby there was a cat show taking place. Before the game I popped in for a look and I can honestly say it was the noisiest place I have visited this year!

*contributed on 29/01/23.*

**TT No.101: Craig Dabbs** - Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> December 2023; **Bungay Town** v Easton; Anglian Combination Division One; Venue: The Maltings Meadow Sports Ground; Result: 0-4; Admission: £3; Programme: 36pp, Free; Attendance: 56.

This has been on the agenda for a fair, few years. I've tried to get here before but the club had been using the second pitch as the first wasn't match fit.

Bungay Town don't play in Bungay, that's in Suffolk and this is over the River Waveney in the Norfolk village of Ditchingham. The ground forms part of the Bungay & District Sports Association which aside from the football, cricket and tennis are also played here. It has been home to the club since 1953 taking its name from the Ditchingham Maltings which has now been re-purposed for housing after a major fire in 1999.

The Maltings themselves started life as a silk works prior to being used for malt production. It has also been used by the Home Guard and the USAAF as a storage depot with housing first opening in 2013.

The ground itself is worthy of a higher level of football from the nominal step 8 where the Black Dogs find themselves. It is fully railed with hard standing all around, floodlights and a smart clubhouse. Its crowning glory however is the glorious main stand, which was damaged by a fire in 1987, resulting in it being made smaller to what you see today. It's been beautifully done out, with a brick framework complementing the much older wooden interior dating from a time before the ground opened in 1953. Although I'm not sure of the actual date of the stand it came from the long-gone Bungay Racecourse, further research is needed.

As for the game Easton came good in the second half adding three more goals to the one scored before half-time to take all three points in what turned out to be a comfortable victory.

*contributed (via Brian Buck) on 29/01/23.*

**TT No.100: Keith Aslan** - Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> January 2023; **BAKEWELL TOWN** v Harworth Colliery; Central Midlands League Premier North; Kick Off: 14.00; Result: 2-2 (abandoned after 80 minutes, result stands); Admission: Free; Programme £2; Attendance: 58 (41 home, 12 away & 5 neutral)

A perfect day for some serious groundhopping in the beautiful Peak District. Weather: check, indeed when the sun shone it was almost hot. Programme: Check, regular issuers. Trains: Check, no strikes or engineering works, but most importantly, nowhere near Avanti. Their website advised 'customers' not to travel today with over a third of services already cancelled the day before due to 'unseasonably high staff shortages' or in plain English, we haven't bothered to employ enough traincrew. Steer clear of these jokers and it was going to be a good day today.

Bakewell is a touristy town, and like the rest of the Peak district, was pretty well filled, even in January. A half hourly bus service from Chesterfield, one fast, one slow, and I would advise going on the slow one in one direction as it goes through the grounds and up to the front door of Chatsworth House, a magnificent stately home that's even larger than my country dacha. The buses are double deckers, which would be much needed in the summer, and sitting on the top deck as we ambled through the hills and dales of Derbyshire is one of the joys that make life almost worth living. It helps that it's all free with my bus pass, which I don't know if I've mentioned, I got six years after everybody else.

An 8-minute walk from the bus stop is the Recreation Ground, home to Bakewell Town F.C. Although the name might suggest it's a pretty bland venue, there is a river running round it and a dinky pavilion, all in all a rather pleasant spot. There is a small room inside the pavilion serving hot drinks and more importantly, a pile of programmes lay on the counter. Surprisingly you could also watch the lunchtime footy on a big T.V. Accrington Stanley v Leeds, be still oh beating heart. Fully roped, a table was bought out onto the touchline with soups, teas and coffees for people too lazy to walk back to the pavilion, and you can count me in on that one. Photos I have seen show Bakewell playing on an adjacent pitch which apparently, they have to use during the cricket season. I'll have to come back for that one Ha! ha!

Among the groundhopping fraternity it was good to meet up again with the two Scottish dipsomaniacs, always good company, and at my age it's reassuring standing next to one half of the Caledonian duo as he used to be a doctor. He'll know what to do when I have my heart attack. Probably move to the opposite side of the ground. Harworth had a large travelling support (it's all relative) and when they scored a young lady 'invaded' the pitch and ran around doing airplane imitations. It was hilarious and just one of the attractions of football at this level.

The match referee never made it due to hitting a pothole on the way to the ground, and the senior linesman took over with a faultless display of officiating. There was a minute's silence before the game to remember the father of the managerial brothers and also for former player Kyle Shimwell who died aged just

21. No undignified clapping here. The ref. still kicked the match off on time, and in spite of the distance to the changing rooms, got everybody going again after a thirteen-minute half time. It was a very entertaining match which was tragically curtailed 10 minutes from the end due to a horrific injury to a Harworth player. I was only a few yards away when he went down screaming in agony with his foot twisted at a grotesque angle to his leg. It was a horrible sight. The referee straight away abandoned the match, but the score will stand. On the bus going back we passed the ambulance, it would have arrived 35 minutes after the 999 call was made, a fair response time as it had to come from Chesterfield. I wish the player well and hope he is making a good recovery, but it will be a long and painful process.

Today restored some of my enthusiasm for groundhopping and a big thankyou goes to ASLEF who are striking on Wednesday and Friday this week, leaving Saturday free for me to enjoy myself.

*contributed on 29/01/23.*

**TT No.99: Jon T Green** - Saturday 21st January 2023; **ALTON** v. Fareham Town; Combined Counties Football League Premier Division South; Venue: Anstey Park; Result: 1-1; Admission: £6; Programme: £1; Attendance: 590

Laying on a table in Alton's clubhouse was a well-thumbed copy of the book *You are the Ref*; for those of us of a certain age, turning its pages brought back memories of reading *Shoot* magazine and trying to answer the surprisingly difficult questions relating to the more obscure points within the Laws of the Game. Little did anyone know just how useful this book would become as the events of the afternoon unfolded.....

Anstey Park is to be found on the North Eastern approaches, an easy ten minute stroll from the railway station and around double that amount from the pubs, cafes and shops of the town centre. Across the large car park is the local rugby club and behind the near goal is a skate/bike park. An old-style metal finger posts mentions several things in the immediate vicinity but there is no mention of the football club. Perhaps a case of unconscious bias and certainly a little strange as it's the dominant feature here. Entering the ground through the single turnstile block the impressive clubhouse and refreshment area are to your immediate left. Purple has been chosen as the colour scheme and whilst that doesn't reflect the clubs kit of black and white, it is however remarkably effective. To the right is a large seated prefabricated stand with around 130 green seats with a small section of white ones at the rear. The "skate park" end consists of flat standing but there is also a grass bank (unofficially in use by a cluster of small boys) which is held in place by log roll, a smaller version of which you might use to edge your flower bed! Young holly trees have been planted at the rear and in due course these will help soften the view of the high fence. On the far side of the pitch there is a long, covered terrace; at first only two steps deep it imperceptibly rises to twice that height before continuing uncovered towards the corner flag. The steps here appear much older so perhaps only those under the stand roof were replaced when the cover was erected. The "park" end of the ground is uncovered but to its left, and adjacent to the clubhouse, is an area of decking which proved extremely popular,

even on a very chilly afternoon - perhaps the proximity to the bar rather than the view of the pitch was the deciding factor.

With the two clubs less than 10 miles apart this was a proper local derby and plenty of Farnham fans were in attendance. With the bulk of the local games again being frozen off the crowd was swelled by plenty of neutrals which, if nothing else, proves the value of an artificial playing surface.

Alton began the day in lower mid table comfortably clear of the two relegation places whilst Farnham sat in the top half, albeit with a promotion place looking beyond their reach. Despite the visitors having the first chance of the game when Lewis Mees did well to keep out Tom Smith's free kick, it was Alton who dominated for most of the half. Ed Dryden made a perfect headed connection from a corner provoking James Ferguson into a fine reaction save. The hosts were enjoying some considerable success down the right wing and when a low centre arrived from there Siph Mdlalose would have been disappointed to scoop his effort off target. Hard running Trevor Caborn was constantly a danger to Town and it was he who burst past his full back only to see centre forward Scott Sanderson somewhat mis-hit his low drive. Sanderson was to more than make up for his miss when, after 37 minutes, he opened the scoring. Louis-Kieran Russell skipped away from the Farnham defence and sent in a high centre; Sanderson adjusted his position perfectly before heading back past Ferguson into the far corner. Mdlalose drove just wide a couple of minutes later when a second goal would perhaps have sealed victory for Alton.

The second period was more even but certainly more controversial. Caborn and centre-half Liam Flanighan were the first to receive yellow cards after the pair were involved in an unnecessary tussle before Town substitute Richie Mbele was also cautioned for a high tackle. After a period of relative inaction, the game sparked back into life with a quarter of an hour remaining; Matt Benham tangled with Connor Young under a high ball and was adjudged to have fouled the Farnham man. Referee Mr Childs was well placed but, from the stands, the decision looked a little "soft". Perhaps justice was done as the impressive Mees plunged to his left to keep out Young's spot kick. Five minutes were left when the visitors finally drew level, Owen Dean took a left sided corner and Flanighan made no mistake with a well-timed header. A draw seemed to be on the cards until another melee, this time in the Farnham box, saw the official award a second penalty kick. Jamie Phillips made absolutely no mistake curling home a left footer, but his wild celebrations were curtailed when Mr Childs awarded a free kick to the visitors on the edge of the area. Confusion reigned as the infringement could have only been for encroachment in which case, according to the FA website, the kick should have been retaken. Despite popular opinion, it's very rare for the referee to have so wildly misinterpreted the Laws so, giving him the benefit of the doubt, let's assume that he saw another indiscretion. It was certainly a strange moment though and definitely one to appear in the next edition of "*You are the Ref*".

*contributed on 24/01/23.*

**TT No.98: Craig Dabbs** - Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> January 2023; **Billericay Town v Kingstonian**; Isthmian League Premier Division; Venue: New Lodge; Result: 5-1; Admission: £12; Programme: 40pp, £2; Attendance: 807.

I went out early this morning to thick fog and -4 degrees and pretty much gave up hope of football on grass and opted for artificial again. New Lodge fitted the bill having had 3G installed in what has been some transformation in recent times.

Home to Town since 1971 when it was an open field used by Outwell Common FC, it was developed into a neat little venue with a couple of stands coming from Newbury Town to go along with a main stand, and then come along a whirlwind in the shape of Glenn Tamplin.

Tamplin is a larger-than-life type of person, and it seems that he has the ego to go with it. He swept in taking over the club in 2016 and in the three years he was there brought in big name signings, spent a whacking great £2 million on completely transforming the ground which aside from what you see today he was very fond of his murals. He introduced various rituals, managed the club and it was all quite mad and worrying really from an outsider looking in. He sacked himself from the management role and put the club up for sale in 2019 after being investigated by the police. Also, if my memory serves me right, I think some of the work was done without planning permission and I really feared for the future of the club which thankfully survived and are currently doing rather well at Step Three.

For all the madness over those three years, the money Tamplin invested in the ground has left the New Lodge as a 5,000-capacity ground with cover on all four sides, with seating for 2,000, essentially Football League ready which is where he wanted to get them to.

The match itself was largely one sided. Ricay, dominated for large parts of the first half and much more of the second cruising to victory against a visiting side who offered little. Kingstonian may well be looking at the drop unless they sort it out whilst Billericay may well be looking at a return to the National League South where they've been for the previous four seasons.

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

**TT No.97: Jon T Green** - Saturday 14th January 2023; **BISHOPS CLEEVE v. Willand Rovers**; Southern League - Division One South; Venue: Kayte Lane; Result: 1-0; Admission: £10; Programme: Online only; Attendance: 121.

"It's a meat raffle" said the man with the book of small pink tickets "pork or chicken today" adding after I had handed over my £1 coin "you understand it's a meat raffle, don't you?". I nodded solemnly. "You must present your ticket to claim the prize" he went on "we have an ongoing court case, and we don't want a repetition". Scanning the latest newsfeed, I could find no reference to The Crown v Bishops Cleeve FC but on an already slightly strange day I wasn't ruling anything out.

In the nicest way possible, once you know that your intended match is going to be postponed, and practically everything in the West Country was heading that way, the replacement game can feel something of an anti-climax. Myself included, us hoppers tend to think that it's the responsibility of every club to provide interesting grounds full of characterful stands and old school banks of terracing. Sadly, though this isn't the case so money-spinning artificial pitches and low cost, low maintenance prefabricated seating areas are increasingly seen by cash strapped clubs as the way forward. Nothing wrong in that but, with all due respect, it does make for a somewhat 'bland' visit - better than nothing I hear you cry and of course that is entirely true...

Kayte Lane is situated on the outskirts of the town which in turn is just a couple of miles North of Cheltenham. It's neat and tidy with a new high wooden fence immediately visible as you enter the car park. Inside the tarmac is fresh as is the green pitch-side perimeter surrounds. Backed by extensive chain link fencing this isn't strictly a "cage" but it certainly has the feel of one. Entering through the main turnstile, the clubhouse, complete with a vast roof expanse of solar panels, is to your left. The changing rooms are next door and beyond that the "Mitres Grill". All are fronted by a wide patio area and an area of flat uncovered standing behind the near goal. On the furthest touchline is a typical new build stand with predominantly green seats situated in four rows. Visiting directors and the press have their own sections here. Continuing around the ground, the far goal is backed by more flat standing however the view of Cleeve Hill, the highest point in The Cotswolds, is not to be missed and is undoubtedly the saving grace of a visit. Along the near touchline two further pre-fabs, one seated and one terraced, have been attached either side of an original brick backed cover. Still visible on the roof fascia is a wooden board that presumably showed the club or stand name. It's a shame that this hasn't been better looked after as it would make a nice feature. Looking around the clubhouse there are team photos taken in front of the then main stand - it appeared to be a covered seated structure with the team badge appearing on an attractive brick wall at the front. Once again, it's a shame that this couldn't have been retained as the replacement stand certainly isn't an improvement from an aesthetically pleasing standpoint.

On the pitch, Cleeve have been in great form winning their last four games and are now 14th in the table, just one point behind the visitors from Devon. It's Willand who make all of the running in the first half but incredibly go in at the break one down rather than three up. From the off, Rovers Gabriel Rogers shows himself to be a great player and it's he who goes close after just eight minutes following some good build up play down the right flank. Rogers, and centre forward Ben Griffith, then combine to put in the hard running left back Bailey Kempster. Luckily for Cleeve 'keeper Lewis Clayton is alert and does well to block Kempster's drive. Midfielder Douglas Camilo, who is finding an acre of space in behind his strikers, then sends a right footed shot narrowly wide before Clayton makes a superb two-handed parry from Rogers. At the other end, George Burton is not called into serious action until the 34th minute when he produces a spectacular diving save to foil Ross Langworthy. Willand are soon on the attack again and once more Kempster makes good ground before the ball eventually falls to Michael Lilley. Only another acrobatic tip over from Clayton keeps the game scoreless. The 'keeper then proves his worth again with an extraordinary reaction save from

Griffith's point-blank header. On a chilly afternoon and with a good number of the home supporters heading towards the warmth of a half-time cuppa their side take the lead; Blaine Waugh receives the ball wide right, but his cross is high and looks to be over hit. Instead of lamely going out for a goal kick it looks to be held up on the blustery wind and instead falls neatly inside of the far post. Upon such acts of good fortune are matches won.

The second period is a much more even affair with the home side almost doubling their advantage during the opening minutes; Langworthy first being denied by Burton and then seeing his goal bound effort blocked on the line by Willand's captain Kieran Bailey. For Rovers, Camilo should have done better with a free header at the far post and then Rogers, finally finding a way past Clayton, only to see his free kick cannon back off the crossbar. It sort of summed up the visitors day and once again proved, that as in life, you don't always get what you deserve.....

*contributed on 18/01/23*

**TT No.96: Brian Buck** - Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> January 2023; Horsham v Margate; Pitching In Isthmian League Premier Division; Result: 4-0; Attendance 809.

With there being heavy rain throughout the night, lasting to well after midday and causing most games to be called off locally, I decided to pay a belated visit to Horsham's Hop Oast ground, opened in 2019, or The Camping World Community Stadium, as it is currently known. The game was always going to be on because they have a 3G pitch here and today the attendance swelled because most local games were called off and people came here instead.

Getting here was easy and I caught a direct train from soggy Bedfordshire, arriving at Horsham about two and a quarter hours later. Then I used my experience of visiting Southwater last season to catch the number 98 bus, which runs every 20 minutes during the daytime and arrived at the Park and Ride also about 20 minutes later. Then it was a short walk to the ground along a leafy little lane. Think of Needingworth United! The entrance is shared with the local golf club and is about a good eight iron shot from the bus stop to the ground!

I was here early enough to have a couple of leisurely pints, which cost a bit in this rather affluent area, but you do get a pound back if you return the receptacles back to the bar afterwards. Then I made my way to the main stand, which was by now filling up quickly. I sat in the 'away officials only' seats, as I correctly surmised that there wouldn't be enough of them to fill them all! Soon more and more people piled into this lovely tree line ground, with hardly a house in sight. They came in all age groups and for me it was a throwback to the late 1960's when everyone came to enjoy themselves, watching the game without becoming silly. In addition to the 300-seater main stand they had two small stands on the far side of the pitch, one seating about 50 people (think of Langford!) and another, slightly larger non-seating stand behind the bottom goal. There was some overhang from the clubhouse goal as well. I went to the club's old Queen Street ground twice, once in 1981 when Horsham lost 5-0 to Worthing in a Berger Isthmian League

Division 2 match and again in 1985 when a Vinny Samways goal saw Spurs Youth beat them 1-0 in front of 600 (approx.) in a friendly match.

Today it didn't take them long to score against a spirited Margate side. The goal came on 16 minutes, just after 5 minutes' worth of rain had ceased. The goal came from a corner, which after the keeper fumbled it, the ball was headed home from close range. For most of the rest of the match, there was little to choose between the sides. Although Horsham always had the edge, Margate were still in with a shout until they conceded a second goal on 74 minutes when the scorer was left unmarked some 15 yards out to finish off a cross from the right. Then in added on time Horsham scored twice more, firstly from ten yards with the shot going straight through the keeper and then from a breakaway following two successive Margate corners. This brought to a close a great day out, made even sweeter because the trains and buses ran spot on time both ways.

*contributed on 17/01/23*

**TT No.95: Keith Aslan** - Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> January 2023; **BURSCOUGH** v Charnock Richard; North West Counties Premier; Kick Off: 14.58; Result: 3-2; Admission: £4 for wrinklies; Programme: £1; Official attendance: 65, which is nonsense as actual attendance: 111 (86 home, 22 away & 3 neutral).

What a momentous day this is. For the first time in over a month Broadstairs station actually has trains running from it on a Saturday morning. I stood on the platform in the pluvial conditions with tears of emotion streaming down my face, I now know how the people of Berlin must have felt when the wall came down. Incidentally, I am assured by a well-known Stockport groundhopper that 'pluvial' is a grandiose way of saying rain. What a great word, I must make more use of it.

Arrived on the concourse of despair at Euston Station to find Avanti were having one of their better days with only one short term cancellation to add on to the pre-ordained ones. Indeed, everything ran perfectly today, showing what can be achieved, but very rarely is.

Burscough's new ground is just a six-minute walk from Burscough Bridge Interchange station. Quite why they've added the last bit is a mystery, it doesn't really interchange with anything. The ground backs onto the railway and I spent the match trainspotting and checking they were running on time. Yes, I really am that sad. Burscough Bridge is a pleasant little place, anywhere that has a dog grooming parlour called 'Short Bark and Sides' is o.k. by me. Started to go for a walk along the canal, but pluvial conditions and dodgy knees meant I didn't get very far.

The ground is pretty basic, no clubhouse to get warm in, but a wide variety of pies and other comestibles were available from a container inside the ground. The Atcost stand wasn't much use as even at the back I got a good soaking with gale force winds driving the rain straight at me. Getting a face full of hailstones is what groundhopping is all about. Plastic pitch, but where oh where was the green mesh surrounds? It may be different, but a wooden picket fence just doesn't say 'plastic' to me.

Although Burscough's printers were shut due to Covid (is that still a thing?) they didn't use it as an excuse not to issue and printed it off themselves. Everything in it, you wouldn't know it wasn't professionally done other than whoever printed it isn't very good at photocopying. The front cover was on the back and the other pages were all random which to paraphrase Eric Morecambe 'He's got all the right pages but not necessarily in the right order' The piece-de-resistance was the spurious staple put in completely the wrong place meaning you couldn't open it up properly. I had great fun with it on the train going home, and all joking aside, well done boys when so many clubs don't bother to issue at all these days.

Both teams put on a decent show in atrocious conditions with Burscough's winner coming two minutes from the end, a goal that lifts them above Longridge and out of the bottom two. Mind you, Longridge have six games in hand!

Let's hope conditions aren't so pluvial next week.

*v2 contributed on 15/01/23*

**TT No.94: Jon T Green** - Saturday 7th January 2023; **COVENTRY COPSEWOOD** v. Wednesfield; Midland Football League - Division One; Venue: Copsewood Community Sports and Social Club; Result: 3-3; Admission: £5; Programme: Yes, free with admission; Attendance: 42 (headcount)

"You look like a professional" the man behind the tea bar counter said as I stood poised with the pepper pot over a steaming cup of Bovril. A professional what exactly he never made clear (answers on a postcard to *FGIF* Towers please) however he did go onto explain that when he worked on the production line at Rolls Royce (what a name dropper!) that pepper and Bovril was seen as the perfect antidote to the common cold. Whilst I didn't have a cold in the medical sense, I was certainly a bit chilly in the "why didn't I bring a warmer coat" sense so armed with this new found information I braved the windy and wet elements and made for the main stand.

The Copsewood Community Sports and Social Club is much more than just the football club. There is a long two storey 1960's building with echoing stairwells and closed off rooms which reminded me somewhat of my school days at the local Comprehensive. From the closed in balcony views can be had across the bowling green to a netball court and beyond that the trees surrounding the edge of the golf course. Behind the social club are more pitches, used by juniors and by Meredith Road Baptist Church FC of the Saturday morning Coventry and District Christian League. There is even a narrow-gauge railway which runs on some Saturdays at the beginning and the end of the football season - today track maintenance was being carried out but at least they weren't on strike. The ground itself consists of two covered areas - the David Wickens stand is two steps of terracing beneath a corrugated iron roof. It's situated behind one goal and, whilst convenient for Coventry's own club house (separate to the main building), it's rather a long way from the pitch so viewing the action at the far end could be a little challenging on a gloomy day. Astride the halfway line sits the breeze-block Ken Naylor Memorial Stand; containing 80 seats in sky blue (what other colour is there for a Cov based

team?) it also includes two neat wooden benches. White metal rails and a concrete path surround the pitch on three sides with newer (albeit more uneven) plastic fencing on the far touchline. It's grass standing only there so choose a dry day.....

With both teams sitting mid-table an even encounter looked likely and, whilst that ultimately turned out to be the case, it was superb entertainment on a pitch which held up remarkably well considering the frequent downpours. Attacking the club house end, the red shirted visitors wasted less than 35 seconds before Dimitri Dunkley gave them the lead; the centre forward receiving the ball in the box before clipping his shot beyond Nathan Pearce. Not that the lead lasted long as a corner from Charlie Gordon was met with a strong header from Craig Civzelis which drifted back across goal and in at the far post; five minutes played and already 1-1.

Civzelis was having a busy time at both ends of the pitch; giving away a free kick for a rough challenge on Rhys Horton, the subsequent free kick was hacked off the line to save the centre-half's blushes. On a more positive note, the same man was involved in giving Copsewood the lead midway through the half; his aerial prowess again unsettled Wednesfield, and this time Bryan Kohyrelon forced the ball over the line at the second attempt. Coventry were now dominating with the leggy Jean Patrick Gomes showing a great work rate in midfield. With a touch over half an hour played the visitors rather surprisingly drew level; some neat approach play saw Dunkley set up Mac Lee whose angled drive found the net.

With the second period barely underway Wednesfield were once again quickest out of the blocks. This time Lee turned provider setting up the impressive Dunkley for his second of the match. Copsewood, now chasing the game, changed formation to a more attacking 3-4-3 with 15 minutes remaining. This produced plenty of long balls up to the strikers, not a bad tactic considering the torrential rain now sheeting across the pitch but resulted in little clear goal scoring opportunities. With three out of the four additional minutes having elapsed, the hosts finally got a break as substitute Jake Archer burst into the box and was clearly tripped. Referee Mr. Rolfe pointed to the spot from which Ben Ellis coolly dispatched his penalty high into the roof of the net. It was an exciting end to an excellent game in which neither side had deserved to lose.

*contributed on 10/01/23*

**TT No.93: Gary Spooner** - Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> January 2023; Hucknall Town v Harrowby United; United Counties League Division One; Venue: Aerial Way; Result: 3-2; Admission: £6; Programme: 44pp, £2; Attendance: 393.

Thankfully no weather drama for me yesterday. I'd arranged to meet my mates The Welsh and The Scouse for the first game at Hucknall's new stadium. Had that been called off we were all going to revisit Eastwood on the plastic just down the road, but Plan B was not needed.

The ground is very good for UCL level with plenty of cover. However, the covered standing areas are just flat standing and not tiered so only really good if you're in

the front row. Shouldn't be a problem unless a really big crowd turns up on a really wet day. Many hoppers in a 392 attendance and a cracking game.

Harrowby spoiled the script by scoring the first goal at the new ground and lead 1-0 at the break. Must have been some half time team talk for Hucknall as they came out flying in the second half and equalised on 49 minutes. After 75 minutes Hucknall were leading 3-1 and seemingly cruising to victory. There was to be late drama though. Harrowby scored on 87 minutes and then hit the post in the 89<sup>th</sup> minute.

An excellent game and yet another second half downpour. By full time the rain was of monsoon proportions, and I got soaked just walking back to the car. The heavy rain also made for difficult conditions driving home but I was back for tea before six.

*contributed on 08/01/23*

**TT No.92: Craig Dabbs** - Saturday 31<sup>st</sup> December 2022; **Dronfield Town v Nostell Miners Welfare**; Northern Counties East League Division One; Venue: Stonelow Playing Fields; Result: 4-1; Admission: Free; Programme: 12pp, £1; Attendance: 209.

T'was a filthy day to end the year for most parts and my arrival in this corner of Derbyshire was met with the sight of six gentlemen on the pitch, one was putting sand down, one forking it, one brushing water off it and the other three were the officials talking about it. Naturally I collared them as they were leaving the playing area and fortunately, they were three officials with the attitude that they were there to officiate a Football match and that was what they were going to do.

With that sorted I went back to the pay hut to sort my programme out. it was slightly damaged, and I admit I'm terrible when it comes to programmes, so I purchased another when a spectator walked in and was told they had sold out. This was a full hour before kick-off, so I sold him the slightly damaged one for face value. I discovered the print run was just 25, so many would miss out.

The ground itself is an enclosed area of a larger playing field that features two cricket pitches, one of which Coal Aston Cricket Club use and it's there you park up. The ground is on quite a tight footprint, a small eighty-seater stand looked to be the only cover however there is a very narrow covered stand behind the goal at the Parkgate end of the ground that blended into its background, meaning I didn't spot it straightaway. It was most welcome on such a wet day too. The far side is closed to spectators and the cricket club end is open to the elements.

The club have played here since 1998, and they have worked their way up through the Hope Valley League, the Midlands Regional Alliance and the Central Midlands League eventually arriving in the NCEL in 2013.

The ground could limit the club if they become very successful due to its size. There is scope though with space to extend the stand and develop behind the goal

so it has a couple of more levels in it but, in truth, it's probably all they will ever need, as I think they've found their level.

The match was decent as I often find on soaking wet pitches. The pitch held up well - apart from one area, it wasn't bad at all. Dronfield played much better in the conditions than the visitors who took an early lead that quickly woke Dronfield up. It was largely one way traffic from that point, although Nostell did have a few chances, but they didn't come to anything much.

*contributed (via Brian Buck) on 08/01/23*

**TT No.91: Keith Aslan** - Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2023; **MOULTON** v Lutterworth Athletic; Spartan South Midlands Division One; Kick Off: 15.01; Result: 2-3; Admission: £3 for old people; Programme: £2; Attendance: 152 (127 home, 12 away & 13 neutral)

Today is the only day I could actually do this one. The line from Euston has been closed since before Christmas due to what the railways euphemistically call 'Engineering Works'. Opened up for 24 hours today before five days of strikes puts the kybosh on the whole shebang. The trains ran perfectly, but I suppose if you are only running them one day out of fourteen you might as well put a bit of effort into it!

First time I've been proper groundhopping for three weeks, but the prospect didn't excite me as much as it should have done. Moulton is a village just to the north of Northampton. Buses aplenty from the bus station. If you are looking for somewhere vibrant and exciting to visit, Northampton on a bank holiday is not the place. There is a bus stop four minutes from the ground just before you enter the village, and two hours before kick-off I was hugging some paper and I could now set off on a stress-free pub crawl. Six or seven years ago the accommodation for one of the hops was in Moulton so I knew exactly where the three pubs were in the village. I visited all of them. All closed of course so it was back to the ground to imbibe my Fosters quotient in the clubhouse.

The clubhouse (opened by Martin Chivers no less) was full of groundhoppers who were all pleased to see me. At least that's what I told myself. Lunchtime footy on the tele. Teas, coffees and bumper hot sausage rolls were on offer. The toilets had a 'urine colour chart' on the wall. Apparently, it told you if you were dehydrated or not by the colour of your pee. Are you really likely to be dehydrated in a pub? Judging by the programme I think somebody must have a mate who works for a printers. I know not so many people buy programmes these days, but if you'd missed out on this edition how would you ever have known that full back Tom O'Neil's favourite film is 'Love Actually'

The ground has a plastic pitch which can only mean one thing. A green mesh fence. You can spectate from three quarters of it, and an offering on the halfway line from 'Atcost' makes the ground graders happy, unlike Lutterworth's current abode! Moulton have been around a long time, 1896 to be precise, but they have only impinged on my consciousness this season with their elevation to the South Midlands League. They are attracting some pretty big crowds for this level, with Northampton Town being at home not affecting the gate one iota this afternoon.

This was an entertaining game of football, only a point apart in the league and there was nothing to choose between the teams on the pitch either. Moulton were 2-1 down before getting a deserved equalizer in what should have been the last few seconds of the match. I've long ago given up trying to work out why referees add on vast tranches of random overtime onto games, but suffice to say Lutterworth got the winner three minutes after they should have been back in the changing rooms and sharing the 'Wash and Go'.

Although I enjoyed my outing to Northampton a lot of the magic has gone from groundhopping lately. Won't have to worry about motivation this Saturday, no trains to go anywhere anyway.

*contributed on 03/01/23*

**TT No.90: Jon T Green** - Saturday 31st December 2022; **ROSSINGTON MAIN** v. Athersley Recreation; Northern Counties East League - Division One; Venue: Oxford Street; Result: 7-0; Admission: £5; Programme: £1.50; Attendance: 414

In Doncaster town centre there stands a statue commemorating the history of the mining industry in the area. Around the slate grey base are the names of local collieries; among them Yorkshire Main, Denaby Main and Rossington Main. All were the primary source of employment in the pit villages and all supported football clubs whose rich heritage is still in evidence today. The first shaft was sunk at Rossington in 1912 with the football club being formed seven years later. They moved to their current Oxford Street home in 1923 which was only a few hundred yards from the coal face. Production finally ceased in 2000 but thankfully the club has survived and under a new young chairman has recently celebrated its 100th anniversary.

On a cool, grey morning beneath low heavy clouds the reception from the committee members at "Rosso" could not have been warmer. Whilst President Gerald Parsons explained the work which had been carried out - a fully revamped clubhouse bar, new outer fencing and upgraded changing rooms, Doug Lawton extended his role as Vice Chairman to "put a brew on" - milk and three sugars thank you. Both men had been ex-players and, like many at the club, had been involved for well over 30 years. The ground is, in some ways, rather modest but one of those places where the whole is greater than the sum of the parts: entering through the turnstile block there is a trestle table selling programmes and badges and to the left of that the "Main" bar with a separate building for committee members and invited guests further along the touchline. To the right is a stepped covered terrace and towards the corner the Maxi Hughes Stand with its blue seats standing out in contrast to the neat white paintwork. At the rear, up a set of steps, are the changing rooms and managers office. Both ends of the ground are flat standing but on the far side is the low seated Gerry Murden stand. Set back into the perimeter fencing, the view from here is slightly awkward given that the near touchline is some way from the pitch rail and the stand itself a good, few yards behind that. The floodlights, of which there are five, have been upgraded to the LED variety; not only are they energy efficient and extremely bright but also come on immediately, none of this 'five minute to warm up' business here.

On the pitch things are looking equally bright for Main as they sit comfortably in the play-off places albeit some 16 points behind champions elect Champion. Despite their fluorescent orange kit, the position is much less rosy for the visitors from near Barnsley as 'Rec find themselves in the relegation zone. Things actually begin brightly for them on a pitch holding up well despite the heavy drizzle which has been falling for most of the day. Their good start, however, only lasts six minutes before Ross Hannah guides his header beyond the diving Ellis Pickard. Hannah was involved again a few moments later setting up Harry Sheppard who rifled home. Main were dominating midfield and it was from here that Hannah received the perfect pass; taking it in his stride the striker rounded Pickard before guiding his shot beyond the covering defender. Much to their credit Athersley continued to play attractive football but a right footed shot from Ethan Nixon, palmed away by Lewis Hill, was as good as it got during a first half in which they were totally outplayed. The best goal of the afternoon followed as Rosso made it four; Bradley Grayson lined up a free kick a few yards outside of the area before sending an unstoppable effort into the top corner. Hannah then completed his hat trick a couple of minutes before the break with a close-range finish.

Unsurprisingly the second half was something of a low-key affair, as with another game in just a few days the home side let the tempo slip. 'Rec were able to enjoy a more equal share of the ball and were a little unlucky not to reduce the deficit as a shot from distance cannoned back off the bar. With less than ten minutes remaining Rosso added two more goals; first Manny Kianga outpaced a tiring defence to beat Pickard with a low finish before substitute Tyla Bell repeated the trick with the unlucky 'keeper getting a hand to the ball but being unable to stop it crossing the line via the foot of the far post.

The remainder of the season looks bright for Main and with a bit of good fortune in the play-offs they might just be playing NCEL Premier Division football next season.

*contributed on 03/01/23*

**TT No.89: Craig Dabbs** - Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> December 2022; **Uttoxeter Town** v Stone Old Alwynians; Midland League Premier Division; Venue: Oldfield's Sports & Social Club; Result: 4-3; Admission: £6; Programme: 20pp, £1; Attendance: 78

From a sporting perspective if you think about Uttoxeter you will probably think about horse racing and little else. Indeed, whenever I used to pass the town and see the signage, I wondered why on earth a place that size didn't have a football club, and I was wrong.

Uttoxeter Town are now in their 50th year but it's only really in the last eight years that they have been in the Midland League (apart from a one season return to the Staffordshire County League) that I've really noticed them and that probably goes for others too.

The club were a Sunday side until 2011, having played at Oldfield's since fairly early in their formation. It is an historic venue, first opened in 1905 as a cricket

ground. The listed pavilion which is still the focal point of the site gives you the clue you need. J C Bamford, the founder of JCB used the ground for first class cricket between 1907 and 1909 with South Africa and Australia gracing the field, it was also used by Staffordshire until 1970. These days the cricket is played elsewhere. The Rugby club which is alongside the football Club moved here in 1982.

The current football ground is still a little basic with the main drawback being the distance between the pavilion and the pitch. The club have done well mind with what they have. It features six separate areas of cover, all behind each goal with, for me, the highlight being Ella May, Chester and George, three former dugouts used as small stands. The other thing of note are the lights, which are so close to the houses and back gardens which back onto the pitch. How they got permission for them, I simply don't know.

The match itself was a local derby and a very enjoyable one at that as the 4-3 score line suggests. The pitch was a little heavy and the game lacked a little pace compared with my hop to Harrow the day before. There was a marked difference in standard but putting that aside because it really didn't matter the two sides really went at each other and served up a game that was not only a treat but a vital three points for Town lifting them out of the relegation zone for now.

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

**TT No.88: Craig Dabbs** - Monday 26<sup>th</sup> December 2022; Harrow Borough v Metropolitan Police; Southern League Premier Division South; Venue: The Rogers Family Stadium, Earlsmead; Result: 0-2; Admission: £6; Programme: 44pp, £2; Attendance: 208

I trust you're enjoying the festivities. Today's trip wasn't exactly what I had in mind originally but with a 50% discount on admission and having not been, I thought a trip to North London was in order.

Formed as Roxonian in 1933, Harrow Borough, as they are now known and have been for many years, first played at Earlsmead in 1934 just one year after their formation.

The ground was renamed The Rogers Family Stadium in 2017 in honour of Peter Rogers the long-standing chairman of the club having first joined as treasurer in 1967 the year they became Borough instead of Town. Roxonian went before the war in case you are wondering.

Earlsmead in old money and easier to type is a fine old venue with bags of terracing to be found along with four stands, all apart from the main stand which dates from 1997 replacing the original.

For all the world this fixture looks Isthmian League not Southern League as both clubs have a long history in the former. The game saw two teams struggling somewhat with Harrow Borough more so than the Met who consistently punch above their weight with small crowds at Imber Court.

Harrow totally dominated the first half and somehow went in level at 0-0, I have no idea how, good goalkeeping was one factor. The Police did a little better in the second half but were still outplayed managing to take what few chances they had and so it proved which was enough for the visitors.

Earlsmead is a lovely ground to visit, and I liked their approach to cut the admission in half should you pay up front rather than at the turnstile. They knew the visitors wouldn't bring much in the way of support - indeed I saw precisely one person celebrate their goals and with Wealdstone at home they were always going to be up against it, 208 wasn't bad all things considered in an area saturated with clubs.

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

**TT No.87: Jon T Green** - Tuesday 27th December 2022; **WESTFIELD** v. Chipstead; Isthmian League South Central Division; Venue: Woking Park; Result: 3-3; Admission: £9; Programme: Online only; Attendance: Approx 161

Westfield's Woking Park ground sits a few minutes' walk away from Woking FC's impressive Kingfield Stadium and forms part of a larger leisure facility. If, however, you were expecting a 4G caged pitch tagged onto the back of a sports hall, as I did, then you will be pleasantly surprised. The entrance takes a little bit of finding as you duck through a small walkway between gleaming metallic buildings housing, amongst others, sea rangers and local scout groups. Immediately through the single turnstile, head upstairs to the bar area where there is a wide balcony giving unobstructed views out across the pitch. Rather unsurprisingly this is the favoured area to watch from but, with Westfield's crowds generally being "modest", finding a good spot shouldn't be a problem. Downstairs, at pitch side, there is a refreshment hut along with two small blocks of black tip up seats. To the left, and situated between the goal and the corner flag, is a covered prefabricated stand containing a further 100 or so seats. Behind it, and probably out of use, is a gently sloping grass bank. The rest of the ground is flat standing but with a background of trees it gives the ground a slightly more countryfied feeling than the location would suggest. If townscapes are more your thing, then walk around to the far touchline for an interesting view of the Woking skyline. For sure it's not Manhattan or Sydney but the high-rise buildings do provide something of a big city aspect. Free parking for three hours is available adjacent to the ground and even if you are planning a slightly longer stay it'll only set you back a modest £1.30 for up to four hours.

With this being a Noon kick-off, the hopping fraternity were out in some force in the hope of adding on one or two further games later in the day. Whatever the subsequent fixtures were it's hard to imagine they served up better entertainment than was on show here. Prior to today's game Westfield sat comfortably in seventh place with the visitors from Chipstead four places and six points behind them.

The hosts, resplendent in yellow and black stripes, looked in confident form with Richard Afrane-Kesey showing some nice touches in midfield. Centre-forward Troy Walters, along with strike partner Florian Envoudou Ada, worked the line well and

constantly pressed Chipstead's back four. It was Walters who had the first chance of the game as he moved smoothly onto a through ball, but his weak shot did little to trouble 'keeper Matt Kerbey. At the other end, Andy Kakuikusomo was proving more than a handful for the home defenders and so it was no surprise when he opened the scoring on 20 minutes; controlling a flicked-on header he killed the ball, turned inside his marker before opening up his body to clip a neat finish beyond Sonny Wheeler. The lead lasted less than six minutes as Didi Ndombe centred from the by-line and Ada made no mistake from close range. Unperturbed, Chipstead regained the lead with the best goal of the afternoon as midfielder Jonathan Hood let fly with an absolute screamer from 25 yards which fairly flew past the diving Wheeler. The same player might have made it 3-1 early into the second period only to see his effort spectacularly headed off the line by Isaac Charles. With tempers beginning to flare, Ada having been dumped unceremoniously into the hoardings, and then Daniel Pappoe cautioned for a blatant trip on Ndombe, the game was in danger of losing some of its flow. A quarter of the match remained when once again the home side drew level; David Amate crossing to the far post where Walters applied the final touch with a low header. Much to their credit both sides continued to search for a winner, and it looked to have arrived as Chipstead took the lead for the third time. A left-wing corner was only partially cleared and, when Peter Wedgeworth centred again, Michael Dixon was on hand to fire it into the roof of the net. Remarkably, this time the visitors' lead lasted barely sixty seconds as Ada wiggled his way through a gaggle of defenders before stabbing his shot wide of Kerbey. In the end a draw was a fair result and, whilst it was a superb watch as a neutral, you suspect that both managers saw this as two points lost as much as one gained.

*contributed on 29/12/22*

**TT No.86: Jon T Green** - Saturday 17th December 2022; **HOLYHEAD HOTSPUR** v. Ruthin Town; Cymru North; Venue: The New Stadium; Result: 1-2; Admission: £5; Programme: No. Possible future on-line issues; Attendance: Approx 110

Walking around the pitch I was approached by an elderly gent with long straggling grey hair. Expecting to be challenged as to what I was doing in the ground a couple of hours before kick-off, I was rather taken aback when in a thick Brummie accent he asked, "Is this where the pensioner's Christmas party is?" Before I had a chance to reply (although clearly, I didn't know the answer) he went on "You have to be 65 to be invited, I'm 75 y'know". Luckily, being fully up to date with mathematics, I was able to confirm this did indeed make him eligible for turkey and all the trimmings, but the gent had already moved on. "I used to play football but now my tendons have gone." Which particular tendons and where they had departed to was never revealed as he continued "the sports centre's shut so the dinner must be here. I'm going to get my haircut now" and with that he walked slowly, due to the tendon issue I surmised, towards the exit.

It had already been a slightly surreal morning having spent the bulk of it sitting in a car park near Colwyn Bay and watching as the FAW app confirmed one after another game had been postponed. Even the 3G pitches seemed to have succumbed to the weather although being a suspicious individual I suspected that the proximity to Christmas, rather than an actual playing surface problem, caused

a few of these call-offs.....

Holyhead had posted that they were inspecting at 10am but with the time now at nearly 11 there had been no update. In desperation I called the club, the man at the other end sounded surprised by my question, "Of course we're on, beautiful sunny day here and the pitch is soft and playable." It was the words every hopper wants to hear and not only that, but the game was on real living, growing, beautiful, natural grass.

Hotspur's ground is situated on the outskirts of the town and, although new build housing is slowly encroaching, it still has a wonderful rural feel to it. Hills rise up in the distance, horses graze in a nearby paddock and red dogwood trees add a splash of colour beyond the far touch line. A large 500+ seated stand dominates the scene with the club's name picked out in white against a royal blue background. To one side of it is a slightly raised covered enclosure and to the other the impressively large clubhouse. Changing rooms and a tea bar are adjacent to the turnstiles behind the near goal with the rest of the ground being undeveloped flat standing.

The teams arrive with the PA announcing that he didn't wish Ruthin Town a pleasant stay as "we need the points". A glance at the league table reveals the wisdom of his words as Holyhead sit bottom of the league with just one win from thirteen games. The visitors are mid table and immediately assert their authority scoring twice within the opening ten minutes: young 'keeper Adam Martin spills a speculative shot from distance and Sam Jones has the easiest of close-range finishes. Martin looks nervous and, when his attempted clearance falls short, Ethan Davies drives at the home defence before sliding a left footed effort back across goal and into the far corner. Ruthin should have put the game beyond doubt soon after as Gwion Owen dances his way through only to see his shot strike the upright. The same player goes close after thirty minutes having been set up with a superb cross field pass by centre half Vita Mbolokele.

Hotspur had been outclassed all over the pitch during the first half but the second 45 minutes is a revelation. Their number 11, Dylan Summers-Jones, is taking on Ruthin almost single handedly, and causing the visitors all manner of issues. Playing as a part of a front three he constantly drops to the right touch line, committing the full back and dragging other defenders out of position. Town soon identify the problem and double-team him, but that doesn't stop a well struck left footed drive calling visiting 'keeper Daniel Goldston into his first meaningful action of the afternoon. With twenty minutes left Hotspur finally get the goal they deserve, Summers-Jones provides a low centre which centre forward Craig Owen converts from a few yards out. This being Christmas there should have been a fairy tale ending but it wasn't to be as, although Hotspur saw plenty of the ball, in the closing stages shots on goal were all too rare. It looks like it's going to be a challenging second half of the season for Holyhead but in Summers-Jones they have a fine player who might just galvanise their fight against relegation. Now did someone mention Christmas dinner?

*contributed on 19/12/22*

**TT No.85: Brian Buck** - Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> December 2022; **Yaxley** v Sutton Coldfield Town; Pitching In Northern Premier League Midlands Division; Result: 1-2; Attendance: 109.

And then it snowed and froze! So, no more football to watch until today and with most games being called off, a 3G option was essential. However, but on my arrival at Leading Drove, or the Toojays Stadium as it is now called, just about the only snow I saw was in the club car park.

Apart from some building work going on by the turnstiles, there were no obvious changes to the ground since my last visit, about a year ago. So today entrance to the ground was through the clubhouse instead and as with my game on the previous Saturday, it was good to see some people here that I knew. As I needed to sit down, I bagged a seat early. It was a back row seat, because they were mostly dry, as opposed to the front row which were sopping wet, as one spectator was to find out to his cost! But things could have been worse, as I've been here before when these seats have been covered in ice!

As for the game, Yaxley weren't expected to win, as they have so far only picked up one point from their 20 league fixtures. Furthermore, three of their star(?) players left the club recently, along with possibly some of the backroom staff. Today's visitors were in 12<sup>th</sup> position. The basic scenario of the game was that Yaxley weren't quite as bad as the statistics show and the visitors, despite a lot of puffing of chests, weren't that much better than Yaxley. It was the hosts who took the lead on 6 minutes after the scorer received a short square pass and after making space for himself, shot home from just inside the area. It was to be their best move of the game. Then on 17 minutes Town equalised from the spot, following a stupidly given away foul. They moaned at the ref a lot, too much in my opinion, especially their captain, whom I didn't care for one bit! The game was sewn up on 53 minutes when the ball was tapped home from close range following a wide cross from the left, which caught the keeper diving the wrong way. Thereafter there was a lot of posturing from them along with a couple of theatrical dives which led to two Yaxley bookings. I'm not sure if either of them were actually fouls. As for Yaxley, they kept trying. They probably don't have enough quality players to prevent relegation, but they are good enough to win at least some games eventually.

*contributed on 19/12/22*

**TT No.84: Steve Hardy** - Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> December 2022; **Solihull Sporting** v Leamington Hibs; Midland league Division 3; Result: 1-2 (match abandoned after 80 mins - serious player injury); Admission and Programme: Free; Attendance: 14 H/C.

My final game of this year ended in an abandonment. What happened was on 80 minutes there was an accidental collision between 3 players which resulted in one Solihull player lying unconscious on the pitch. Everybody rushed to help including the Hibs medic who stayed with the lad until help arrived. An abandonment was the only sensible thing to do in my opinion.

Sporting play at the Tudor Grange Academy in Kingshurst, where the tragic loss of four young lives happened just last week. We had a minute's silence before kick-off observed by most players, although a couple of Sporting players preferred to carry on with warming up exercises.

The 4G pitch attracted a good few groundhoppers, although with a first ever programme on offer I had expected a few more. There weren't that many games that survived the arctic conditions in the Solihull area, so this was an unexpected bonus for those who braved it.

The match itself is almost secondary now, but for the record Hibs scored twice in the first half to lead 2-0 at the break. Their second goal was a belter too from a fair distance out and they fully deserved their lead.

Second half saw Sporting pull one back and were pressing for an equaliser when the abandonment happened. 2-1 to Hibs, but presumably the game will be replayed later in the season.

Should we count an abandonment? Well, everyone has a different view on that, mine being 'of course you do' as we got 80 minutes of play. Had it been 10 minutes in, then I would say no though.

So, it just remains for Sarah satnav and I to wish my three readers a happy Christmas and a peaceful new year.

*contributed on 18/12/22*

**TT No.83: Keith Aslan** - Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> December 2022; **RAMSGATE** v Chichester City; Isthmian South East; Kick Off: 15.02; Result: 0-0; Admission: £5 for old people; Programme: 20 pages - Free; Official attendance: 494! Actual attendance: around half that.

I wasn't going to do a report today. Already done one on Ramsgate this season and there's only so much you can write about the Costa Del Thanet. But it would be selfish to spoil Christmas for my millions of fans, so here is my contribution of joy and happiness to the festive season.

Train strike today, only 1 in 5 trains running. Avanti 'customers' are looking forward to the improved service. Down here there's nothing at all, just like every other weekend but without the rail replacement buses. In truth I wouldn't have been venturing very far today anyway as I'm still groggy from yet another nose job. Big one this, up at Guys Hospital in London, a last throw of the dice to keep me alive a bit longer. Can't die yet, God owes me at least six more years to make up for getting my bus pass so long after everybody else. The hospital staff are wonderful. The nurses have had a real terms pay cut of 20% over the last 10 years, politicians a real term increase of 15%. It's a free country, why do you vote for these criminals?

I've never understood the logic of fiddling attendances, at least not upwards. Ramsgate have a history of this, but if you're going to pluck a number out of thin air at least ground it in some semblance of reality. 494? Come on boys, it was

patently around half that figure. What do you get out of it? The 250 odd that stayed away clearly made the right decision. This was dire.

I've nothing against goalless draws, they can be very entertaining. This one wasn't. It was 96 minutes of freezing my nuts off and bleeding everywhere that made even the prospect of staying at home watching the third place play-off match seem enticing. Ramsgate are top of the league but I've absolutely no idea how. It's a funny old game, but there wasn't much fun to be had this afternoon.

Once again, I must mention the programme situation. 20 pages, plenty of reading and everything else you could want from your match day accompaniment, all given away free on request. Surely other clubs could do the same. With cheap paper I can't see if they charge a quid for it how they could possibly make a loss. Well done Ramsgate, it almost makes up for the football.

I've spent a lot of this season watching Ramsgate. Proper ground, cracking programme, tasty grub. and a 20-minute bus ride from my country dacha. Maybe I'm getting old (no maybe about it) but I'm coming to the conclusion that this is the way forward for my Saturday entertainment. Leaving home at the crack of dawn, getting back around midnight, and travelling on trains that increasingly don't turn up is all rapidly losing its allure.

As always, I wish my many fans a happy Christmas, and if not a prosperous New Year, at least try to keep out of the poor house. Peace and goodwill to all men except politicians who should be lined up against a wall and shot.

*contributed on 18/12/22*

**TT No.82: *Brian Buck* - Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> December 2022; Ware v Biggleswade; Pitching In Southern League Division 1 Central; Result: 2-2; Attendance: 171.**

After enduring a week of poor health my football watching was further hampered the following week when temperatures dropped like a stone, so I played the 3G card today to make sure I got a game in, and I saw quite a few people here I knew, and they all seemed to have the same idea as me.

Ware has been playing here since the mid-1990's and now with its 'lived in look' about it, these days has become one of the better grounds in these parts. It's a good ground for spectators and it offers good viewing from the main stand, plus a decent amount of covered terracing on the far side, along with some shallow, uncovered terracing behind both goals.

This match was third versus second, although Ware will go above Biggleswade if they win their games in hand. For a long while in this game, the sides were evenly matched in terms of possession, thus cancelling each other out in some respects and for me the highlight of the first half was seeing this bloke walk by, wearing a 'plucked chicken' Christmas hat, with the 'chicken' somehow still looking as though it was alive as he walked by, causing some amusement to spectators. In this period Ware were more solid as a unit going forward, but Biggleswade were slick in their passing, and they got the ball forwards quickly. But a lot of what they did

was usually too rushed and moves often ended with a misplaced pass. On 35 minutes Ware took the lead after an initial shot was blocked by a defender and the rebound was sent towards the bottom corner. The keeper dived and pushed the ball out but only as far as the scorer who knocked it home. Then just before half-time, a cross was blocked by the Biggleswade keeper, but it only went as far as the scorer who controlled the ball with his right foot and shot with his left. The ball was going wide, but an outstretched Biggleswade leg diverted it into the net. A two-goal lead for the hosts at this point was slightly harsh on the visitors though.

The second half continued in the same way but with the hosts now time wasting slowly the ascendancy was turning in the visitors' favour. On 75 minutes Biggleswade were awarded a penalty following a foul, but the resultant spot kick was saved. It seemed that it wasn't going to be their day, especially as Ware now ramped up the time wasting, leading to at least one booking. But on 89 minutes they pulled a goal back after a low cross came across the face of the goal and it was forced home, possibly via a deflection. Then, on 90(+6) minutes, a visitors player cut in from the right, played a one-two and beat the keeper for the equaliser. Ware weren't happy with the amount of time the ref had added on, but it was their own fault for slowing the game down too much.

*contributed on 13/12/22*

**TT No.81: Craig Dabbs** - Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> December 2022; **Slough Town** v Havant & Waterlooville; National League South; Venue: Arbour Park; Result: 1-3; Admission: £15; Programme: 40pp, £2.50; Attendance: 466

Well, the car's back in action. It cost me a fortune mind, but there you are. So, the world was my oyster again except it wasn't due to the cold snap we are having severely restricting options. My original plan was in the Midlands, but I knew mid-week there was no chance, so I opted for 3G or 4G (or whatever it was), and Slough Town came to mind.

The club plays at Arbour Park and have done so since 2016 after many years ground-sharing having lost the use of their former Wexham Park home, which is still there but partially built on now. The ground has been constructed on playing fields on the site of the former Arbour Vale School and it's different from many new builds which tend to be out of town as it's actually the opposite. I must admit I was expecting something rather bland, and it isn't. Part of the council's urban renewal programme, it was built by Stadium Solutions and is covered on all four sides with full width covered terracing at either end that can keep nearly 900 spectators dry. There is seating on either side with the main stand housing the bar and kitchen area at the top with glass frontage which I don't mind saying I spent the second half peering through rather than stood outside in the cold weather. The two seated stands combined provide around 500 seats giving the site a current capacity of 2000 with plenty of scope for further development should the Rebels need it.

At the moment the Rebels don't need any further development and are sadly having a tricky season, teetering on the edge of the relegation spots back to step

three. With third place visitors Havant in town, it was never going to be an easy assignment.

Slough played well though. They are clearly fighting hard to stay up and why wouldn't they? They took the lead and made life as difficult as possible but overall, the Hawks were stronger and more organised which eventually showed as they pushed on to take control. Full credit to Slough though for not making it a comfortable visit to Berkshire for the visitors.

*contributed (via Brian Buck) on 11/12/22*

**TT No.80: Keith Aslan** - Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> December 2022; **LEIGH** v Cuxton 91; Sevenoaks Charity Cup; Kick Off: 13.30; Result: 0-2; Admission and pirate programme: Free; Attendance: 16 (9 home, 2 away & 5 neutral)

God has been winding me up lately. This would have been my last opportunity this year for some serious groundhopping, with the railways all but shut down 'till well into 2023. So, what does the ditzy diety do but create a cold snap with the frost causing virtually every game on grass to be postponed. Cheers mate. This is how I came to be watching my football on the green, green plastic of St. Gregory Catholic School equidistant between Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells.

In truth, as Sevenoaks Charity Cup games go this was about as big as it gets, a real David and Goliath clash, but this time it was Goliath that came out on top. Leigh, it has a station, is a few miles from Tonbridge. While they do have their own ground in the village, they seem to play most of their games here at the school, where I assume the facilities are better. Easy to get to, a bus every 15 minutes from outside Tonbridge Station for the four-mile run and you will be dropped off outside the ground. There are spectator facilities down one side and, no surprises here, the ensemble is surrounded by a green mesh fence. No food or drink of course, but a pleasant hour was passed in the Cross Keys pub. across the road where the hopping fraternity assembled with one of our number taking photographs of the beer pumps. This made me feel a lot better about what I do.

Nothing much to choose between the two teams. Cuxton went one up early doors and got a second in the ninetieth minute. A perfectly acceptable game of football, but nothing to get the juices flowing. Never found out why the away team were called Cuxton 91, they were formed in 1996 so it wasn't that.

Got home nice and early only to find Strictly Come Dancing wasn't showing tonight. Life really is on a downer at the moment. Sunday morning, and due to God messing me about so much I didn't go to church today, but instead went for a constitutional along Broadstairs golden sands. Passed by the bus stop outside the station to see a bunch of bedraggled 'train customers' freezing their nuts off carrying large quantities of luggage waiting for a rail replacement bus, all of them looking thoroughly fed up. Even when there are trains, there aren't any down here. It does make me cross.

*contributed on 11/12/22*

TT No.79: *Keith Aslan* - Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2022; **BEVERLEY TOWN** v Athersley Recreation; Toolstation Northern Counties East Division One; Kick Off: 15.00; Result 2-2; Admission: £3 for old people; Programme: £1.50p; Attendance: 162 (149 home, 10 away & 3 neutral)

Today I feel Qatari. Today I feel Arab. Today I feel Welsh. Today I feel Gay. But mostly today I feel a bitter impoverished pensioner which is the persona I will be adopting for my outing to Beverley. Most of the week was spent attempting to find lines with trains running on them, then trying to second guess which of the remaining services wouldn't be cancelled at the last minute. South East trains have really taken their eye off the ball, and while they've successfully annexed Broadstairs from the rest of the country every Sunday 'till Christmas, they missed out this Saturday and given passengers/customers the opportunity of a stress-free journey into London. That's not what privatization is about.

To get to Beverley you have to go through Hull, there's no getting round it. Although always coming top every year of the 'Ten worst places in England to live' anywhere where the buses, trains and Greggs are all under the same roof is ok by me. I had a stroll round the adjacent shopping centre, highly recommended if you want to fully appreciate the fact you don't live here. Hull has unique white telephone boxes and an aquarium and was somehow named U.K. City of Culture 2017. Alas I had to move on, and what a pleasant contrast it was to arrive in Beverley. Larger than you would expect, thronged with Christmas shoppers today, it's made up of long windy pedestrianized streets with a great big dollop of ecclesiastical architecture in the middle. The football ground is a 17-minute walk from the railway station, but if you're going back to Hull after the game, make sure you don't get stuck on the wrong side of the level crossing.

Debutants in the North East Counties this season it's obvious much work has been recently put into the ground. Two thirds railed with a walkway, the other third out of bounds. A small stand, but unless you are one of the few lucky ones able to cram into it when it rains, you'll get wet. I know this from experience. The catering here is legendary, and I've been to cafes with a smaller selection of meals. There's a terrific array of goodies on offer, not your usual football fayre, so make sure you've left plenty of room for some serious face stuffing. The three girls serving looked as though they were related. The Beverley Sisters perhaps? The clubhouse was showing the lunchtime football. How comes all the other games in the top two divisions have been cancelled due to some middle eastern football tournament, but Sunderland v Millwall was taking place. Presumably *Sky Sports* told them it had to be played to give them something to show.

What a match this was. Athersley opened the scoring on 26 minutes with a precision chip over the goalkeeper. They got a second two minutes later with a precision chip over the goalkeeper. Here is a man who doesn't learn from his mistakes. Athersley just had to keep on playing as they had done in the first half to record a comfortable victory. But their manager would appear to be somewhat lacking in tactical nous and they spent the second half with six at the back and wasting time at every opportunity. What we have we hold, which they didn't. Beverley missed a penalty, well it wasn't so much missed, more a brilliant save,

but they kept on going and fully deserved their 89<sup>th</sup> minute equalizer. It all got a bit frisky towards the climax. This was one of those games that went on for ever. I have been known to leave games early to catch a train, but I wasn't going to leave this one, too much happening, and thanks to Mr. Mathew Oakley adding on nine minutes to the second half I was left with the best part of an hour to reacquaint myself with Beverley town centre while waiting for the next train. Why do referees do it? Where is Clive Thomas when you need him?

Although catching an hour later train than I was expecting at Beverley, thanks to some wicked connections, and a fabulous piece of train driving between Doncaster and London, I just about managed to clamber aboard the train I was originally anticipating to be on back to Broadstairs. So, all good. This week.

*contributed on 04/12/22*

**TT No.78: Brian Buck** - Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> November 2022; **Northwold** v North Elmham Youth; Central & South Norfolk League Hartt/Eastaugh Memorial Pease League Cup 2<sup>nd</sup> Round; Result: 2-1; Attendance: 12.

This ground was quite easy to get to and it can be found just off the A134 Mundford to King's Lynn road, turning right after about four and a half miles, passing the Mundford ground on the way. They were at home today as well and what a pretty little ground they have. Northwold's ground by comparison is pleasant enough, but the locals don't seem to take any interest in it. Eight of the spectators were with the visitors. There were only two home fans, both female and were seemingly partners of two of the players. One pushed a baby in a pram around and the other had a lively dog. For a while in the second half the ladies swapped roles, probably to relieve the boredom! The other two people present were a ref's observer and me.

They have a clubhouse here, complete with a covered veranda probably used by smokers, but which would keep crowds of this size dry on wet days. It wasn't open when I arrived but swung into action once the match finished. The pitch was partly railed off, but only for a few yards, to house eight small adverts. The pitch itself was awful and I suspect that many teams above Step 7 would refuse to play on it. Nonetheless the grass had been cut and it was in the best condition they could get it, at this time of the year.

Both sides play in Division 3 of the league and are in the top half. But in their home match on the previous Saturday Northwold were thrashed 9-1! Initially, it looked like more of the same today as they conceded with just six minutes played. Following only a partially cleared corner, the ball was crossed back in from the byline and headed in at the far post. Immediately before that though, one of the visiting players ran off the pitch. It transpired that his wife had rung up, telling him that he had to go home because there was a problem with their child. But after conceding the goal, rather than crumbling, the hosts dug in, with there being visible earth patches where they'd tried this in other games! The result was that they dominated the rest of the half but couldn't get anything from the eight corners they had. In the second half though they tried shooting from distance and eventually this yielded dividends. But not before they lost a player due to injury on

57 minutes, when his foot made contact with the ground and his ankle shattered, followed by some suspect screams when they tried to move him off the pitch. At this point he looked to have broken it and it seemed that an ambulance would be needed. Anyway, on 67 minutes and as Elmham were starting to fade, Northwold tried their luck with a hit and hope shot and it went in from about 30 yards out. Now they pressed for the winner and their cause was helped when the visitors had a player sin binned on 75 minutes. Then deep into added on time the winning goal came when a Northwold player tried his luck with a direct free kick from some 40 yards out and he succeeded, with the ball going into the net through a ruck of players. Despite the lack of people present, those both on and off the pitch enjoyed themselves, as I did. Perhaps not the injured player though as when it was discovered that his ankle probably wasn't broken after all, had to hobble off the pitch unaided whilst his colleagues took down the nets and the adverts!

*contributed on 29/11/22*

**TT No.77: Craig Dabbs** - Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> November 2022; **Kettering Town v Southport**; National League North; Venue: Latimer Park; Result: 0-0; Admission: £15; Programme: 44pp, £2.50; Attendance: 541

On Friday evening I broke down on the way home, well the car did anyway, I'm fine. Gearbox related, it's out of action and from a football perspective it completely destroyed my plans. My wife offered me the use of her car, but I was time limited because it was needed for work first and foremost, so I went back to Latimer Park for the fourth time to see Kettering Town play and get, what is known in the groundhopping business, a bracketed tick.

My previous three visits had been for Ladies' football (once), and to see Burton Park Wanderers but never for Kettering Town, so this trip had always on the cards at some point.

So, who's ground, is it? Well, it was once very much the home of Burton Park Wanderers. Kettering Town used to play at the much-missed Rockingham Road and when that was lost, they rented Nene Park for a short period after the demise of Rushden & Diamonds. After moving into Latimer Park, they took over the lease meaning that Burton Park Wanderers who still play there are now the ground sharers. Money talks and Kettering Town's banking credentials hold much more sway than that of Burton Park Wanderers, I imagine.

The ground has since evolved, it had too. From my first visit when the lights were up minus the actual lights on top, the fence over the far side missing and only two small areas of cover over on the clubhouse side, through to what you see today with a large, seated stand behind the goal at the factory end, a much-extended cover at the other and the two seated stands, over on the clubhouse side. What I also noticed yesterday was the splash of red and not blue and there is no longer any reference to Burton Park Wanderers in the ground at all, only a small footnote underneath a much larger Kettering Town sign outside. I fear for Wanderers, I wonder what will go first, the club or being kicked out of the ground altogether. The pitch, after all, isn't the best and probably could do with a little less usage.

You may also ask how long Kettering are going to stay here, because you hear noises of a new ground for the Poppies.

The match was an entertaining 0-0 with plenty of chances for both sides with very little in it. I always thought there would be a goal and it was only with around ten minutes left that I thought a scoreless draw would be the final outcome.

So that's Latimer Park put to bed from a groundhopping perspective. I wish the best to both clubs at Latimer Park and that Kettering Town do remember that without Burton Park Wanderers there wouldn't be a Latimer Park for them to play at in the first place.

*contributed (via Brian Buck) on 27/11/22*

**TT No.76: Brian Buck** - Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> November 2022; **Brache Phoenix** v Stopsley United; Bedfordshire County League Division 2; Venue: played at Stockwood Park Athletics Track, Luton; Kick-Off: 2.30pm; Result: 1-0; Attendance: 10 approx.

Today's date will forever be etched in my mind as it was the 62<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of my first ever visit to White Hart Lane, to watch Spurs 6 Birmingham City 0 (League Division 1) with scorers Dyson (2), Jones (2), Smith (pen) and White (att: 46,010). In that 1960/1 season they went on to win the Double, becoming the first side in that century to do so. Some might say that Spurs have gone downhill, having failed to win the league again since that season! That was also my first ever logged game, although in latter years I have been able to put a date to two other matches I saw in the 1950's.

As for today's game, we arrived at the ground a bit later than I intended, but we still got there in time for kick-off. Despite getting there in good time, I had an argument with my sat nav and eventually found the correct entrance which is down a driveway off Farley Hill. Pedestrians may find other ways to get into this large complex, which includes a golf course. I've been here twice before. Once was on 10<sup>th</sup> April 1997 when I saw Lewsey Social beat Stockwood KA 3-0 in a Luton District & South Beds League Premier Division match, (att: 30 approx), on an outside pitch, and secondly a few years ago when the ref called the match off, due to a waterlogged pitch, shortly after I arrived.

There was no problem with today's match though and we sat on the 208 uncovered seats they have here on the raised bank. In fact, the ground has quite a rural feel to it. The only problem we encountered was finding the Athletics Track once we'd parked the car, and secondly, was actually locating the entrance into it after we'd found it!

The match was between two lower placed teams in the division and to be honest, at times, it showed. In the first half the setting sun directly opposite us made viewing of the game difficult, but not the planes taking off from the nearby airport. In this period Stopsley had nearly all the possession, but they created few scoring chances, missing the few they did make. Brache (no connection with the

old Brache Sparta) simply couldn't get into the game. By halftime the lights had been switched on, but two of the lights (out of six pylons) weren't very bright and they shone mostly on the athletics track. Meanwhile the 'pushing the baby in the pram' around the athletics track Olympics had started and was won easily by the home secretary, made easy for him as he was the only competitor! Stopsley were still dominating in the second half, and they did 'score' on 59 minutes, but the goal was disallowed for offside, shortly after Brache managed to have their first shot of the game. Gradually the hosts came into the match, and it was during one of their rare forays into the opposition's half they managed to score the only goal of the game, coming completely against the run of play and out of the blue (or dark!) when the ball was turned in at close range from a cross on 81 minutes. Thereafter Brache grew in confidence, leaving Stopsley little time to do anything about it.

*contributed on 23/11/22*

**TT No.75: Steve Hardy** - Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> November 2022; **Sutton United** v Balsall & Berkswell; Birmingham FA Vase - 2<sup>nd</sup> Round; Result: 2-1; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 95 H/C

When I spotted that Midland Combination side Sutton United, from Sutton Coldfield, were playing their first match on their brand-new purpose-built ground today, going there was an easy decision to make.

It would be true to say that the new ground is a work in progress as some of my photographs will show. The main floodlit 4G pitch is finished, as is the super clubhouse and a smaller 6 a side 4G pitch. Er that's it! Loads of diggers, tractors and mud everywhere but the plans in the clubhouse show it will be pretty snazzy when it is finished.

The main pitch is NOT in a cage (hoorah!) and spectators can walk around all 4 sides (double hoorah). Free admission today resulted in a very healthy crowd of nearly 100, including several B&B supporters which was good to see.

I really enjoyed the game too. Sutton are top of Division 2 in the Midland League, with B&B mid table in the division below. Both teams played some really attractive football, with the fun starting on 30 minutes with a Sutton penalty for handball, which was brilliantly saved by the B&B keeper. The league website would have you believe that Sutton had scored their opener in the first minute, but they hadn't. It actually came from that rarity of a goal straight from a corner, and I made it on 36 minutes myself. 1-0 at the break then.

The second half was equally as close, and I wasn't surprised to see B&B equalise on 79 minutes. With the spectre of penalties looming large though, Sutton hit the winner on 86 minutes to clinch their spot in the 3<sup>rd</sup> round.

Is it or isn't it a new ground though? The set-up is behind the Coleshill Garden Centre which rang a bell in my head. Back in 2012 when I was starting out on the quest to visit every ground in the Birmingham AFA, I had been to the Coleshill Garden Centre to see Parkfield Amateurs playing there. I have no photos from that

time though, so my guess is that the grass pitch there has simply been dug up to allow the shiny new plastic version to be built on the same footprint.

Nice to see that my beloved came to the game today too. She didn't get out of the car of course as it was too cold, but it's a start!

contributed on 20/11/22

**TT No.74: Craig Dabbs** - Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> November 2022; **Heybridge Swifts** v Hereford; FA Trophy Second Round; Venue: Scraley Road; Result: 3-0; Admission: £10.00; Programme: 32pp, £2.00; Attendance: 474

Heybridge is a large village that sits just to the north of and adjoining the town of Maldon in Essex. Within the village on Scraley Road you will find a former carrot field that is now the proud home to Heybridge Swifts and has been since 1966.

The club were formed in 1880 and Scraley Road is their fourth home after an unhappy time playing at Sadd's Athletic on the back of losing their previous long-term home Bentalls Sports Ground, where along with the cricket club much of their equipment was thrown out or destroyed. The club was on its knees when carrots were swapped for footballs and Scraley Road most certainly saved them.

The ground is covered on three sides; the oldest West Stand is named the Mick Gibson Family Stand, this structure dates from those early days and was extended in the 1980's with bench seating added to it. The two other stands were constructed around the same time with the covered terrace on the far side (running up to the main entrance) completed in 1995 - it partly blew down and the ground was closed for a short time whilst it was rebuilt. The main stand dates from 1996 giving the ground seating for 550 and overall cover for 1,200.

At present the club are doing well and sit just inside the play off places in the league. They are also on a good FA Trophy run having seen off Beckenham Town, Chipstead, Potters Bar Town and Royston Town prior to Hereford arriving. Heybridge easily beat their opponents this afternoon and certainly didn't look like a club playing two levels below them.

*contributed (via Brian Buck) on 20/11/22*

**TT No.73: Keith Aslan** - Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> November 2022; **LUTTERWORTH ATHLETIC** v Wellingborough Whitworth; Spartan South Midlands Division 1; Kick Off: 15.02; Result: 2-1; Admission: £3 for those of a certain vintage; Programme: £1; Attendance: 46 (36 home, 0 away & 10 neutral)

Trains running today so the worlds my oyster. Not quite. East Anglia, no trains anywhere near Liverpool Street. North East, line shut north of Peterborough, West Country and Wales, no go either with Great Western Trains having a bonus strike day. North West, didn't fancy playing Russian roulette on Avanti Trains. Other than that, I could go where I wanted. Brilliant, absolutely brilliant.

Lutterworth Athletic are currently playing at the old Leicester City training ground. Easy to get to with literally millions of buses out from the city centre. The 15-minute ride passed by the rugby, football, athletics and cricket grounds. This is only their second 'home' league game of the season having been given away fixtures to allow time to lay a plastic pitch. Rather pointless as the contractors haven't even started yet at their Hall Park ground and the club are anticipating spending the rest of the season in Leicester. So, no rush to visit given they have fifteen home matches to squeeze into the last three months of the season. The ground is the home of former Leicestershire Leaguers Leicester YMCA, so if you've done them, you've done this, but I guarantee you won't recognise anything if you do a re-visit

Leicester City moved to a brand-new training complex in 2018. Nothing wrong with this one but I suppose if you've got so much money splashing about you've got to spend it on something. The place is now used for their youth and women's teams and covers a very large area with pitches all over the place. Lutterworth play on the only plastic one that I could see. You'll get wet if it rains, which it did today, but at the right times. A standing area along one side and that's it. It clearly doesn't meet South Midland League ground grading requirements, but common sense has come into play here. The floodlights weren't much kop but just about did the job. The big selling point here is the surrounding mesh fence was not green like everywhere else, but blue. Teas and coffees were served in the changing room block before the match and at half time. Very effective were the doors to the changing rooms which all had life sized photographs on them of Leicester City legends, and Emil Heskey. The drinks were served by the chairman Mick English, a true legend, who began playing for Athletic as a sixteen-year-old, and managed the youth, then the first team for many years. A wickedly good programme for a pound with lots of interesting reading, particularly the club histories, and a laminated cover.

Don't know quite what to make of the game. A fairly good first half with the score at one apiece at half time. The second period was all a bit bitchy but sprung into life two thirds of the way through when the bitchiness escalated into a full-blown punch up which upped the entertaining quotient no end particularly as the fisticuffs all took place right in front of me. If the referee had had the benefit of Var the game would have been abandoned as there wouldn't have been enough players left on the pitch to complete the match. I have a lot of sympathy for the referee and it must have been an impossible task to work out who to send off, but one booking and one dismissal seemed an unduly lenient response to the carnage. Lutterworth won it with a cracking goal fifteen minutes from the end and they then gave an impeccable display of game management, or time wasting as it used to be called. So bad was it that the referee even gave a free kick against the goalie for holding on to the ball too long. The 'six second rule' is usually ignored, but the keeper was pushing it at what must have been over 20 seconds.

The World Cup starts today, with the excitement almost non-existent, I hope there's something good on the other channels. The portents are good for an England victory. And before you start thinking that dementia has finally kicked in, consider this. The last time England won the World Cup it was played in a country

that, like Qatar, homosexuality was illegal. And if that isn't an omen, I don't know what is.

*contributed on 20/11/22*

**TT No.72: Brian Buck** - Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> November 2022; **Ten-Em-Bee** v Minster; NRG 24HR Kent County League Premier Division; Result: 0-7; Attendance: 10.

Today I used public transport, and I encountered no problems getting to the ground, changing trains at Blackfriars and eventually alighting at Beckenham Hill from where the ground is a leisurely 15 minutes' walk away. The entrance to it is well signposted and involves a short walk down a road lined by cedar trees, which soon brings you out into an arena which houses two pitches, both with dugouts, plus a small floodlit arena for 5-a-side football.

The name of Ten Em Bee came from the merging between the Tenth Branch of the Metal Box company which is where they all worked in Rotherhithe and the Brixton Beehive. In July 1975 Ten Em Bee was born. But today the place looked distinctly quiet. I looked for the bar. There was one, but it was not in use as it was being prepared for a party later on. One of the lino's was here already though, but he didn't know where the nearest pub was, so I sat on one of the outdoor benches they have here and waited 50 or so minutes for the game to start. Later this lino informed me that there was a McDonald's 200 yards away which I usually only use to go to the toilet! But he and his fellow lino, neither no longer in their prime, were starting to get a bit worried. Where was the ref? Eventually the relief on their faces became evident when they saw him rock up in his car some 25 minutes before kick-off.

Meanwhile I was asking everyone I saw if they knew how Ten-Em-Bee got their name. As you could see from the attendance, this didn't take long! But eventually two of the crowd, namely the league chairman and his wife appeared, and it was she who gratefully helped me out, in between taking photos for the league. I spent most of the game talking to the father of one of the Minster players and his dog! He was worried as although they do win away from home, it is usually only by the odd goal. They were in second place and the hosts third from bottom, so an away win was expected. Their manager is a school teacher and actually taught my 'friends' son and most of the players playing today, although he no longer teaches at the school my 'friends' son played for.

The game was played out on the furthest pitch to the clubhouse and for a large chunk of the first half you would have been hard pressed to choose which side was highest placed in the league. Ten-Em-Bee looked as good as their opponents. Then on 27 minutes Minster scored with a header from about ten yards out, which went in off the post. A third goal followed on 42 minutes, a stooping low header from close range and if that hadn't put the game out of reach of the hosts, then the fourth one on 53 minutes from the spot, following a handball, did. By now the hosts were getting a bit cheesed off and so corrective action by the ref was required. On 66 minutes what appeared to be a studs showing tackle was only punished by a yellow card. On reflection I think that he was right as the player concerned made a genuine attempt to get to the ball. It was just that he got there

late! Matters weren't helped by the recipient of the tackle, who acted as though he had broken his leg, but was perfectly all right when the game restarted. Then on 73 minutes Ten-Em-Bee had a player sent off, (maybe the same player) for picking up a second yellow. This was too much for them to cope with and Minster scored three late goals to easily win this match once they got going.

*contributed on 15/11/22*

**TT No.71: Jon T Green** - Saturday 12th November 2022; **RUNCORN LINNETS** v. Kidsgrove Athletic; Northern Premier League - West Division; Venue: Murdishaw Avenue; Result: 2-0; Admission: £10; Programme: £2; Attendance: 569

On Remembrance Weekend it would be wrong not to start without a mention for those who have, and continue, to serve our country. Not only was a two-minute silence immaculately observed but Runcorn had gone much further inviting members of the local sea cadets, the Cheshire Regiment Association and the town's Mayor and Mayoress to attend a short service before kick-off. The following day representatives from the club laid wreaths at a local war memorial.

Founded in 2006, as a successor to the original Runcorn AFC, the club are named after the Linnets Park housing estate upon which the now defunct teams Canal Street ground had once stood. The first four years were spent as tenants of Witton Albion in nearby Northwich before they finally returned to the Murdishaw area of town in 2010. The clubhouse was given an extensive makeover in 2017 as a part of a wider retail and leisure development plan and three years later a state-of-the-art pitch was installed. Thankfully for us purists the surface is still primarily grass but interwoven with fibres to produce a strong and durable hybrid surface, certainly it looked pretty good today with no signs of wear and tear.

Runcorn feels as though it's a town that wants to move you on to somewhere else; the motorway to the south seductively mentions North Wales whilst, if you are not careful, the two main roads will sweep you over impressive bridges and on into Widnes and Merseyside. This is a shame though because, on an almost spring like November day, a stroll through the old town and along the promenade besides the Manchester Ship Canal was extremely pleasant.

Back at the ground it's a hive of activity with numerous junior training sessions and matches taking place on the outside pitches around the main stadium. Murdishaw Avenue (or to give it the current sponsored title The Apec Taxis Stadium) is a very well-appointed facility: the Main Stand with nearly 150 green and yellow seats is of the prefabricated variety and sits astride the halfway line. Opposite are the dug outs and to each side of these two opened sided shelters akin to the sort used to store supermarkets trollies. The far end (which nominally seems to be the "away" section) is flat standing beneath a simple metal roof. The bulk of the home supporters gather on the covered metal stepped terrace behind the goal primarily, I suspect, because it's closer to the clubhouse bar than for any great view of the action. The pitch is surrounded by individually sponsored plastic panelling - the Linnets seem to be particularly popular in Scandinavia which perhaps ties in with the town being originally founded to guard against a Viking invasion!!!!

To be honest I found this game a somewhat difficult watch; it wasn't as though it was a poor match, in fact it was precisely to the contrary. The players passed and moved with a muscular athleticism, the ball went where it was supposed to and both sides were tactically astute. All well and good but when you are used to a much lower standard it was something of a culture shock. For heaven's sake there was even a proper sized crowd in attendance and not one which you could "head count" in about 20 seconds either. It was all extremely professional and maybe that's what caused my disquiet.

On the pitch Runcorn deservedly claimed all three points to maintain their promotion push against a Kidsgrove team who worked hard but created very few chances. The first half was goalless; indeed, it was popular opinion during the break that it would stay this way; however, with 66 minutes played the deadlock was broken. Who actually scored is a matter of opinion: certainly, it was centre forward Jamie Rainford who turned and shot and certainly it was Scott Lycett who deflected the ball beyond his own 'keeper but as to whether the initial shot was on target is another question. The League have ruled that it was an "OG" with the club crediting their own man. If it turns out that Rainford is denied the first then he most definitely scored the second deep into added time as he moved onto a long bouncing downfield punt before neatly lobbing the advancing Ryan Brown.

Despite my personal misgivings about the match, Linnets are a club who should be visited. Top notch facilities, knowledgeable fans and a first class printed programme - there is nothing not to like. For me, I'm off to watch a game at Step 8 where the ball will be regularly hooved into a neighbouring field of cows.....

*contributed on 15/11/22*

**TT No.70: Steve Hardy** - Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> November 2022; **VIP International** v **GXNG**; FA Sunday Cup 2nd Round; Result: 5-0; Admission: £4; Programme: £1; Attendance: 48 H/C.

For my second round Sunday Cup tie, it was off to Earlswood Town for my first visit since December 1989. Earlswood is rural. Very rural. It was certainly the first time I have been advised not to tread in any cow pats on the way in, anyway.

The match featured VIP International, who I saw in the last round, entertaining GXNG from Coventry. Nobody had any idea what GXNG stands for, although I learned subsequently that it is a clothing brand, started by people who want to make people aware that the word Gang doesn't just mean violent drug dealers. Good sentiment I reckon.

The match turned out to be another cracker and was definitely not a 5-0 game. The first half finished 0-0 with GXNG much the better side I thought, but that was as good as it got for them. VIP scored the crucial opener on 46 minutes and after an hour a GXNG player was sent off for two bookable offences. From the resultant free kick VIP scored number two and that was that. Heads went down and VIP scored three more to clinch their place in round 3.

In the Sunday Cup, all clubs must issue a match programme. Very few bother, of course, so it was good to find a full colour 4 pager issued by VIP.

*contributed on 14/11/22*

**TT No.69: Keith Aslan** - Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> November 2022; **RUGBY BOROUGH** v Buckingham Athletic; Spartan South Midlands League Premier. Kick Off: 13.59. Result: 6 - 2. Admission for the elderly: £3. Programme £1. Attendance: 68 (59 home, 0 away & 9 neutral).

If you're only interested in the football I'd skip the first paragraph (and the last). A two-week window of trains actually running on a Saturday before the next strike. Not through Broadstairs they aren't, South East trains are celebrating a rare Saturday of running trains by not running any. But it gets better, two Rail Replacement buses an hour to Ramsgate arriving 2 and 12 minutes AFTER the HST to London has departed. I had an interesting telephone conversation with one of their drones suggesting it might be good customer service to run a bus 5 minutes earlier to actually connect with a train. His disinterest was palpable. Not wanting to hang about at Ramsgate station for 48 minutes I made the journey on a service bus. It was free with my bus pass (which I got six years after everybody else) but imagine having to pay the extra fare on top of the ridiculous price of the trip to London which included a 'High Speed Supplement'. Well worth paying extra for the 'quick' journey time with the website showing 2 hours 11 minutes for the 86-mile run from Broadstairs to St. Pancras. Euston was its usual chaotic self with Avanti wiping out most of its trains. Nothing at all to Glasgow, but as a treat, my train to Wolverhampton was extended to Preston, effectively cramming four trains worth of passengers/customers onto one service. Only place to sit was in first class with the guard staying firmly locked in his little room out of a sense of self preservation. Hardly worth mentioning we were 20 minutes late arriving in Rugby.

I like Rugby, been there many times and it's a really nice place. A bonus for me was that since my last visit they've moved Greggs, so an unexpected new tick. The Borough play a long way out of town, a hopper has walked it from the station in slightly over an hour, which was never going to be an option for me, not with an irregular bus service to within a 5-minute walk of the ground. Irregular it may be, but the times fit in perfectly with the football. An impressive set up, pretty new by the looks of it, with indoor and outdoor facilities for those strange people who exercise for fun. I didn't realise it was plastic until I looked down from the top of the entrance and saw the green mesh fence surrounding the pitch. A good ground though, with two seated stands, one along the side and the other in a corner offering a surprisingly good view of proceedings. A hatch supplied a wide variety of hot food while you could sit in the clubhouse and watch the lunchtime football.

Only team I know that's sponsored by a car park, and a large banner proclaims 'Mill Road Car Park - the place to park'. Not really, it's in town and a long way from the ground. I felt at home here, and the afternoon was complete when I won the 50/50 draw. Not a life changing amount, but nice all the same. Considering this was just a run of the mill mid-table game it attracted an inordinate amount of groundhoppers. I can only assume somebody must have tipped them off that I was

going! A minute's silence was observed for Remembrance Day, so much more dignified than the clapping we usually get. Pin up boy on the front cover of the programme was Tommy Glasscoe who I learnt 'Always gives 110%' I find just giving 100% usually does the trick.

This was a game of two halves with Rugby winning the first 46 minutes and Buckingham winning the second 47. The home side were already 6-0 ahead at the interval making the second half pretty irrelevant. Indeed, Buckingham only held out for 18 seconds before going a goal down, and not to put too fine a point on it, were pretty rubbishy in the first half. A big improvement after the break, but not big enough to pull back a six-goal deficit. The referee added two minutes onto the second half. No injuries, no time wasting and no stoppages of any kind. Why do they do it?

Got back to Rugby station after the match and had a little chuckle to myself on discovering my train was cancelled. It was Avanti of course and the reason for the cancellation was 'lack of traincrew'. So, no surprises there then. To quote their website 'Avanti West Coast are working hard to rebuild their timetable in a resilient and sustainable way' And a right mess they're making of it.

*contributed on 13/11/22*

**TT No.68: Brian Buck** - Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> November 2022; **Milton United** v Wyrley United; Staffs Senior Challenge Vase 2<sup>nd</sup> Round; Result: 2-3; Attendance: 30 approx.

Today I was very grateful to get a lift. I was dropped off at the ground about 20 minutes before kick-off, with the last part of the journey becoming a bit tortuous as we believed that in the last four miles, we passed at least 13 speed cameras! Not to be confused with the Milton United of the Hellenic league, I'd been to the club's previous Leek Road ground once before, on 1<sup>st</sup> September 1999, when, in front of a crowd of about 70, I saw them lose 3-1 to Stone Dominoes in a Springbank Vending Midland League match.

That ground is still there and these days it's used by the nearby Abbey Hulton United's youth teams. The hosts new ground is at the Hardman Centre, Millrise Road, a few hundred yards west of their old ground and it's better for them as it's in a large complex where they have numerous other pitches, some of which have dugouts. Apparently there had been nine youth games here earlier in the day and a further nineteen matches were scheduled here next day. Our match was played out on Pitch 5, which was railed off and had a 34-seater stand. This was needed today as on a blustery day, it rained at times during the game. The clubhouse seemed to double up as a community centre as well and I was able to have a pre-match pint before the start. It must attract tourists as well as there were plenty of leaflets around, telling you all the things you can see and do locally.

The game was a curious one and in the first half the Staffs County Senior League hosts were completely dominated by the visitors, who play at a step higher, in the West Midlands (Regional) League. They took the lead on 4 minutes after the ball was forced home from close range following a mad scramble inside the six-yard

box. There was no certainty that a goal had been scored though until the players trooped back to the centre circle. The lead was doubled on 34 minutes when the scorer jumped highest to head home a long cross. Then the third goal followed on 43 minutes after a loose ball was lashed home. That seemed to be it, but at the start of the second half Milton brought on two lively wingers and they caused Wyrley all sorts of problems. Some friction followed as well as the visitors reacted after no longer having everything going their own way. Gradually Milton reduced the arrears, firstly on 61 minutes, from an unmarked position following a short diagonal pass and secondly on 76 minutes when a wide free kick was expertly deflected home. The game finished as it started, with confusion, when Milton pushed everyone up, including the keeper, for a corner. Just about everyone had a go at either scoring or defending and when the ref blew his whistle no one was quite sure if it was for a goal, or the end of the match. It was for the latter.

Afterwards I walked the one and a half miles to where my friend was watching Hanley Town play. On the way the heavens opened, and we had the heaviest rain of the day and I got soaked! I arrived here with just enough time to have a post-match pint, before it was time to go home. My previous visit here was on 6 February 1988 when I saw Hanley Town beat Pilkington Recreation 2-1 in a Focus TV Mid-Cheshire League Division 1 match (attendance: 30 approx). At the time, although it was a decent ground, it looked a little ramshackle. These days it is much improved by comparison, and I enjoyed my short time here.

*contributed on 08/11/22*

**TT No.67: Jon T Green** - Saturday 5th November 2022 **CAERAU (ELY) v.** Cwmamman United; Ardal South West; Venue: Cwrt yr Ala Road; Result: 3-1; Admission: £4 including a free tea or coffee; Admission: £4 (includes a free half-time tea or coffee); Programme: No; Attendance: 26 (head count).

“When you come to Wales” said the gateman momentarily popping out from under his large golfing umbrella “you get proper rain”. Given the downpour sweeping across the ground some sixty minutes before kick-off it was hard to doubt the wisdom of his words.

Even with the help of a satnav, Caerau’s Cwrt yr Ala Road ground is not easy to find. A large housing estate sprawls away from a busy four lane highway hurtling traffic between the M4 and the southern outskirts of Cardiff. Once in the maze of houses, looking for the tell-tale floodlights becomes difficult (even more so because it turns out that there aren’t any!!!) but with a little perseverance and a slice of luck you’ll pass under a noisy road bridge and, before heading out into uncharted territory, the ground miraculously appears on your right. A description of “hidden“ doesn’t even begin to do it justice. It’s as though the bridge separates the world of homes and suburban living from a rural retreat where a football ground is surrounded by trees and views of gently rising hills.

A central driveway divides the club house and changing rooms from the ground itself - both are protected from unwanted visitors by high perimeter fences and it’s noticeable that the stands have metal shutters fitted to them in the style that you might see on a high street shop. It’s a sad fact that too many clubs in Wales

have been the target of mindless vandalism so, whilst the shutters are ugly and a little obstructive, no one could doubt that they are a necessary deterrent. The ground, now also home to Cardiff City Ladies, consists of two stands - the first, and original one, is a red brick construction with a gentle sloping metal roof. Six rows of, mostly, green seats bring a vibrant splash of colour and, although the roof supports do slightly obstruct the view, the proximity of the built-in dugouts can provide a lively view of the action. Opposite is a newer build stand with approximately 145 red seats; the rest of the ground is undeveloped but with hard standing on only three sides as the far end of the pitch has no spectator access.

Welsh for “fort”, Caerau are in good form with a run of league and cup victories whilst today’s visitors have taken just one point from a possible nine during October, a return which sees them hovering just one place above the relegation zone. On a squishy surface, and with rain still falling, Cwmamman started in positive fashion with Charlie Davies showing remarkably fine footwork before sending his right footed shot curling just wide. Home ‘keeper Josh Murray was then called into a great double save; first he parried Kieran Richards drive before responding quickly to Kyle Ashford’s follow up header. With 20 minutes played Caerau rather surprisingly took the lead; there seemed to be no danger as George Sheppard’s cross looped towards Chris Dunkley but United’s ‘keeper, under no real pressure, spilled the ball and Hywel Davies had the easiest of finishes from close range. The goal rather took the wind out of the visitors sails and they found themselves two behind at the half hour mark; Liam Bishop’s surging run was unceremoniously stopped by full back Cory Saunders, and, from the resulting free kick, Bishop dummied leaving Calum Bateman to drive an unstoppable shot beyond the five-man defensive wall. Cwmamman then deservedly pulled a goal back before the break; a short corner was worked on the right and when the ball came in Murray, another victim of the slippery conditions, failed to gather cleanly and Gwion Howell poked home the rebound.

The hosts almost added a third shortly after the restart as Bateman, on the turn, deftly executed a chip which unluckily clipped the top of the crossbar. With conditions becoming increasing strength sapping both sides made multiple substitutions which did little to help the flow of the game. Caerau seemed to be caught between going for the kill and not wanting to concede with United struggling to create a meaningful chance. The final goal of the afternoon arrived with just six minutes remaining and it went to the home side. Again, there seemed to be no danger as Cwmamman retained possession inside of their own penalty area but, as Bateman half blocked an attempted clearance, the ball rolled into the path of Bishop who clinically converted from six yards. This was another hugely enjoyable visit to the Welsh leagues who continue to serve up an exciting fast paced brand of football played out at some wonderfully scenic venues.

*contributed on 07/11/22*

**TT No.66: Craig Dabbs** - Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> November 2022; **Rowsley '86** v Yorkshire Main; Central Midlands League, League Cup Second Round; Venue: Rowsley Recreation Ground; Result: 4-3; Admission: Free; Programme: 4pp, free; Attendance: 23.

A tip off that there would be a one-off programme led me to the small village of Rowsley in the beautiful Derbyshire Dales just inside the Peak District. It's really one of my favourite places to visit, although today's trip was met with overcast skies and drizzle spoiling the views a little.

Rowsley '86 started life in 1981 as Duke William FC playing in the Matlock & District League and in Matlock itself. The club moved into the Hope Valley League, changed their name to Horseshoe Matlock and then finally in 1986 they found a home in the village of Rowsley, became Rowsley '86 and settled down. The club's next move was to the Midland Regional Alliance, a step up and one where they achieved success, winning numerous titles, before another move up into the Central Midlands League in 2018.

The club were playing at step seven last season, but internal problems saw them seek voluntary relegation into Division One West for this season, as they try and rebuild. The ground is rather basic with it roped down just the one side for the small number of spectators they get. They have a small building on site which aside from the changing rooms has a small tea hut in the middle and a small overhang to the front if you wish to watch from a distance. I was not disappointed and found it a welcoming place with some lovely views when the clouds did occasionally shift, and the standard of football wasn't bad either.

Rowsley were underdogs against Premier North opponents, Edlington based Yorkshire Main. The home side were fielding a team that only had one substitute and the writing looked to be on the wall when Main scored two early goals. The visitors began to take their foot off the gas and looked a little less serious about the game. Rowsley rallied and worked their way back into it taking control. Main realised at this point that the match was getting away from them and when their manager got sent off, they couldn't get back into it, despite grabbing a late third goal when Rowsley team were just caught napping for a second. Cool heads and focused minds won the day.

*contributed (via Brian Buck) on 06/11/22*

**TT No.65: Steve Hardy** - Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> November 2022; **Desi** v Sutton Select; Birmingham & District League Holder Cup - Round 2; Result: 3-5; Admission and Programme: Free; Attendance 2 H/C.

I played the plastic pitch card again yesterday after a good, few games in my area were called off due to the recent rains.

My match of choice took place at Lordswood Girls School on the Bearwood/Harborne border in Birmingham. Only 20 miles from home, what could possibly go wrong? Well, Bearwood did for a start. It must be the most difficult town in England to actually drive through, with clogged traffic, double parking wherever you want to park, and seemingly driving on both sides of the road if you feel like it. I wonder how many of the drivers I queued up behind, had driving licences? Fewer than 50% I would guess, as the standard of driving was dreadful.

So, somewhat later than anticipated by Sarah the Satnav, I finally reached the school, and made my way over the muddy playing fields to the floodlit 4G pitch in a cage, where my friends from Desi were entertaining Sutton Select in a Birmingham & District cup tie, the Holder Cup. Desi are in division two of the league with Select one division above them in division one, and to be honest the difference in class really told today with Select much the better team once they got going.

The game started with Select scoring after just 5 minutes, but Desi getting straight back into it by equalising 3 minutes later. Select then scored again on 38 minutes from a clearly offside position and led 2-1 at the break. The next goal was crucial I thought, and it was Desi who scored it on 50 minutes when a shot slipped through the Select keeper's hands. Sadly, that was as good as it got for Desi as Select quickly scored two more goals on 53 and 60 minutes respectively to lead 2-4. Credit Desi though as they pulled one back on 73 minutes, but it wasn't enough as Select sealed a deserved win with their fifth late on.

So, just one ground to visit now to recomplete the BADL. You will be delighted to hear that the club concerned don't have a home game in November at all, so no more BADL reports from me for a while. I have to say though, today's match was another cracker and I have yet to see a duff game in the league so far this season. Also delighted to learn that my last ground is nowhere near Bearwood, as I really don't want to go there ever again, thank you very much!

*contributed on 06/11/22*

**TT No.64: Keith Aslan** - Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> November 2022; **MINSTER** v Bromleians; Kent County Premier; Kick Off: 13.59; Result: 2-1; Admission: Free; Programme: On-line only (boo); Attendance: Official 25 (my headcount 24 - 22 home, 0 away & 2 neutral).

Another trainless Saturday. At half past four on Friday, just before they all went home for the weekend, the R.M.T. had an epiphany and called the strike off for no particular reason. Too late to run any trains of course so everybody came in and got paid for doing nothing. Christmas is coming and the brothers don't want to lose any more money. I used to be in the R.M.T. for many years and they aren't very good.

Without trains, even going to a village eight miles from my country dacha presents major logistical obstacles. Getting there is easy, but in August the council committed genocide on the local buses and the last one of the day now leaves Minster at 14.15. I faced a long and dangerous walk back to Ramsgate after the match, so thanks go to a fellow hopper who gave me a lift to a bus stop that still has buses running at 4 o'clock in the afternoon. If you are fortunate enough to visit Minster when strikes and engineering works allow some trains, the ground is only a 7-minute walk from the station if you take the short cut off the end of the platform. It's well worth tarrying a while in Minster Village, bigger than you'd expect, with plenty of food and drink emporiums. The monastery is usually open

for visitors where the monks produce and sell some excellent honey (It's the bees that actually produce it, but you know what I mean).

This is the Kent County League so best not to expect too much in the way of facilities then you won't be disappointed. The one big plus here is that there is plenty of cover outside the changing rooms which was the preferred location for most of the spectators on a day when Mr. Drizzle featured prominently. A rope round the pitch and that was your lot. Tantalizingly there was a small hall with a serving hatch for teas and coffees which remained steadfastly shut. A chair was bought out for the elderly referee assessor who bravely sat on the half-way line throughout the match getting very wet. If I was assessing, I'd have cowered under the shelter with everybody else. Much kudos to him.

As a general rule e-programmes are the work of Satan, but not so the one at Minster for which the alternative would be nothing at all. Spent time the preceding week chatting to the programme editor. Illness means he can no longer get to games, and he edits programmes as a way of keeping involved. Also does them for Hawkinge and Metrogas. Obviously, he isn't in a position to paperize them, and the chairman/secretary/ball boy at Minster has been trying to get copies printed out, so far without success. It is a really good read; well laid out with everything you could want, and I hope to soon have it magically transformed into paper with a little help from my friend. Player profile was of lanky 18-year-old centre half Mark Weatherley: Favourite food: Lasagne, favourite drink: Strongbow and favourite all time player: Declan Rice (you what!)

On paper this should have been a walkover for the home side, but the game isn't played on paper and it's 11 against 11. Minster's first season in the Premier division has so far been a very successful one and they started the game two points behind the leaders and finished it one point behind. On the other hand, Bromleians are bottom of the table and have yet to win a game this season. With their first shot on target Bromleians took a surprise lead on the half hour with Minster equalizing before the break. After an ELEVEN MINUTE half time the second period was very even and Minster needed a penalty to win the game, with the Broms creating plenty of opportunities to get a point. Don't see them being winless much longer.

Uniquely I got home in time to listen to Sports Report which was very nice.

*contributed on 06/11/22*

**TT No.63: Brian Buck** - Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> October 2022; **South Bank Cuaco** v Alexandra Park; AFA Senior Cup 1<sup>st</sup> Round; Result: 3-2; Attendance 10 approx.

Today saw me make a rare trip on the trains to get here, passing close to the visitors ground on the way, news of which impressed them so much I was awarded an honorary away fan for the day. I eventually alighted at Herne Hill station, from where the ground was about a 15 minutes' walk away, off a turning in Turney Road. Buses 3 and 201, from the station pass close by.

This was a busy day for the hosts as eight out of their nine teams had games. The third's game was called off because the visitors couldn't raise a team. All their

teams won, except for the ninth's and fifth's, who lost. But the fifth's did lose to the fourth's! With five of these games due to be at home, kicking off at different times, this was a busy day for the club, although two of them, I think, were switched to other venues close by.

The club is a merger of two clubs. South Bank used to be known as South Bank Polytechnic. CUACO Football Club was formed in 1919 as the Football Section of the Commercial Union and Associated Offices Athletic Club. The name of the Club remained the same until 1999 when it changed to CGU CUACO following a merger between Commercial Union and General Accident. In 2001 the Club merged with South Bank to become South Bank CUACO. This followed another merger between CGU and Norwich Union which resulted in Norwich Union selling the Copers Cope Road ground in Beckenham to Crystal Palace Football Club. I visited CUACO on 5 December 1984 where I saw the Southern Amateur League draw 1-1 with the Old Boys League in a Representative Match (att: 70 approx). In those days most rep games were played in the afternoon, and you could pick up new grounds almost weekly from these strictly amateur leagues and get team sheet programmes.

Today I arrived early enough to have a couple of pre-match pints in the clubhouse, where on my arrival I was greeted by a friendly dog. As the late Mick Burt would often say in his match reports, they had a well-stocked tea bar here as well. But at this stage of proceedings, they were just getting things ready for later on. It was an unseasonably warm day and on the clock in the clubhouse it showed 21 degrees.

The match was played out on the pitch nearest the car park, and I sat watched on the wall separating the two to watch it! However, if this was their main pitch then in one part, it was a very poor one, sloping, bumpy and devoid of grass. The visitors, from Division 2 of the Southern Amateur League were expected to beat their Division 3 hosts, but ultimately some poor defending would let them down on the day. The match had three veteran match officials and started without corner flags, a problem which was soon remedied.

South Bank took the lead on 4 minutes, seemingly direct from a corner but Park were level on 18 minutes, by way of a back header from a long throw on this narrow pitch. But just before half time the hosts undeservedly regained the lead when somehow the ball looped over the keeper. Then on 82 minutes the ball trickled over the line for the equaliser. But two minutes later South Bank won it when the ball was smashed home from the edge of the area. On the day they simply wanted it more than Park.

*contributed on 01/11/22*

**TT No.62: Jon T Green** - Saturday 29th October 2022; **ST ANDREWS** v. Blidworth Welfare; United Counties League - Division One; Venue: Canal Street; Result: 5-3; Admission: £6; Programme: £1; Attendance: 35.

I will freely admit to feeling the slightest pang of disappointment after discovering that, despite flying the blue and white saltire flag, St Andrews are not named in recognition of the Patron Saint but rather for the nearby housing estate. Formed in 1965, the club originally played under the pub name of the Rifle Butt but when

that, along with the surrounding area, was demolished in the early 1970's to make way for an extension to the Leicester Royal Infirmary, the club changed its name. Life began playing friendly matches before they moved into the Leicester City League, then upwards to the Leicestershire Senior League before, in 2008, becoming founder members of the East Midlands Counties League. Today, following the latest round of division reorganisations, St Andrews are members of the United Counties League.

Despite being close to a busy arterial road, Canal Street feels a surprisingly rural venue benefitting hugely from the adjacent wooded area of Aylestone Meadows Nature Reserve. The ground is reached via a narrow hump backed bridge which seems to act as some sort of time portal; on one side narrow busy back streets and on the other an oasis of tranquil greenness. Walking through the black and white painted iron gates the ground spreads out before you: the 1980's-built clubhouse, which now conveniently includes a tasty cafe, is immediately ahead across a large car park and to the left is a modern turnstile block. The Main Stand consists of three rows of bright blue tip-up seats along with more traditional green painted benches at the front and rear. Opposite, and behind one goal, the club have installed two covered open fronted shelters; at first glance they appear rather like converted containers but upon closer inspection they are clearly purpose built and decked out in a nice shade of green which blends perfectly into the background. Hard standing and a traditional concrete post and metal rail combination complete the scene at what is a really well-appointed venue.

Two red cards, two penalties and eight goals which goes to show that two teams in the lower reaches of the league can provide just as much excitement as a top of the table clash. The visitors from Blidworth experienced mixed fortunes right from the start as, within the first minute, centre forward Tom Batterham (great name for a striker) was injured going through on goal. Whilst the unlucky lad was receiving treatment his team scored; Matt Brian, looking suspiciously offside, moved cleanly onto a through ball and beat the advancing 'keeper. It didn't take long for the home side to draw level and again there was an element of controversy; Finn Batty appeared to be fouled under a high cross and, when the ball was hooked back, Shimron Thompson-Isaac applied the finishing touch. Saints were now dominating the play with Mo Sesay, Jermaine Corbin and Jurelle Philip all having worthwhile attempts on goal. The latter was sporting a pair of shorts so tight and high cut that it looked like a re-run of The Big Match from the 1980's. With a little over half an hour played, Saints went in front as their tall striker Matt Collison found the bottom corner with a shot beyond the unsighted Batty. As the interval approached the home side were reduced to ten men when Kaden Stokes was shown a straight red for a high tackle. Whilst the decision was undoubtedly correct, this was a shame for Stokes who was having a productive afternoon in midfield.

The second half opened with Brian almost pulling Blidworth level but a few minutes later they found themselves three goals adrift. Firstly, Philip was upended in the box and Sesay made no mistake from the spot lifting his penalty high into the roof of the net before Collison, just staying onside, picked up a through ball and drilled it beyond Batty. Welfare responded in positive fashion as Jack James headed in a right-wing centre. With home manager Shane Gibson, exhibiting

perfect mixed messages, literally jumping up and down in frustration whilst yelling “relax” to his players, the arrears should have been reduced further as Brian found himself unmarked only to head straight at Grantas Gričius after a superb cross from Nathan Moss. Ten minutes remained as Saints re-established their three goal cushion: Philip netting from 15 yards following some great footwork from substitute Lotredge Muteera. The drama, nor the scoring, was not over though as St Andrews were reduced to nine men; the excellent Samba Gaye deemed to have been last man as he made a foul tackle in the box. Brian duly converted the penalty and there might have been another as Blidworth full back Alex Bennett struck the inside of the post with a thunderous drive. In the end it was a deserved win for the home side in a game, despite the two dismissals, played in good spirit on a wonderfully warm late Autumn afternoon.

*V2 contributed on 01/11/22*

**TT No.61: Steve Hardy** - Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> October 2022; **Castle Vale Town Spitfires v Kings Heath Rangers**; Birmingham & District League Intermediate Cup - Round One; Result: 0-3; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance 4 H/C

It is over twenty years since I last visited the Castle Vale Stadium in Birmingham. Then, I watched Paget Rangers beat Gresley Rovers 1-0 in a Southern League match. Back then the area was known as Beirut, and spectators were advised not to leave their cars in the car park, as the wheels wouldn't be there when you returned. There was rubble and rubbish everywhere, including syringes and a burned-out car. Not a pleasant experience at all.

These day's things are a lot better. Grassy parkland everywhere, no burned-out cars, and a tarted-up stadium that now has a 3G pitch installed. I also discovered that there is a railed off grass pitch behind the stadium, and with Castle Vale Town at home on the main pitch, their reserves were going to play on this grass pitch. Woo-hoo!

The Reserves are rock bottom of division 4 of the Brum AFA, with visitors Kings Heath Rangers a division above them. As usual I chose this game because I thought there would loads of goals, and all to Kings Heath.

Sadly, I was completely wrong once again. KH bossed the match from start to finish and with Vale seemingly unwilling to tackle anyone, Heath ran into a 3-0 half time lead. I expected loads more goals to follow, but none did. Vale actually tried to mount a few attacks of their own but were never in danger of actually scoring. My man of the match went to the bespectacled Vale keeper. His confidence grew as the match went on and he pulled off some wonderful saves too.

The ground is shared by Romulus and Castle Vale Town. With one or other of them going to be at home on a Saturday, then the chances are that if the Vale Reserves have a home game, then it will be played on the grass pitch.

The attendances make interesting reading too. Just 4 at my game, but only 13 at the first team match. Difficult to see how they can keep going really, and their

fabulous programme from a couple of seasons ago, has now disappeared to cut costs, I guess.

*contributed on 31/10/22*

**TT No.60: Craig Dabbs** - Saturday 29th October 2022; AFC Caddington v Bush Hill Rangers; Capital Counties Feeder Leagues Trophy Second Round; Venue: Caddington Sports & Social Club; Result: 1-3; Admission: £3; Programme: 8pp, 50p; Attendance: 71.

Somehow, I had missed this fixture in the week, fortunately spotting it on Thursday and I'm very pleased I did. Many of you will know that I require a programme from a first visit and it's not easy to obtain them from teams in the bottom division of the Spartan South Midlands League. However, I've managed to pick my fixtures down the years and only had new boys AFC Caddington to do to re-complete the division.

I spoke with someone at the club back in early September and there was no intention of issuing, so I had to exercise patience once more and wait. The club entered the CCFLT, and I know it's mandatory to issue a programme or be fined and with a home draw AFC Caddington issued a basic but perfectly acceptable programme and I was very grateful to them for that.

AFC Caddington were re-formed in 1973 as Caddington and have spent most of their existence in the SSMFL dropping out in 2013 when they struggled to raise a team. They continued in the West Herts League and made a return this season now with AFC bolted on to the front of the name.

The club play at the villages Sports & Social Club and have done so since 1981 which is also the year when Eric Morecambe and David Pleat laid their patron stones during the construction of the club, although there is evidence of the site dating back further than that, to 1962.

The current set up sees a smart clubhouse with the football club having its own space upstairs. I imagine that this pavilion is shared with cricket (which of course is played in the centre of the field) with the main football pitch closest to the clubhouse and a second pitch on the other side.

The main pitch is fenced off at the clubhouse side and partly railed at the Ledwell Road end, with no access to spectators at the opposite end and a rope over the far side. Interestingly, there is a stand here at one end and there are remains of dugouts - I believe this used to be the main pitch during the club's previous Spartan days.

The match itself pitted two sides at the same level, Bush Hill Rangers play in the Herts County Senior League which in my opinion is stronger than Division Two of the SSMFL and so it proved, although AFC Caddington kept the contest tight with some hard work.

So now that's two to go to complete the whole league. it may be this season depending on whether Aylesbury Vale Dynamoes decide to issue a programme or not. Until then, I will have to be patient.

*contributed (via Brian Buck) on 30/10/22*

**TT No.59: Keith Aslan** - Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> October 2022; **INGLES** v Smethwick Rangers; Midland League Division 1; Kick Off: 15.00; Result 6-1; Admission: £3 for old people; Programme: £1; Attendance: 38 (27 home, 9 away & 2 neutral)

Ingles play at ex-Leicestershire League Thringstone's old ground and there is an hourly bus service here from Loughborough. Another fun day on public transport, train to Loughborough, 29 minutes late. Train back to St. Pancras, 16 minutes late meaning I missed my connection to Broadstairs. And to add to the misery, the bus didn't turn up after the game. Apparently, some scumbag smashed a window and it had to be taken out of service. When I become Prime Minister and given their current lifespan, it must be my turn soon, I shall immediately bring back the death penalty, and the evil little scroat who broke the bus window will be one of the first in the electric chair (after Richard Branson of course). All this meant I got back home much later than planned, with the double whammy of having to make my way through all the ghouls and zombies that were roaming about. In some parts of the country this is known as Halloween, but here in Thanet we call it a typical Saturday night.

In spite of the travel travails my visit to Ingles was an uplifting experience. Formed in 1972 this Shepshed based club were happy to wander around the local leagues for most of their existence, but when their ground was replaced by housing in 2018, around the same time as Thringstone folded, they saw it as an opportunity, moved into the village and shot up the pyramid. And what a job they've made of upgrading the facilities here. Tarmac walkway, fully railed, and got the floodlights working again. Seating was put into the stand, a hybrid of old and new. More cover added behind the goal and a renovated clubhouse. It must have all cost a fortune; I wonder where the money came from? The people behind the club made me feel most welcome, and while most non-league clubs are very friendly, this one is friendly double plus. Clubhouse has hot and cold drinks accompanied by some major ham or cheese and onion rolls. The lunchtime football was showing on a big screen.

Nobody could have foreseen this result when Ingles, struggling near the bottom of the table, went 1-0 down after 15 minutes. They played some really good stuff from then on and totally trounced the opposition. A couple of the Smethwick supporters blamed the referee for much of their woes. No boys, you lost because Ingles were much the better side. For the record, referee Craig Patrick had a faultless match, which couldn't be said for some of the Smethwick players. Much happiness and joy at the end of the game, they'll be dancing in the streets of Ingles tonight.

No worries about late trains next week. There aren't any.

*contributed on 30/10/22*

**TT No.58: Brian Buck** - Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2022; **Waltham Cross** v Lemsford; Herts Senior County League Division 1; Venue: played at Cheshunt 3G pitch; Result: 0-1; Attendance: 25 approx.

This was not an entirely satisfactory day for me. After I got home from my previous match, I settled on a game at one of the few Northants Combination grounds I haven't been to. Initially *Twitter* didn't indicate any problems, so I wrote up my match report from my last game to kill some time before leaving home. But by the time I'd finished it a tweet had appeared saying that my game was off due to a waterlogged pitch. Bearing in mind that this was a sunny day with no sight of the previous evening's rain around, I found this equally annoying and amusing, especially when pictures of the said ground appeared on *Twitter* later, showing no waterlogging! Clubs nearby also found this laughable. But now I unexpectedly had a problem. With time ebbing away, it was difficult to find a new ground on grass which I hadn't been to before and with suspicion that there might also be other 'waterlogged' grounds around, I reluctantly played the 3G card and so settled for the one at Cheshunt.

In reality though this was no real hardship, as not only did I live in Cheshunt from 1960 to 1986, but I've also been to the main stadium pitch many times before and having seen 239 games here, this is my sixth most visited ground. My first recorded game was on 9 October 1965 when I saw Cheshunt draw 1-1 with Croydon Amateurs in an Athenian League Division 2 match. Two of those 239 games were played on a then outside training pitch. At the time I didn't count that as a new ground because they changed in the main ground. Today that area is overgrown waste land, but which will soon become housing as part of a major redevelopment of the whole Cheshunt complex.

The 3G pitch is set immediately north of the stadium pitch and is raised up so you can look down on it. In between is an extended car park, which in non-league circles is one of the bigger ones. But there's more here than I had realised. To the east of the 3G pitch is a railed off pitch with dugouts and to the north is a roped off pitch with dugouts. Additionally, there are a couple of other pitches. Inside the caged 3G pitch there is spectator viewing, but it's only on two thirds of one side. But the dugouts are on the other side of the pitch. The ground had separate dressing rooms and toilets from the main stadium where FC Romania were to lose 1-0 to AFC Dunstable.

As for the game, which was mildly entertaining, it featured the generally more skillful, newly formed this season, home side against a rather more intimidating visiting side, who gave the ref a hard time. In fact, he had to speak to one of their players just 20 seconds into the match. He even got challenged by his own son at half time about a decision he'd made! Attitudes apart, there wasn't really much between the sides in playing terms. I was rather hoping that the hosts would win but the visitors did with a well hit 30-yarder on 83 minutes. By the end I had enjoyed my nostalgic (re)visit here, which brought back memories when I came here many Saturdays in my teens when I wasn't watching Spurs 'A' play up the road at the old Spurs Training Ground at Brookfield Lane (second most visited

ground - 505 games) and in the days before I started my 50 years plus run (now ended) of not missing a Spurs first team home match.

*contributed on 25/10/22*

**TT No.57: Jon T Green** - Saturday 22nd October 2022; **HASSOCKS** v. Eastbourne United; Southern Combination Football League - Premier Division; Venue: The Beacon; Result: 0-0; Admission: £7; Programme: £1; Attendance: 140.

Let's start this week's report with a question - which Sussex village has the same name as cushions used for kneeling on in church and firm clumps of grass on boggy land? It's an easy one of course if you are a keen theologian or naturalist but, for the rest of us, the rather surprising answer is Hassocks.

There has been a club here since 1902 with games originally taking place at the centrally located Adastra Park - the park is still there today and looks to provide at least one pitch for junior or Sunday League matches. 1992 saw a parcel of land acquired on the edge of the village which, after many years of hard work, has been developed into a very well-appointed facility at the foot of the South Downs. The driveway to the ground leads to the turnstile block and immediately beyond a modern, comfortable clubhouse which, on its upper level, is shared with a local nursery group. This side of the ground is essentially flat standing but, as it's nearest to the bar, it still attracts a good level of spectators. The locally famous Jack and Jill windmills can be seen atop the nearby hills. To the right is a grass bank which, despite the FA frowning on these things, is still actively in use not least by a small group of youngsters who had a great time retrieving wayward shots whilst participating in a game of their own. The bank curves around the corner flag and continues to the main stand - a dark green painted metal construction with four rows of somewhat faded green seats. Behind this area the club are looking to develop a practice pitch, they have purchased the land and are now actively seeking local planning permission. On the far side of the stand is more grass banking along with one solitary small crush barrier. This entire side is backed by a dense hedge which helps give it a nicely enclosed feel. The remaining end is undeveloped, other than for a paved walkway, with at its rear, a stand of mature trees through which rattle barely seen trains making their way to and from Brighton.

On the pitch it looked like it was going to be a close encounter with Hassocks having won four and drawn one of their last five Southern Combination fixtures - a surge in form which has seen them move into sixth place just one position below the today's visitors from Eastbourne. The hosts open quickly with Leon Turner's run into the penalty area only stopped by a defender's out stretched leg; there was probably minimal contact but as the saying goes "I've seen 'em given". Cleaner tackling is being provided by United's Dee Okojie who clearly is a fine practitioner of this dying art. With something of a stalemate developing, the two gentlemen standing nearby began a rather surreal conversation: the younger of the two, and clearly an ex-Army officer, is explaining to his friend how he once played a game in Iraq where there was no offside. "You just wandered upfield and stood next to the goalkeeper" he explained "easiest thing in the world". Sadly, a short but sharp shower of rain somewhat truncated the story as they moved away to the

shelter of the stand, and I was left to ponder whether this created or diminished the number of goals. Maybe FIFA could instigate a feasibility study. Actually, let's not even mute that as they already think that a World Cup every two years is a good idea!! Back at The Beacon, Phil Johnson and Pat Harding were skilfully combining only for the latter to fire a somewhat tame effort towards James Broadbent. Turner's cross shot proved another routine stop for the 'keeper before, at the other end, Aaron Capon's glancing header called Alex Harris into action for the first time.

The second period began with Eastbourne's Tigana Quebe booked for a foul described by one Hassocks defender as "a cowardly challenge". It rather set the scene for the next 45 minutes as play became increasingly frantic with the number of cautions rising in direct proportion. United's Alfie Headland tried an over-the-shoulder hooked shot and, with the visitors beginning to assert some pressure, substitute Aaron Hopkinson forced Harris into a diving save to keep out his free kick from just outside the D. In the end a point apiece was about right in a highly competitive encounter played out between two teams who have their eyes set on some silverware come the end of the season.

*contributed on 25/10/22*

**TT No.56: Steve Hardy** - Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2022; **Claverdon** v Desi; Birmingham & District League Division Two; Result: 3-2; Admission and Programme: Free; Attendance: 2 H/C

When I discovered that West Midlands Railways have an offer for travel anywhere in their region for £7.50, I decided to give it a go with the longest trip I could get a new ground from. So off to Redditch it was and a visit to Matchborough, which is one of many little places that surround Redditch itself. Bus 57 from the station took me to Matchborough, and more specifically to Arrow Vale School. On the opposite side of the road from the school is yet another floodlit 4G pitch in a cage and it was there that I was able to watch Claverdon play Desi in the wonderful Brum league.

The village of Claverdon is some five miles away near Stratford Upon Avon, but I am guessing the Recreation Ground there doesn't have the facilities that the club need.

The match itself turned out to be yet another classic too. Claverdon have been scoring goals for fun this season, but in the first half they just couldn't get going at all. Desi could though and they scored a superb long-range effort on 19 minutes, followed by a second just before half time. All this despite having a player sin-binned too.

I

n the second half, Claverdon kept their composure and finally found a way of beating Desi's 9-foot-tall number 5, who was excellent throughout, and scored 3 goals themselves to record their first league win of the season. A bit harsh on Desi

I thought who had played really well, but that is why we love the game I suppose. Or not, if you suffer from being a Reading fan, as I do.

*contributed on 24/10/22*

**TT No.55: Craig Dabbs** - Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2022; **Christchurch** v Hythe & Dibden; Wessex League Premier Division; Venue: Hurn Bridge Sports Ground; Result: 1-3; Admission: £7; Programme: 28pp, Free; Attendance: 80

Now and again, you visit a club that leaves a lasting impression on you. Christchurch FC are the latest. With it being so wet over the last few days and a note of caution from the club with reference to the weather, it was nice to get a call back this morning confirming all was well. In addition, and with a degree of disbelief, I heard that a car-full coming from the East Midlands was heading to Little Christchurch. I was told to make myself known upon arrival, the programmes were reserved, and we would all be welcome for half time hospitality - you can't ask for much more than that.

We arrived a few hours later and were warmly greeted, given some lovely key rings as a gesture of gratitude and photographed for the programme, I simply can't fault Mandy and the team down there for the way they looked after us, it was very much appreciated. So, if you head down to deepest Dorset, you will receive a warm welcome in nearby Hurn, close to Bournemouth Airport.

The club was formed back in 1885 and, known locally as the "*Can't Whack Erms*" moved to Hurn Bridge in 1984, leaving their long-term Barrack Road Recreation Ground. Hurn Bridge Sports Ground was formally owned by British Aerospace, and it helped to develop the club in a good-sized space with an excellent clubhouse on site. Since then, an extension has seen added to it, the football pitch granted lights and two stands. The main stand dates from 1995 and provides seating for 200 spectators. Inside is an electronic scoreboard acquired from AFC Bournemouth who provided the additional seating to be found in the smaller seated stand which is bolted to the front of the changing room complex (reminiscent incidentally of the main stand at The Scholars, home to Chasetown from my visit there many years ago).

The site isn't just used by Christchurch FC though; alongside it is Christchurch CC and I'm pleased to see, from a football perspective, that sharing with cricket in this case doesn't mean a three-sided ground but has hard standing extending around all four sides. The cricket side of Hurn Bridge can also be found in a large building on site providing indoor cricket all year round. Finally, the site is also home to the Bournemouth Divisional Football Association who oversee local football including the Bournemouth Football League. The whole site is well looked after and is set with a lovely tree lined surround as a backdrop, well worth the visit.

Christchurch FC are currently sat a little further down the division than they would like for sure. They featured in their squad, British Virgin Islands international Luka Chalwell who made his international debut at just 16 but sadly Luka and his team mates couldn't stop a determined Hythe & Dibden side who looked just that bit

sharper than Christchurch, in a game that didn't really get going until that first goal in the second half.

TT No.54: *Keith Aslan* - Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2022; **KODAK** v Chipperfield Corinthians; Anagram Records Trophy; Kick Off:14.40; Result: 1-5; Admission: Free; Programme: £2; Attendance: 16 (7 home, 6 away & 3 neutral).

The Anagram Records Trophy is one of my favourite competitions which involves clubs from feeder leagues around London who don't qualify to enter for anything else. It gives teams who would not normally get together the opportunity to meet in competitive action, like today's Middlesex League v Herts Senior encounter. Oh yes and programmes are compulsory, a rule which, by and large, clubs adhere to.

Back in the day I saw Kodak play at their own company sports ground, now a leisure centre, but since 2014 they have made the Harrow Weald Recreation Ground very much their own with a large sign above the changing rooms announcing their tenure. Two pitches, with luminous posts and rope surrounding the 'show pitch'. Teas and coffees were available at half time, with the eight-page colour programme hidden away from prying eyes and not available to supporters unless extensive enquiries were made. A doddle to get to, situated behind Harrow bus station. Train to Harrow & Wealdstone and a choice of routes drop you off outside the ground. For the athletically inclined it's around a 15-minute walk from Headstone Lane station. Chipperfield are celebrating their Centenary season, although as they were formed in 1902, I don't know how they work that one out!

Arrived at Euston to find the concourse jam packed with everybody gazing uncomprehendingly at the Departure Board which informed them that nothing was going to happen. Signal failure had brought the place to a standstill. Although most of the rail network was providing its usual substandard service, Avanti was having its own special strike today. Only one in four trains were running, which in truth isn't much different from any other weekend. Still want to risk it? Engineering works meant the trains that were operating were going on an un-scenic detour making the journey times to Manchester or Liverpool around 4 hours. But to make things really impossible the aforementioned signal failure meant you weren't going to get in or out of London anyway. While waiting for your non-existent train you could pop next door to see how the work is coming along for the terminus for HS2. A hundred billion quid to get to Birmingham 20 minutes quicker while it's beyond the skill set of Railtrack to run any trains at all on the normal lines. It does make me cross. There was actually a solitary train leaving Euston, the London Overground service to Watford wasn't affected by the signal failure, which fortunately was the train I needed to catch. So, I'm alright Jack.

But back to the football, the match kicked off 10 minutes after it should have done due to the late arrival of the referee. He was delayed by heavy traffic. Heavy traffic in Harrow on a Saturday afternoon, he couldn't possibly have foreseen that! Chipperfield were two one up at the interval and added another three in the second half. I missed the third as I was watching a major punch up on the adjacent pitch. Entertaining top-quality combat which lasted the best part of 3 minutes, nothing so exciting in my match. Kodak are a well-run, friendly club, and the

programme told me that at its peak, it employed six thousand people in its factory at Harrow. Somewhat of a contrast to the seven supporters at today's game.

Trains continued to remain motionless on my return after the game, but the London Overground was still managing to fight its way through. I look forward to some more Anagram action in the next round.

*contributed on 23/10/22*

**TT No.53: Brian Buck** - Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> October 2022; **Toqeers Titans** v FC Bierton; Aylesbury & District League Premier Division; Venue: played at Botley Road Playing Fields, Botley Road, Botley, near Chesham; Result: 1-3;) Attendance: 9.

My choice of game today was partially governed by my need to return to Hitchin Town first of all, to retrieve my flask that had I left there after watching their FA Youth Cup match on the previous Thursday. I arrived three hours before their league game against Hednesford Town (1-1) kicked off and I was impressed by the number of staff present getting everything ready for their match later on. In fact, they outnumbered the off-field people present at my chosen game.

I was expecting this match to be played at Bellingdon, a couple of miles north west of Chesham, but on checking, I received a text from the home secretary advising that they have been playing at the address above for most of the season and that *Full-Time* was wrong. This ground is a steep uphill walk, about a mile, from Chesham Tube station. But as I went by car, I relied on my not so trusty sat nav and I was taken down some narrow country lanes, bringing back unpleasant memories of my trip to Devon a couple of months previously and by the time I arrived at the ground, I hadn't got a clue as to where I was in relation to anywhere else.

Toqeers Titans are a new club, formed in memory of a player killed in a car crash and they have been put straight into the Premier Division of this league. The helpful referee for the game is also a Groundhopper and he lives just half a mile from Bierton's ground. His brother is playing for Walthamstow this season. The match was played out on a long, narrow pitch which sloped up and down and side to side. There is also a similar pitch, same size in this pleasant complex, which is a haven for dog walkers.

As for the match, it was a battle between skill and brawn. It was a windy day, turning cold once the sun went in and, in the early stages, it looked like Toqeers, playing downhill in the first half, might struggle. By the end of the match, they were second bottom in the league, having picked up just one point from their five games. Bierton were an arrogant side, but they stayed just the right side of the referee and he didn't need to show any cards in the match.

On 26 minutes he noticed some shit on the pitch, which wasn't what I had noticed as soon as the game kicked off. The ref asked someone from the home side to come and remove it, but no one did so eventually someone from Bierton did. The first half was fairly even, but both sides struggled to deal with the strong wind. At half time the Bierton manager gave his side a bollocking. If it had been me, I

would have given him one after watching him play when he came on as sub! On 67 minutes Titans took the lead after the scorer got to a descending ball quicker than the keeper after he pushed a shot up in the air. Bierton levelled two minutes later with a deflected shot from the edge of the area and then took the lead five minutes from close range, before getting a third goal right at the end, catching Titans on the break and bringing to a close a game which got better when the goals started to go in.

*contributed on 18/10/22*

**TT No.52: Craig Dabbs** - Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> October 2022; Sheerwater v Badshot Lea; Combined Counties League Premier Division South; Venue: Eastwood Leisure Centre; Result: 0-6; Programme: 36pp, £2; Admission: £7; Attendance: 86

There are three senior clubs in Woking, Woking of course, plus Westfield (next door to Kingfield) and Sheerwater. I've been to three grounds now and all those have been Sheerwater's.

Sheerwater itself was set up by London County Council in 1948 to provide housing as an overspill for the capital. Ten years later the housing estate had its own team, Sheerwater FC playing in the Woking & District League.

The club progressed through the system and into the Combined Counties League in 2003 via the Surrey Senior League (which was renamed the Combined Counties League) and the Surrey Premier League (renamed the Surrey County Senior League).

The club has spent much of its time in Division One and playing at the frankly inadequate Recreation Ground which was an Athletics track first and foremost with a small pitch in the middle and lights only for Athletics. Faced with relegation from the league some good fortune came the club's way when the council announced a major regeneration of the estate which included building houses on the track and the outer railed pitch, and the opening of a new Leisure Centre just a few hundred yards away.

The club moved to Woking FC in 2018 when all this started, before moving to the new Eastwood Leisure Centre in 2021. The Centre cost £26 million to construct and it caters for various sporting activities with a floodlit 3G pitch complete with a 100-seater full length stand, with covered standing either side of the seats. Another feature of this particular cage is that, unlike many, you can watch from all four sides. The Leisure Centre has been set out with Sheerwater FC in mind, they have their own clubroom upstairs where you can get hot food and drink as well as having a bar too, it's self-contained and a nice touch.

Prior to the game I took a walk around the old ground where re-generation is taking place with most properties boarded up and the new housing well underway on the old site, something you could clearly see behind the one goal at the new place.

Sheerwater gained promotion to the Premier Division in 2019 but unfortunately the wheels have come off the wagon a bit when, at the end of the 21/22 season, the entire playing and coaching staff of both the first team and U23's left, leaving a massive void which explains why they are struggling a bit.

So, onto the match. As expected Sheerwater struggled against an unbeaten Badshot Lea. Having already lost 0-7 in the week against Jersey Bulls I guess this was on the cards. However, Sheerwater gave everything and could've had a fair, few goals themselves; they certainly weren't as bad as the 0-6 score-line suggested. I really hope they can sort themselves out because they are a lovely club and deserve better.

*contributed (via Brian Buck) on 17/10/22*

**TT No.51: Keith Aslan** - Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> October 2022; **KINGS HILL** v Rushtall; DFDS Kent Senior Trophy; Kick Off: 14.17; Result: 0-1; Admission & Programme: £3; Attendance: 187 (150 home, 31 away & 6 neutral)

What a day of stress free groundhopping this was. A lie in, home in time to see 'Strictly', a magnificent walk through the Kent countryside, plenty of food and drink, quality paper, and the trains behaved themselves. It's days like this that make you almost glad to be alive.

The nearest station to Kent County League Kings Hill is East Malling on the London to Maidstone line. No buses from here, but a great workout for my dodgy knees with a 33-minute limp through some of the best countryside you're likely to find anywhere in England. Multimap will tell you it's 4.1 miles, but with a trusty Ordnance Survey Map showing footpaths it's less than half that. The weather was perfect, warm and sunny, not what you would normally associate with the middle of October. Global warming was doing its job. Had company on the return with a fellow hopper whose knees are in much the same state of disrepair as my own. It's an age thing. Found a fabulous cafe in East Malling and pre-match I loaded up on fuel in preparation for the walk ahead.

Kings Hill has one of the best facilities in the Kent County League. The ground, it is a ground not just a pitch, is enclosed and fully railed and fenced. It's in the centre of a large sports complex with the changing rooms in the middle and the all-important clubhouse above them. Here full meals are available which I didn't partake as, having previously stated, I'd already stuffed my face in East Malling. The only lager on draft was 'Spitfire' which is also the nickname of the football club. Coincidence? They are called the Spitfires presumably as the site used to be an airfield. Spent the countdown to kick off watching the lunchtime footy on a big screen. It was on a channel called *Sky Sports Main Event*, but no disrespect to either Rotherham or Huddersfield, this wasn't a game that the words 'main event' immediately spring to mind.

This was Kings Hill's big day and they handled it superbly. Sensibly, the excellent 'commemorative' programme, their first ever, was included in admission (why don't more clubs do this) but they still had a bunch left over as somebody got a bit

carried away with the printer. The team line ups were written on a whiteboard at the entrance, with a lovely lady on the gate. Rusthall bought quite a few supporters with them, and they had a whip round which raised £50 which was donated to the home team to top up their gate money. What a club. The crowd was a record for Kings Hill, and the team rose to the occasion.

Playing at a considerably higher level than their opponents, as you would expect, the match was all Rusthall, and well done to Kings Hill for repelling their attacks. I got the impression that once they scored, they'd bang in quite a few more, but that's not how it panned out. Still 0-0 at half time, which for some unknown reason lasted 19 minutes, Rusthall finally made the breakthrough with a penalty around the hour mark. Far from collapsing, Kings Hill played some of their best stuff after this, but they never really looked like they were going to get an equalizer. They left the field with their honour intact. Two thirds of the officials were of the female persuasion, and something I've never seen at this level, they were all miked up and able to speak to each other.

Two great clubs, one great day out.

*contributed on 16/10/22*

**TT No.50: *Brian Buck*** - Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> October 2022; **Brinklow** v Coventrians Reserves; Stockton Charity Cup 1<sup>st</sup> Round; Result: 4-0; Attendance: 25 approx.

Brinklow is a pleasant little village situated roughly halfway between Rugby and Coventry on the south side of the M6 and they play in the Coventry Alliance. I didn't have time to explore the village though, which has a population of just over a thousand people. Officially parking is in Barr Lane but noting its narrowness, I decided to park along the main road instead and make the short walk to the ground from here.

You need to find the Brinklow Community Hall, where the players change which has also been known as the Parish Hall. It has a Scout Hut on site as well, but none were likely to turn up to watch today's players. The club doesn't have a social club, but instead they go into the White Lion pub, which is directly opposite the Community Hall. To get to the pitch you make the short walk through a door behind the changing rooms, and this brings you out behind the goal. However, if you do park in Barr Lane, you can see the pitch, in the distance from there.

It was good to bump into the Coventrians people again and in particular their manager, who was the husband of wife and secretary Jane, whom I've met a couple of times and really someone who should be the recipient of an unsung hero's award on the BBC's One Show, such is the work she does looking after the club's many teams.

As I spent the game on 'their' side of the pitch, I didn't engage with the Brinklow people at all. But it was they who looked very impressive in the early stages of the game. They are the holders of this cup, and it was they who took the lead on 5 minutes after a clever 'step over' by a teammate saw the ball run to the scorer who then smashed it home from the edge of the area. The second goal came five

minutes later and was really an own goal, but it was awarded to the bloke who passed the ball into the area. Then the brother of the first scorer claimed the third goal two minutes after that. The visitors were shell shocked at this point. But slowly the hosts slowed their scoring down, although they did claim a fourth goal on 28 minutes. This seemed to be enough for them as thereafter they took their foot off the pedal.

At the break Coventrians had a chat and in the second half they were far more focused. Brinklow tolerated this for a bit, but as the half wore on the visitors dominated possession, to the point that by the end half time arrivals would have thought that it was they who had won the match. Right at the end the hosts (winning 4-0) had a player sent off following a nasty tackle and this was quickly followed by a set-to involving a number of players, which the previously smiling ref found difficult to deal with. He wisely blew the final whistle as soon as the 90 minutes were up. Overall, an interesting but not a particularly memorable game or day out.

*contributed on 11/10/22*

**TT No.49: Steve Hardy** - Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> October 2022; **Crescent** v VIP International; FA Sunday Cup 1<sup>st</sup> Round; Result: 0-0 (4-5 pens); Admission: £2; Programme: £1; Attendance 131

The FA Sunday Cup is back and for my first-round tie of choice I was back in Stone, or more specifically, the Yarnfield complex, home of Stone Dominoes. When I arrived at 1.30pm the place was heaving. Four other games were happening on outside pitches and the car park was full to overflowing. A good time for the Dominoes to charge £1 for a parking space, as they must have made a fortune.

Crescent, who play in the Stoke based Coors Sunday league, are now based permanently at Yarnfield, although their league games are probably not on the more expensive to hire main pitch every week, I would have thought. Visitors VIP International are from Birmingham and not Bedfordshire, as I first thought.

The match was, to say the least, aggressive. Loads of bookings for both sides but no goals unfortunately. Only fair that the game went straight to penalties I thought, as the two sides were very evenly matched. VIP scored all five of their pens, whereas Crescent missed their third, so went out.

There was a very healthy crowd of 131 in attendance with a good, few supporters coming up from Birmingham. The large refreshment area just inside the entrance must have done a roaring trade as all the outside games had plenty of supporters too. Just a shame that there was nowhere I could stand that didn't stink of herbal refreshment!

*contributed on 10/10/22*

**TT No.48: Steve Hardy** - Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> October 2002; **Newroz** v Leafield Athletic; Birmingham & District League Senior Cup - 1<sup>st</sup> Round; Result: 2-1; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 1 H/C

I have been looking forward to getting back to games in the Birmingham & District League this season. I reckoned I needed just 3 new grounds to recomplete the league, and, sadly, all three clubs were away today. Not a problem, as the league is always finding new grounds for clubs to use and today was no exception.

The venue was Gospel Oak School in Tipton, and the ground was yet another 4G pitch in a cage. No problem getting inside the cage as I was the only spectator again and was allowed to wander round all four sides to take my photos.

Homesters Newroz (pronounced *Nowrosh*), are made up entirely of Kurdish speaking lads. I was told their name comes from a festival of the same name back home, although the name now means a charity as well. I quickly picked up 3 Kurdish words too. 'Bravo' seems to mean well done, and 'fu\*\*\*ng h\*\*l' will be familiar to most of us already.

Visitors Leaffield Athletic are having a torrid season so far, with several double figure defeats behind them. Although a division above Newroz, they struggled to score again today despite plenty of possession early on. Nowroz scored first on 36 minutes after some ridiculous fiddling about by Leaffield's defence and led 1-0 at the break. Just after half time, Leaffield equalised with what was obviously a well-rehearsed move. A free kick on the left sailed over the home defence, and was met at the far post by a Leaffield player to slide it in. After that it was end-to-end stuff until the 76<sup>th</sup> minute when the winner was hammered in after more mucking about by the Leaffield defence.

I thought it was a well-deserved win for Newroz, but it could have been a lot bigger if they had stopped all the dramatic diving and squealing in agony, which brought no sympathy from the Ref, and only much laughter from the Leaffield team.

*contributed on 10/10/22*

**TT No.47: Jon T Green** - Saturday 8th October 2022; **MARKET RASEN TOWN** v. Ludford Rovers; East Lincs Football Combination - Division One; Venue: Rase Park; Result: 0-2; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 76 (headcount)

The elderly gentleman eased himself up from his sunny spot outside of the club house and followed me inside "can I help you?". "I'm looking for a copy of the team sheets" I replied. There was a momentary silence before he pointed to an open door "the bar will be open in 10 minutes". Whilst this was undoubtedly good news on a pleasantly warm afternoon, it didn't entirely answer my question. "Do you know who has the team sheets?" I tried again. "She's a bit late today but it'll be open soon, have everything you want." "Including the team sheets?". A long silence followed during which time both parties wondered how to exit a conversation fast taking on the appearance of a Two Ronnies sketch.

Luckily the arrival of the match official broke the spell, my new friend went back to his bench, and I followed Mr Paul Carter into the referee's room. Whilst I copied down the magic line-up information, Paul told me that this was the second week

running that he had reffed Market Rasen “had them in the County Cup last week, four down in 20 minutes they were. Local derby this one today so the league wanted someone with experience.” A tall, wiry man of 63, Paul spoke with a gravelly accent containing a hint of Yorkshire in it. “I won’t take nonsense. I’ve been in this league for 18 years and the players know me, and I know them. It’ll be a hard game but no problem.”

Rase Park is not the easiest ground to find. The main entrance is a narrow track between non-descript units on an industrial estate. Certainly, the approach doesn’t prepare you for what is a splendidly rural venue. The town’s cricket and football clubs share the ground with the clubhouse and fine cricket scoreboard being the first that you come to. Benches are spread around what would be the boundary, including some beautifully crafted metal seats that incorporate elements of both sports.

On the far side of the square lies the football pitch, still a little threadbare in parts after the long dry summer. It’s not roped off today about which I hear a whisper suggesting this is an oversight on behalf of an unnamed individual. Backed by woods and, down a steep embankment, the river, after which the ground takes its name, is a wonderful blue and white painted stand. Perhaps uniquely the dug-outs (or more correctly the outline of dug outs for there are no sides or roofs to them) are built into the front of the structure. They would seem to obscure the view, but the stand is well populated along the top row so perhaps the sight lines are better than I imagined. Anyway, it’s far too nice an afternoon to sit in the shade so I take up a position along the open side where the football and cricket pitches meet to watch the home side turn out in thin blue and yellow stripes against a Ludford team in equally thin red and black hoops - there is a hint of Dennis the Menace about the kit which almost makes it difficult to take seriously. Not that every member of the visitors is wearing the same shirt as captain Louie Wright is in stripes!

It’s still early days in the league season with only a handful of games played but, with Rasen having been undefeated in winning promotion last season, I mentally have them as slight favourites. Certainly, they start the better as Kerim Djerbi unleashes a thunderous drive before Charlie Scales heads narrowly wide from a corner. Ludford are playing some nice controlled passing football with the bald headed Noah Faisey seeing plenty of the action in midfield. Hugging the right touch line is George Jones, making his way back from injury he has the beating of his full back both in terms of skill and speed. He caresses the ball with an assured touch and is easily the most accomplished player on display. For the home side George Bennett is a solid and willing target man up front, perhaps not the most naturally gifted footballer he nonetheless “puts himself about” and is exactly what you would want from your centre forward. Half time is reached goalless but within a minute of the restart the ball is in the net: Harry Wilson picks up the ball wide left and delivers a perfect curling pass behind Rasen’s defensive line. Jordan Kay anticipates the move and from close range guides his shot beyond Ryan Wakeling. Faisey then turns provider, setting up Adam Smith as Rovers take control of the game. Bennett continues to batter the visitors defence but even he fails to hit the target after another marauding run. 12 minutes remain when Ludford wrap up the points; a long free kick drifts across goal where Kay, once again showing his powers

of anticipation, squeezes his shot between keeper and post. In the end it might have been more; substitute Dylan Gorbutt hits the upright with an angled volley before Smith and Ashley Cocks also go close. Mr Carter brings the match to a close with a theatrical final whistle and declares himself satisfied with his afternoon "I booked a few but there was nothing serious. The lads just wanted to play, and I really enjoyed it." I enjoyed it too, a competitive game and a nice venue in a league that you might not have considered visiting.

*contributed on 10/10/22*

**TT No.46: Steve Hardy** - Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> October 2022; **Maidenhead United U19** v Worthing U19; National U19 League Cup 1<sup>st</sup> Round; Result: 0-2; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance 9 H/C

The Retired Gentlemen's League (*copyright Ray Groves*) has been an absolute boon to us retirees who fancy a game on a Wednesday afternoon. Games are nationwide and all start at 2.00pm. My match today was the first round of the league cup and saw Worthing U19s making the long journey up to Maidenhead.

The venue used to be the Berkshire College of Agriculture in Burchett's Green. I say 'used to be' as according to Wikipedia, the college closed in July this year. There are still loads of football/rugby pitches and cricket squares though, and all were in action this afternoon.

And then the fun started. With both teams out on the pitch warming up, we realised that the referee hadn't arrived. We all stood around for the next 35 minutes wondering if a substitute referee could be found, until our man was spotted watching the Women's game on another pitch. He was persuaded to 'get on with it' and off we went, 40 minutes late.

Not much to say about the game itself, I am afraid. Worthing were better in every department, scoring after 14 minutes and early in the second half. Maidenhead were disappointing throughout and seemed content to just stand off from their opponents with hardly a tackle made.

Not sure what the relationship is between the College and Maidenhead United, but the dug outs on other pitches all had Maidenhead United badges on them, so perhaps they use it as a training facility.

Update on Sarah Satnav and her accent changes. For today's game she used one of those harsh 'norniron' accents. No idea why as there aren't many Northern Irish folks in Berkshire for her to copy.

*contributed on 06/10/22*

**TT No.45: Steve Hardy** - Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> October 2022; **AFC Winkfield** v Maidenhead Town Reserves; Thames Valley League - Division One; Result: 3-2; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 9 H/C

Another cracker of a game. My 5<sup>th</sup> in a row too! I wonder if my new policy of going to games I really fancy, as opposed to number crunching just to get a new ground in, has made me less jaded and more appreciative of what I am watching?

Anyway, this particular game wasn't even plan D when I started looking for games to watch. Plan A was Staines & Lammas of the Surrey league, who are now regular issuers. Sadly, I discovered on Saturday lunchtime that their fixture with Ripley Village had been switched to Ripley, so that was out. Several more choices fell by the wayside, until I plumped for this game, at a mere 3 miles from where I was staying.

AFC Winkfield play in the village of Winkfield Row, not in Winkfield itself. Today saw both their teams in action with their Reserves playing Farnham Royal Mavericks on an adjacent pitch, and the first team entertaining the stiff of Maidenhead Town. The ground is used for cricket in the summer, with football taking over for winter, and boasts a super clubhouse and large cafe which did well from us spectators as well as passing walkers.

The game, as mentioned, was excellent. Winkfield went ahead as early as the second minute and bossed the game until a defender's slip allowed a Town forward a clear run in on goal from which he duly scored on 24 minutes. After the break Town came in to their own for a while and took the lead on 51 minutes. Winkfield then recovered their mojo, equalising on 65 mins before getting the winner on 70.

Top game once again, in an area so posh that I probably wouldn't be able to afford a garage there, let alone one of the many mansions I passed. I even noticed that Sarah Satnav had changed her accent to that of an upper-class lady to try and fit in. You can't fool me, Sarah!

*contributed on 06/10/22*

**TT No.44: Brian Buck** - Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> October 2022; **BTC (Southampton)** v Bournemouth Sports; Hampshire Saturday Trophy 1<sup>st</sup> Round; Result: 1-7; Attendance: 12.

With my friend off to watch Hythe & Dibden play he kindly agreed to drop me off here on his way and I was grateful to him for doing so. But despite leaving in plenty of time to get to our games, I nearly missed the start of my match. We would have arrived about 90 minutes before kick-off, had it not been for traffic jams, firstly on the M25 and secondly on the M3 at Winchester. This was mainly attributable to there being road works and a rail strike and everyone taking to their cars instead. In fact, at kick off time we were still on the motorway. But as we roared into the car park, I gleefully noted that they had yet to kick off and

eventually the match kicked off five minutes late. However, I was still sorting myself out when Bournemouth opened the scoring after just 35 seconds.

BTC play in Stoneham Lane, which also houses the football clubs of Eastleigh and immediately next door, AFC Stoneham of the Wessex League. They play in the Southampton Senior League and the BTC stands for British Transport Commission. There were two other matches going on here today and there was another unused pitch, possibly a small sized pitch. I think that they have played here for quite some time, as the place looks rather lived in. The pitch my game was taking place on was far enough away from the clubhouse for some of the knowledgeable locals to drive down so they could park closer to it.

I don't know quite what the rules for this particular competition are but, as you can see from the final score-line, this game was very much a mis-match. To me it seemed strange that today's visitors from the Dorset Premier league play in a Hampshire FA competition. Furthermore, I suspect that you 'move up' from the Southampton Senior League to play in the Hampshire League, which is on a par with the Dorset Premier League. But each to their own!

So it was that Sports basically walked though this game and try as they did, initially BTC were no match for them. Sports added a second goal on 20 minutes but then a minute later BTC pulled a goal back offering them short term hope, which last just three minutes before Sports got their third goal, leading to frustrations on the home bench. Sports scored again on 47 minutes and after this the home people gave up all hope of winning but set out to try and enjoy the afternoon instead, which they did despite conceding three further goals before the end.

After the match had finished, I headed off to the bar to wait for my lift home. But although the bar was open to buy drinks, you couldn't sit in it to sup them because it was being prepared for a children's party, so everyone had to cram in the covered outdoor patio instead. From here the players from the two early kick off cup matches could watch the last dregs of the remaining game, a league match and there was much excitement when a punch up got out of hand, causing the young ref to eventually abandon the game. Meanwhile I got talking to the ref of the game I'd just watched and what a nice chap he was too. He was heavy on man management, and he told me that he had reffed the game despite suffering from cancer, which has moved from his prostate to his pelvis via his liver. Of course, this puts everything in life into perspective really.

*contributed on 04/10/22*

**TT No.43: Jon T Green** - Friday 30th September 2022; **CHESTER-LE-STREET TOWN** v. Birtley Town; Northern Football League - Division Two; Venue: Moor Park; Result: 5-1; Admission: £5; Programme: £1; Attendance: 265

The lights of Moor Park were visible just above the tree line, standing out in silhouette against a sky that a few hours earlier had been leaden grey but now was a darkening shade of cloudless deep blue. Only four lanes of fast-moving traffic stood between me and my target but on a Friday teatime it seemed like everyone

was heading somewhere as streams of lorries, white vans and SUV's hurtled past. With parking limited at the ground itself I had been advised to leave the car "just the other side of the main road", sound advice no doubt unless the main road is the equivalent of the A1. Having successfully played an adult version of "chicken" the approach to Chester's home was eerily quiet as the lane headed out into the trees. This area was once the pit head of the colliery, and the lane was home to terraced houses built for the miners and their families. When the pit was closed in the 1980's the area was grassed over before the local community returned it to woodland with an extensive tree planting plan in the Noughties. And what a fantastic job they did as walking out past the ground you are soon on a network of paths surrounded by thickets of oak, ash and birch.

The club can trace its history back to 1972 when a group of enthusiasts decided to form a team, given the passion for the game in the North East this seems like an extraordinary oversight by the older generations. Matches were played at a variety of venues, including what is now Durham's Riverside cricket ground, before taking up residence at what was the Colliery Welfare Ground in 1980. A considerable amount of initial work had to be done in order to bring the ground up to Northern League standards and this has continued over the years with new floodlights, dressing rooms and most recently the completion of a smart new clubhouse in 2020.

That there is still plenty of work ongoing is obvious as soon as you arrive - new wooden fences and fresh tarmac lead you to the turnstiles located by the corner flag. To your right is an uncovered flat standing area but with a skeleton of wood and metal roof supports in place it looks as though a cover will soon be erected. This end leads you around to the grandstand consisting of five rows of red backless seats beneath a steeply pitched blue roof: white metalwork standing out against the dark interior. Walking on you reach a section of uncovered terracing which angles into the corner and around behind the far goal. Covered at the rear by a narrow stone coloured roof held aloft by gently curving concrete supports the terracing here is of the pavement slab type. The steps are of differing heights and a sign warns of their steepness; the end of the covered section is marked by low brick walls - they are a nice touch and help to bring definition. Further on, and now totally uncovered, the terrace continues into the far corner where the only shelter is to be found beneath the spreading boughs of some mature trees. The remaining side is flat standing backed in part by a corrugated metal fence; trees are being cleared here but it's a little unclear as to whether the fence is in its way up or down - hopefully the latter as it's not the most attractive of backdrops.

Tonight is a proper local derby with Birtley Town the visitors from barely three miles away to the north. They bring with them a group of youngsters who charge towards the far terrace before the teams change ends at the coin toss. "H'way yew buggers" shouts one of them as they turn tail and run back to where they had just been. On the pitch things start well for Birtley, resplendent in a "traffic cone" orange kit, as centre forward Aiden Rutledge almost gets on the end of a driven cross. This is about as good as it gets though as Chester open the scoring inside of 15 minutes; Ellis Swinburn puts in a lovely centre from the left wing and Josh Akal makes no mistake with a solid header. The home side then double their advantage when Nick Marley sweeps in a shot from the edge of the area. With the game more

even than the score would suggest, Birtley looked to have found a foothold in the contest when Callum Smith steals the ball from an over confident defender and buries his shot beyond 'keeper Kieran Hunter. With a minute of the half remaining comes the game's decisive moment; Chester's Billy Harland races through on goal only to be crudely flattened by the on-rushing Conor Grant. Both players leave the pitch, the unlucky Harland on a stretcher and Grant via a straight red card. Substitute 'keeper Isaac Robison's first act is to pick the ball out of the net as Michael Hepplewhite dispatches the penalty. The second period is something of an anti-climax; Town add two quick fire goals midway through the half, both supplied by the excellent Regan Nixon. The first converted by the head of Marley and the second by a smart finish from Hepplewhite. Birtley offer little in the way of resistance and Rutledge's late booking sums up the frustration of their evening.

Heading back to the motorway I passed the cricket ground and wondered whether there is a smaller town anywhere in the world to host Test Cricket, answers on a postcard to *FGIF* HQ please.

*contributed on 03/10/22*

**TT No.42: Craig Dabbs** - Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> October 2022; **Hartley Wintney v Truro City**; Southern League Premier South; Venue: The Memorial Ground; Result: 0-1; Admission: £12; Programme: £2.50; Attendance: 302.

This wasn't my first choice, a combination of leaving later than expected and both the M1 and M25 on the go slow meant it would be tight on getting to Roffey so a crawl down to Hampshire got me there in plenty of time for this match at step three.

Hartley Wintney are an old club having been formed way back in 1897, the nickname "The Row" is a nod to the former hamlet of Hartley Row. The club started out in the Basingstoke League playing out of Causeway Farm moving to the current venue in 1953. As the clubs progressed from through its Combined Counties League days, of which there were many, and into the Southern League where they quite frankly have been punching above their weight on a small budget for what is their fifth season at this level, so too has the ground been developed.

Today the sloped pitch sits within a fully enclosed ground with six areas of cover although you will probably only notice the one off the clubhouse which is set back. There is cover of the scaffold variety behind the goal and two stands over on the far side - however, if you look closely at the Gerry Wykes Stand, that's three with two older stands at either end and, a kit stand plonked in the middle of them. Further seats are covered in tarpaulin elsewhere in the ground ready for a further area of cover down the same side.

I said earlier that they are punching above their weight; that's not my comment but one of a club official. The development of the Memorial Ground is steady and not rushed and is very much the case when the funds allow for it.

The visitors from Devon (not Cornwall, after losing their long standing Treyew Road home) have, by comparison, seen a meteoric rise through the pyramid from the old

South Western League to where they are today. The bubble has not quite burst, just deflated somewhat and it demonstrates the difference between one person bankrolling a club and ultimately putting it in a perilous state when it goes belly up versus the slow and measured approach like The Row. I know which I prefer.

The match was absorbing. City are in second place and Wintney eighteenth and you really couldn't tell. In fact, for some of the game you would've thought that it was the other way around and indeed the last fifteen minutes or so the White Tigers were really hanging on by their claws and Hartley Wintney were very unfortunate not to have at least got a point.

*contributed on 02/10/22*

**TT No.41: Keith Aslan** - Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> October 2022; **MULLION** v Newquay; Kitchin Kit Ltd. South West Peninsula League Premier West; Kick Off: 15.00; Result: 3-4; Old people's admission & programme: £4; Attendance: 41 (29 home, 8 away & 4 neutral).

If you want to know in advance when the next rail strike is going to be, just take a look at the non-league football fixtures. There are very few occasions when there is no football at all in east Kent and yet the two blank Saturday's this season have coincided with railway shut downs. Another football less Saturday would have had an adverse effect on my mental health, especially as I'm still suffering PTSD from my Welsh mountain climbing follies, so I decide to have a mini-break and tick off a ground that would normally take a weekend to do anyway. Exotica such as the Isle of Man and Jersey were both away, but both the teams I needed in Scotland were at home, so that's sorted. No, it isn't, no trains back to London on Sunday due to ubiquitous engineering work. Brilliant. So, it's a weekend in Cornwall to recomplete Phil Hiscocks superb South West Peninsula League.

Cornwall is a magical place that must have more garden gnomes per head of population than anywhere else in the country. Picture book scenery and cottages straight out of a fairy tale, it's a spell binding county. It's got its own language and many of the signs are in Cornish which must be very useful for the three hundred or so people who actually speak it. When Pedannack Airfield shut down, rather than remove the road sign, they left it in place and just painted over the word 'air' There are signposts to the nearest milk dispensing machine, plenty of those down here, while visitors to Redruth are greeted with 'Welcome to Redruth, Cornish mining capital of the world' who'd have thought the Cornish mining capital of the world would be in Cornwall. And there's buses everywhere. No matter how remote a hamlet you live in, they'll be an hourly bus service to somewhere. Sundays too, and for no obvious reason most of them run well into the evening. Has anybody in history ever used the 00.15 service from the Lizard to Redruth. Why does it exist? And this is also a land where football matches finish at quarter to five, at least mine did.

Buses to Mullion don't come any more door to door than the hourly number 34 from outside Redruth station and after an hour meandering through the Cornish countryside, dropping you at the entrance to the ground. There is another bus

company that runs virtually the same route for no reason, and both pass by Helstons ground. Cornwall being out of sync with the rest of England my bus pass doesn't register on their Automatic ticket checkers, these are local machines for local people. The bus drivers are used to it. Carried on down to the end of the route at Lizard which even in October was well filled with tourists. This is the place to go if Cornish fudge is your bag. I took a steady limp down to Lizard lighthouse, the most southerly point on the British mainland. The ocean was a glorious azure, it's amazing how blue the sea is if you haven't got a water company discharging sewage into it as Southern Water insist on doing round the Kent coast.

For lovers of scenic grounds Mullion is the one for you with the Atlantic Ocean visible in the distance. Fully railed with a small brick-built stand on the halfway line between the dugouts, just big enough to keep the crowd dry. I arrived super early and luxuriated in the club house quaffing cheap lager while watching the lunchtime football on TV but it's difficult to really get into it when you want both teams to lose. Hot beverages and pasties (Cornish ones of course) were available. Got chatting to one of the officials who said they get a special deal on footballs through the league at £50 a ball. You what? Floodlights aren't coming along very well with the club still scrambling around trying to get grants. No planning permission yet either, and with one side of the ground backing on to some dinky bungalows, that isn't going to be a foregone conclusion either. Why do the FA insist on village clubs like this having lights they don't need and can't afford?

As games of football go, they don't come much better than this, it must be the sea air down here. Newquay had much the better of the first half and yet somehow managed to go into the half time break (11 minutes incidentally) 3-0 down. With Mullion having built up an unassailable lead, Newquay went and assailed it in the second half with their winner coming from a Beckhamesque free kick in the 88<sup>th</sup> minute. Cracking entertainment.

Great Western Railways (14 minutes late going down, 39 minutes late coming back) were also having catering problems. No stock on the outward journey, but they did come round with free bottles of water which was a nice touch. Plenty of stock on the return but the buffet car attendant announced that his mate hadn't turned up and because he was on his own, he couldn't do any teas or coffees due to Health and Safety. Ten out of ten to him for not bursting out into laughter like my carriage did. Somehow the unsafe nature of making a hot drink single-handedly was lost on everybody. Another strike next Saturday, but plenty of football in Thanet to go to. Enjoyed myself so much this weekend that another mini break would be most welcome but fiscally impossible. Still, when all this extra dosh kicks in from the budget, money won't be a problem anymore.

*contributed on 02/10/22*

**TT No.40: Brian Buck** - Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> September 2022; Stotfold v Leverstock Green; Spartan South Midlands League Premier Division; Result: 1-1; Attendance: 239.

With my usual Saturday routine interrupted because I was required by my wife to be present in church with her at a lunchtime event in St Neots, my choice of game

for the afternoon was limited. In the end it was quite an easy choice to go to Stotfold, where I am a season ticket holder this season having found them to be generously priced.

Their new ground is around three years old now and it's geared for the future, with a decent sized main stand and some covered standing accommodation on the far side of the pitch. Spectator wise though it can be a cold ground, and at times the wind can blow across the fields into your face, or alternatively you can get scorched by the sun on hot days.

The last time I saw these two sides meet occurred on Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> November 2015 at the old Roker Park, a ground which had great character and where, with Stotfold winning 2-0, the match was abandoned after half an hour because the ref decided that it was too windy to continue. But other games in the immediate area were completed. Perhaps he was worried about his wig blowing off!

Today was a bit different to my usual Tuesday night experiences here, as they have mascots on a Saturday, lots of them. So, after they have done their duties there is a lot of noise here as they run around the place. For a while they quieten down while they eat their food, but I expect that the club make a healthy profit on their presence, as I suspect that their parents were not too far away from them in the ground and no doubt, they would have bought refreshments as well! As a result of all this Stotfold had the seventh highest attendance at Step 5 level in the country today.

As for the game, played out in a chilly wind, it was keenly contested and in the first half there was never more than a 'gnat's croquet' between the sides. However, on 37 minutes the visitors opened the scoring when a deep cross from out wide was headed home by an unmarked player at the far post. At this point they were just shading the game slightly. But on 45(+5) minutes Stotfold equalised from the spot after some kind of foul inside the area. It was difficult to see what actually happened because there were about five Leverstock Green players around the affected Stotfold player at the time. They spent ages protesting that the spot kick should be disallowed, much of it in my opinion designed to distract the home penalty taker. But it didn't work. In the second half Stotfold gradually got on top. They created some chances but couldn't score again. Man of the match? Probably Stotfold manager Brett Donnelly. In the first half it was a game Stotfold could have lost, but not for the first time, at half time he tweaked something, not sure what, to put Stotfold in charge in the second period, which augurs well for the future.

*contributed on 29/09/22*

**TT No.39: Keith Aslan** - Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> September 2002; **TOWER HILL** v Hatherop; Witney and District League Division 2; Kick-Off: 14.02; Result: 1-3; Admission & Programme: £4; Attendance: 154 (40 home, 2 away & 112 neutral).

Tower Hill is a sports club with the team playing on the western outskirts of town, making them the most senior club in Witney since the demise of the 'Town'. The food on offer here was curry and rice, with the big surprise being there was no

rice. The curry tasted, how shall I put it, different. Not unpleasant, just different. Teas and coffees were ten bob a cup. There is a large clubhouse, and the game was played on the furthest ground from it, with two other pitches being crossed to reach it. A memorial stone as you enter pays homage to those locals who gave their lives in the two wars. Some of them set out from here which is the site of the Witney aerodrome.

A much better match than this morning's with Hatherop being by far the superior team. They went down to ten men in the first 20 minutes when a player was sent off for stamping. I missed the incident as I was eating a Wagon Wheel at the time, but the offender was telling anybody who would listen that he didn't do anything. So, the referee must have dreamt it then! The numerical disadvantage didn't make any difference as Hatherop went on to dominate the match with Tower Hill's goal no more than a consolation late doors.

Can't praise the organization of these hops too highly, a wonderful day which is as much a social event as anything else with the participating teams going the extra kilometre to welcome spectators, as well as earning some much-needed cash. And the sun shone all day. With the last club, Heyford Athletic, already having had the pleasure of my attendance, I gave the third game a miss and special thanks go to my driver for dropping me off back at Oxford Parkway on his way to the match. I have many happy memories to see me through the next two Saturdays when Mick Lynch's vanity project means there won't be any trains. Again.

*contributed on 25/09/22*

**TT No.38: Keith Aslan** - Saturday 24th September 2022; **BRIZE NORTON** v Cassington Rangers; Witney & District League Division 2; Kick-Off: 11.01; Result: 0-1; Admission & Programme: £4; Attendance: 168 (18 home, 5 away & 145 neutral).

It's hop day again today and what better than a couple of games in Witney. What better indeed when my alarm went off at a ridiculous half past four, which not for the first time led me to question some of my lifestyle choices. Arrived at Oxford Parkway to meet my chauffeur for the day. This was as close as anybody was going to get to Oxford today with no trains running through the station. On the way I passed the building works for HS2. That's 95 billion quid and counting to get to Birmingham twenty minutes quicker while the rest of the railway only runs for five days a week. Skewed priorities methinks. It was a year ago, at the last Witney hop, that I journeyed along this section of the A40, and it was rammed, with the bus taking over an hour to get back to Oxford. It was free flowing today. No football in the town with Oxford United v Fleetwood postponed due to International call ups, and there's words I'd never have expected to appear in the same sentence.

Brize Norton is a village a few miles to the west of Witney, famous for its airfield and nothing much else. The ground is on the end of the runway and aircraft would fly very low overhead, but disappointingly for plane spotters, none today. As is usual for these events, the home team had pulled out all the stops as the club tried to make a bit of money to buy some much needed moveable goals. Same sport as the Premier League, but a different universe. I assisted them in their fundraising efforts by getting stuck into the breakfast baps with the bacon well

incinerated as proper bacon should be. A 16page glossy programme plus all types of souvenirs were available and an outside bar was selling beers with funny names that are so popular among the groundhopping fraternity.

Many of the crowd didn't think it was a very good match. I enjoyed it and I don't know quite what footballing magic you expect to witness in the Witney and District League. It's just good to see a local league like this still functioning in a relatively healthy state when so many others have folded. A penalty, tad harsh I felt, in the first ten minutes sealed the points for Cassington.

*contributed on 25/09/22*

**TT No.37: Steve Hardy** - Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> September 2022; **Stone O A Reserves** v Redgate Clayton Reserves; Staffordshire Senior League - Division One; Result: 3-1; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance 15 H/C

I know what you are thinking! With hundreds of lovely grounds to choose from, why on earth would I go and watch two Reserve teams in action? Well, it is quite simple really. If I want to complete a league, in my book I have to go to every ground in it. As Stone OA Reserves always play at today's venue then they have to be visited.

The venue in question is the sports ground of Alleyne's Academy in Stone, Staffordshire. Alleyne Grammar School dates back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century and as with a lot of older schools it has some superb facilities. The sports ground I visited today has a 4G pitch in a cage, some tennis courts, and a couple of grass pitches, one of which was where my match was played. The main school is further down Oulton Road and from what I could see as I drove past, they have more amenities there too.

The match itself was another cracker, making four such matches in a row for me. The first half was end-to-end stuff with both teams attacking from the off. I was surprised that we ended the first forty-five minutes goalless, I must say, but the second half was a different story with a Stone gaining a well-deserved 3-1 win.

The Stone OA first team was away to Hereford Pegasus this afternoon in the FA Vase. Those watching my match were following proceedings closely on Twitter. Stone were winning 1-0 when my game ended half an hour before the first team did, and I am delighted to hear that they held on for that victory.

*contributed on 25/09/22*

**TT No.36: Brian Buck** - Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> September 2022; **Chalgrove Cavaliers** v Oxford Irish Athletic; Oxfordshire Senior League Division 1; Result: 1-2; Attendance: 40 approx.

Today it took me about two hours to get here, as I steered clear of the busy roads (apart from when I navigated Aylesbury!) and I arrived at the ground roughly 45 minutes before kickoff. I didn't park in the club's village hall car park though. Instead, I parked in a secondary car park, which had plenty of spaces in it. I was

drawn to this particular car park because the secretary had told me that if you use the nearby Crown pub then they give you a free plastic 'glass' and then you can walk down the lane, by the pub to the ground. But I ruled out this option when I found that you don't get a free drink from the club sponsors to go with it!

I had a quick look around the clubhouse, mainly to 'wash my hands' on my arrival. I could also see Chalgrove warming up and a couple of Irish players, along with a marked out pitch in front of the clubhouse and so I went back to the car, ate my sandwiches and waited for the game to start on the pitch in front of me. But a couple of things were starting to worry me. Firstly, as kick-off approached no one put the goals up and furthermore, where were the rest of the Irish players? Then about 15 minutes before kick-off Chalgrove reappeared from the dressing rooms in the village hall after completing their warm-up and headed off into some wooded area. I followed quickly and joined them on what seemed to be a nature walk. But soon the area opened up and found that the playing venue was on the most secluded one of at least three pitches here, being surrounded by trees on three sides. I was left thinking that had I gone to the pub and returned just before kick-off then I would have probably thought that seeing no one around now, the game was off!

Anyway, I soon encountered the ref, who was a nice enough bloke, but he told me that he was suffering with back pains. He was an honest chap and I think that I may have contributed to him having a poor game as I think that he thought that I was assessing (observing these days) him.

Chalgrove took the lead on 2 minutes, when the scorer forced the ball home at the second attempt after his first effort was blocked. But Irish were level on 8 minutes when the home keeper 'air' kicked a back pass and the scorer tapped home the ball into a now unguarded goal. The game was then even for about half an hour then Irish started to get on top culminating with them taking the lead on 41 minutes with a shot blasted home from just inside the area. Then on 57 minutes came the incident which the ref admitted to me afterwards he got wrong. An Irish player was tripped in the area, but before he could blow his whistle for a spot kick play continued and an Irish player hit the crossbar. But instead of awarding a goal kick he brought play back and belatedly gave a penalty instead. Fortunately, for all concerned the spot kick went over the bar. Play continued with a decent Irish side unable to increase their lead against an increasingly poor Chalgrove side. But they did perk up right at the end, causing Irish to embark on some embarrassing and poorly undertaken time wasting. They should leave it to the pro's, who think it's clever to entertain supporters, paying expensive admission money, to be 'entertained' in this way!

*contributed on 20/09/22*

**TT No.35: *Brian Buck* - Friday 16<sup>th</sup> September 2022; Thrapston Venturas v Higham Town; Northants Combination Division 1; Result: 2-3; Attendance: 110 approx.**

Tonight, it was time for what seems to be my annual Friday night visit to Chancery Lane. There were no significant changes to the ground, although there was some building work in progress between the cricket pitch and the football pitch at the

'woods' end. I'll let you know more about this when I return here at this time next year.

So, just to confirm, the three stands with two rows of seats were still along the side between the clubhouse and the dugouts were still there, as was the covered standing only stand on the other side of the dugouts. You can't sit in the stands to watch the game though as people block your view by standing in front of them. Unusually there was no bell ringing practice going on, possibly because just about everyone in the town was here this evening, where there always seems to be a good attendance for Friday night fixtures.

As usual there seemed to be some function going on in the clubhouse. There were loads of kids of all ages running around along with their parents, some of whom were actually watching the game. There was even a B-B-Q going on as well. A few years ago, this would have been a United Counties League match, but tonight both sides were a reincarnation of the sides which used to play in that league. Thrapston Venturas changed their name to Thrapston Town many years ago and tonight's team is allegedly a newish side using their name. Meanwhile Higham Town merged with Rushden Rangers some years back, to form Rushden & Higham United and so tonight's visitors are a new team using an old name.

This game got feistier as it went along. The ref was quite patient with the players in the first half and only booked one player, but Thrapston went on to win this segment of the contest 5-1 after the break! The hosts took the lead on 7 minutes with a far post header from a deep freekick. In this period, although possession was roughly even, Higham looked technically better. Higham equalised on 48 minutes from a foul which generated one of Thrapston's bookings. Four minutes later the visitors went ahead from the spot, following a foul, but the hosts levelled six minutes later with a header from a corner just when Higham looked like they were going to get more goals. Both sides then pushed hard for the winner, especially Thrapston at the end, but it was Higham who got it on 90(+2) minutes, which they marginally deserved, although a draw would have been a fairer result.

*contributed on 20/09/22*

**TT No.34: Jon T Green** - Saturday 17th September 2022; **CHEADLE TOWN** v. Sandbach Town; North West Counties League - Division One South; Venue: Park Road; Result: 4-3; Admission: £5; Programme: £2; Attendance: 80.

During this period of mourning, it would be remiss not to take a few minutes to reflect on the sad loss of Her Majesty. Certainly, the greatest statesperson of our time and to millions around the world she was simply The Queen but to us she was Our Queen and for that we are truly grateful.

In a footballing sense it should not be forgotten that it was from Queen Elizabeth that Bobby Moore received the Jules Rimet trophy. Perhaps less well known is West German captain Uwe Seeler telling his players not to argue with the disputed third goal as he did not wish to appear unsportsmanlike in her presence.

As a travelling England supporter I have stood hand on heart and sung the National

Anthem in nearly forty countries around the world. The feeling of loyalty and “For Queen and Country” has always been incredibly strong. Next week in Milan I will again sing the anthem but this time it will be “God Save the King”, I am sure that it won’t be just me who has a lump in their throat and a tear in their eye. May you rest in peace Ma’am and thank you.

Cheadle “village” was fit to burst on what was technically a Bank Holiday weekend. The traffic was nose to tail, and parking was at a premium as the good folks of Cheshire bustled in and out of shops and cafes. The sun was shining but a cool blustery wind reminded you that, after weeks of glorious sunshine, we had now moved on into Autumn. Town’s Park Road ground is just close enough to everything to be walkable and just far enough away to retain a sense of space although the tranquillity is disturbed every five minutes as jetliners make their final approach to nearby Manchester airport.

What a beautiful venue it is too, entering through the turnstile block, at the end of a pot-holed road, the first view is across the immaculate pitch surrounded by a traditional metal railing. On three sides there is a paved walkway, but nothing else, so it isn’t until you turn to your right do you see the beauty of the main, and only, stand. Situated some ten yards or so from the touch line it sits box-like astride the halfway line. The wide angled roof fascia is dark green metal and is refreshingly unadulterated by any naming or advertising slogans. Beneath are wide white painted steps; the first six rows have been converted to conventional seating by the addition of 120 bottle green seats but at the rear, behind a row of silver crush barriers, the terracing remains. This is a fantastic set up and gives near perfect sight lines whether you prefer sitting or standing up to enjoy your football. The players’ tunnel is clad in wood, as are the stairways on either side, although perhaps less practical the use of a natural material is certainly more pleasing on the eye than cold hard steel.

To the left of the stand is a covered outdoor tea bar set on a small area of decking, watch the step down when carrying your half time pie and pint! Next door is a cosy clubhouse which includes some great team photos and facts about the club. Founded as late as 1961, under the name Grasmere Rovers, they began play in the Manchester and District Sunday League before graduating to Saturday football in the early 70’s. They moved to Park Road in 1982 and changed their name to Cheadle Town a year afterwards. It’s as a touring team (playing under the moniker of Manchester AFC - a cunning ploy if ever I have heard one) that they have travelled the globe, 96 opponents including seven national teams across 30 countries. A crowd of over 65,000 watched them play in one of their two appearances at the legendary Azteca Stadium in Mexico City, although whether the locals were aware that the visiting team actually came from the North West Counties League is perhaps open to debate. In preparation for the 1966 World Cup, Portugal trained at Park Road and in 1993 Brazilian international Jairzinho held a soccer school at the ground.

With such a fascinating history, all the day needed was a cracking match and that’s exactly what we got in what the papers would describe as a “seven goal thriller”. The early signs were not good for the hosts as, within four minutes, they fell behind to a Sandbach team sitting just one place below them in the league

standings; captain Josh Ultram slid a pass into the path of Stanley Tatters who drilled his low shot beneath the body of 'keeper Jordan Latham. Cheadle were seeing plenty of the ball with new signing Febian Brandy instrumental in most of their best movements. It was therefore something of a surprise when the visitors doubled their lead; Joshua Klein-Davies controlled, with a hint of hand ball, a high pass before turning and executing a perfect chip into the far corner. As the half progressed it looked as though it wasn't going to be Town's day, Kyle McGonigle struck the upright with a fierce half volley before Adam Jones smacked the crossbar moments before the break.

With Brandy surprisingly substituted at half time, the second half exploded into life as newcomer Steven Yarwood reacted quickest after Eric Merner had parried Patrick David's initial shot. It was captain Davin who drew his side level two minutes later as he coolly converted from the spot after Martin Pilkington had been tripped. The home side were now in total command and took the lead for the first time as Jones found the net after Callum McGlynn saw his effort come back off the bar. As Jones celebrated the goal, he glanced over to his shoulder at the near side linesman suggesting that he had been very close to being in an offside position. Luckily for him the flag stayed down. Much to their credit Sandbach rallied and drew level as Ultram pounced on a long free kick to beat Latham through a crowd of players. Cheadle were not to be denied the three points though and with four minutes remaining they scored the winner; Sandbach were unable to scramble the ball away and Ryan Usher made no mistake with a skimming shot which eluded Merner and his covering defenders.

And so ended another hugely enjoyable hop, a wonderful venue, some great football and some rather surprising history. No wonder Saturday is the best day of the week....

*contributed on 19/09/22*

**TT No.33: Keith Aslan** - Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> September 2022; **STEETON** v Daisy Hill; North West Counties Division One North; Kick Off: 15.00; Result: 2-4; Admission: £3 for the elderly; Programme: £2; Attendance: 60 (54 home, 5 away & 1 neutral) - official attendance was 88 which is just plain wrong.

I was making the most of a rare Saturday containing both trains and football for an excursion to the Yorkshire countryside. There was originally due to be a train strike today, but those nice trade unions postponed it as a mark of respect for the late Mrs. Windsor (nee Saxe-Coburg). The 'respect' aspect was somewhat diluted by declaring a further strike in two weeks' time, but in deference to H.R.H. it was classified as an unofficial announcement, so that's alright then.

On arrival in London, I was faced with a dilemma, whether to continue my journey north or to queue up for 12 hours to spend a few seconds filing past the coffin of somebody I've never met. Not the most difficult decision I've ever had to make. And positively the last word on the subject, when somebody dies, we often hear the phrase of subsequent events as 'It's what they would have wanted'. Would the

queen really have wanted all the football postponed last Saturday or for 'National Guinea Pig Awareness Week' to be cancelled out of respect?

Steeton play in Keighley, a pleasant town on the edge of the Pennines. You won't go hungry here with plenty of food emporiums, and for fellow aficionado's, Greggs is handily situated adjacent to the bus station. And if you're a railway buff and time permits, a trip on the Keighley & Worth Valley steam railway is a must. The ground is a 20-minute walk from the station situated in an edge of town industrial estate. According to the street maps you pass a bus museum on the way. If you do, it's very well hidden, and it passed me by.

A new build, the, Marley Stadium won't send a groundhopper into raptures, but when designing it I doubt the views of one-off visitors were uppermost in their thoughts. There is a small clubhouse outside the ground serving alcohol and hot drinks which was showing the lunchtime footy. Entrance is through some major turnstiles, which by the end of the match had been moved to facilitate clear egress. Whoever moved them must be spending a lot of time in the gym. A synthetic pitch, and while plastic is undoubtedly the way forward, why must they all be surrounded by a green mesh fence? If the stand was a bar of chocolate, it would be called 'fun sized' i.e. very small. Even with today's paltry attendance it got quite full and the benches, not seats, didn't look very comfortable. I gave it a miss and stood in the covered stand behind the goal, less populated while giving shade from the unseasonably hot sun. The ground is situated next to three grass pitches, two of which were fully railed. Steeton moved here last season, their 'proper' ground in Steeton itself deemed unworthy of the North West Counties League. I never made it there but wonder if the move to an industrial estate four miles away was really such a good idea.

Steeton have been prolific programme issuers long before their elevation to the North West Counties. Today's 44-page issue was a labour of love for somebody. Daisy Hill play in Westhoughton and did you know it was the birthplace of the actor Robert Shaw. You would do if you'd read the programme. Unusually, it also contained an in-depth interview with one of the opposing players. A good read. Something to remember the club by as the next home match is not for another six weeks.

This was a game of two halves, both of them lasting far longer than the 45 minutes they should be. A benign first period was followed by an all action second, with the home side going two goals up within 10 minutes of the restart. Another 20 minutes and Daisy Hill had turned it around to lead 3-2. They added a fourth in the 93<sup>rd</sup> of the 90 minutes. All good stuff, but I do wish referees would do something about the timewasting which both sides indulged in.

Half an hour late home, but these days I'm just grateful there are any trains running at all.

*contributed on 19/09/22*

**TT No.32: Steve Hardy** - Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> September 2022; **SAHA** v Prees United; Shropshire Challenge Cup - 1<sup>st</sup> Round; Result: 3-2; Admission: £2; Programme: No; Attendance: 21 H/C.

It was off to Shrewsbury for today's fix. The home team are called SAHA, but nobody seemed to know what the initials SAHA actually stand for, although one lady guessed that it might be Shropshire Area Health Authority, an organisation that no longer exists, she reckoned.

The venue was interesting too. They play on a 4G pitch in a cage at the back of Shrewsbury Town's stadium. I hadn't been there for years, but I am pretty sure that on my last visit the entrance to STFC wasn't through a Lidl superstore's car park! The 4G is a 'community pitch, which means anyone can book to use it. Regular users appear to be Shrewsbury Town Women FC, whose players made up a large percentage of the crowd of 21 today.

Anyway, on to the match. I like my County Cup ties. Birmingham, Staffs, Derbyshire, Notts and of course Shropshire are all within easy reach of home and normally provide excellent entertainment. Today was no exception with game being another absolute cracker.

Prees play in the top division of the Shropshire League with SAHA in the division below, although on today's performance you would have thought SAHA were the higher division side. The first half ended goalless despite both teams having loads of chances, so I spent a lot of time waiting for trains to zoom past behind the far goal so that I could attempt a few arty snaps.

It all kicked off in the second half though. Prees took the lead from a worldy of a shot from an acute angle that sailed over the keeper into the top of the net. SAHA deservedly equalised before the same Prees player scored again on 78 minutes to give them the lead again. That looked to be it, until SAHA scored twice in the last few minutes to gain a surprise, but well-earned victory.

No need to wake Sarah Satnav up today either, as I got there and back without any input from her. I never knew that Satnav's could snore!

*contributed on 18/09/22*

**TT No.31: Brian Buck** - Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> September 2022. **Stanway Pegasus** v Haverhill Borough; Thurlow Nunn League Challenge Cup 1<sup>st</sup> Round; Venue: played at Stanway School, Winstree Road; Result: 3-0; Attendance: 121.

I was very grateful to get a lift to this game tonight, although it was an easy cross-country drive to get here. We arrived about an hour before kick and as it looked unlikely that we would be able to find a place in the school grounds we bagged the last legal parking space in the road outside the ground instead. Then it was off to a pub my driver wished to revisit and, on the way, we could just spot one of the floodlight pylons at nearby Stanway Rovers.

We returned in good time for kick off, in fact, just as the rain arrived, which would be with us on and off throughout the night, fairly persistent, but not too heavy. Now time for a gripe! I'm all for football grounds in schools, as this one is. It's a win-win situation for the respective councils as they allow their school playing fields to be used outside of school hours, when otherwise they would remain unused. Furthermore, the school can use them as well during the day. But in doing so they have no idea whatsoever how to design them so that they can cater properly for spectators.

Tonight, only one full side was open to spectators plus half of one side behind the near goal, and that was it. The side behind the goal contained a 'Meccano' kit stand, necessary so that the club could play Step 6 football this season. But in my humble opinion, which obviously counts for nothing, for a few extra shillings they could have put a walkway right around the ground and put this stand along either side, where there was plenty of room to do so and thought more about spectators' needs. Spectators and supporters need to be catered for as well, as they are the lifeblood of any club. In this instance the football club and the landlord also need to think about what is going to happen should Stanway win the league, as this ground is not up to Step 5 standard. This could happen as when this game was played tonight, they were top of the league. The visitors tonight have a similar style ground, but at least that is a bit more thought out.

As for the game, once Stanway scored on 24 minutes there was little chance of Borough avoiding defeat. Up until that point the ref came in for a lot of ear-bashing, but was largely left alone after they scored. Further goals on 50 and 63 minutes gave Pegasus a safe passage through to the next round. Despite my negative comments about the place, I actually enjoyed the game, despite choosing to stand out in the rain all night!

*contributed on 09/09/22*

**TT No.30: *Brian Buck* - Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2022; AFC Walcountians v Worcester Park; Surrey Premier County League Premier Division; Result: 2-1; Attendance: 30 approx.**

After doing a lot of driving in the past few weeks, I decided to have a day on the trains today instead and amazingly they pretty much ran to time both ways. I alighted at Woodmansterne and was hoping to catch Bus 166 to the ground which runs every 20 minutes. But I had failed to realise that it departs from the south side of the station rather than on the north side! So instead, I elected to walk the mile or so to the ground, which in my old age took me about half an hour to complete. In mitigation it was mainly uphill and about half the walk was along public footpaths, through woods and fields. I suspect that in winter this would not be a practical way to get to the ground though.

On arrival I headed into the bar where I encountered a demented Celtic fan getting over excited as he watched his side thrash a poor Rangers team on TV, by 4-0. Then it was time for the match and to get to the football pitch it involved a trapeze past a cricket match to get there and in fact the set up here was so big that another cricket match was taking place a bit further on, but none of the three

matches interfered with each other during the games. You could watch the game from anywhere you wanted here, but the side opposite the dugouts, where I stood, was partially roped off. It must be fairly awful watching football here on a wet and windy day in mid-winter, as you were right on top of a hill. Furthermore, from my viewing position, you got panoramic views of London, and you could see just how many skyscrapers there are now. You could see Canary Wharf clearly and when the mist cleared, the arch of Wembley Stadium, which I estimate was getting on for 20 miles away.

Then it was time for the match to start and I was rather surprised that the referee was a lady who seemed to be getting on in years. I had no problem with this as I'm sure that she would never have reached this stage had she not been competent and despite what Worcester Park thought at times, for me, she had an excellent game. The first half yielded no goals. Play was fairly even though towards the end of this period the visitors looked to be getting on top. On 52 minutes Walcountians took the lead, from the spot, following a handball, which I didn't see. This aggravated Worcester Park a lot and they made life difficult for the ref for the remainder of the game. But they continued to work hard to get back into the match and on 73 minutes they succeeded when a cross from the right was swept home. But six minutes later the hosts regained the lead, which they would hold onto this time, when a glancing header beat the keeper from the edge of the area. Overall, a decent game in which a draw would have been a fairer result. Although I could have caught a bus back to the station, I walked it instead as I knew that I had enough time to make my train connection, so I did, and I did!

*contributed on 09/09/22*

**TT No.29: Brian Buck** - Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2022; **Somersham Town v Soham Town Rangers Reserves**; Cambridgeshire County League Senior A Division; Result: 5-2; Attendance: 80 approx.

I come here infrequently, but the ground hardly changes and contains two sections of cover, one on each side of the pitch with the clubhouse behind one goal and is railed off on those sides. In fact, it wouldn't take too much work on it to get it up to Step 6 level which the club are striving to return to.

I actually encountered some pre-match drizzle at this game, but it soon stopped. As I watched them warm-up I said to the Rangers Reserves manager, "I hope that you are going to put on a good show for us tonight." He told me that he would try. But by half time he may have regretted those words! But thanks to their efforts (or lack of them) they did allow a vibrant Somersham side to play very well, and I was impressed with them.

In fact, Soham almost scored the first goal for them on 9 minutes when their keeper nearly miskicked the ball into his own net. But he was only delaying the inevitable and the hosts did take the lead on 17 minutes. A few minutes later the ref spoke to a spectator after he moaned at him and asked him if he wanted to ref the match. On 41 minutes the hosts doubled their lead and added a third goal just before the break. At this point the aforementioned visitors' manager moaned at his players, telling them loudly while the game was still in progress, that it wasn't

worth them turning up if they couldn't be bothered to put in the effort. This led to an improvement to their enthusiasm after the break. But in truth the game was already lost and so a revitalised Somersham coasted through this period, scoring twice in a minute just before the end.

*contributed on 09/09/22*

**TT No.28: Jon T Green** - Saturday 3rd September 2022; **CALDICOT TOWN** v. Monmouth Town; FAW Amateur Trophy - First Round; Venue: Jubilee Way; Result: 2-0; Admission: £5; Programme: None for this fixture but normally on sale for £1; Attendance: 52 head count

With football grounds being increasingly pushed to the periphery of our towns and cities it was a joy to find Caldicot's Jubilee Way at the very heart of the community. Free parking (a phrase which always brings me the deepest pleasure) is right across the road and with shops, cafes and pubs just a few steps away it doesn't get much more central than this. The castle is an easy fifteen-minute stroll out of town and, whilst you are there, be sure to check out the railed off pitch of Caldicot Castle FC who play in Division One of the East Gwent League.

With the Welsh pyramid now firmly in place (at least in the top three tiers) ground grading has, and will become, a much greater concern for clubs. Given the relatively modest attendances at most matches this does seem to place an unnecessary strain on already stretched resources. Certainly, there will be a loss of some of the more historically interesting stands in favour of quick fix prefabricated structures. Caldicot is a prime example whereby their old grandstand, complete with blue seats and white crush barriers (not often you see these in a seated area!!), has been effectively moth balled and replaced by a new, more generic stand. It's an understandable move by the club, less maintenance and ticks all of the grading boxes; just slightly less appealing for us travellers. What hasn't changed is the friendliness of the club who simply couldn't have done more to make it a really enjoyable visit. Two special mentions here: firstly, to the official who went home to find me some programmes from games earlier this season and secondly to the substitute who shared a large box of jelly babies with some of the spectators before the game. The only comparison I can recall is Everton Toffees being thrown into the Goodson Park crowd. Health and Safety would have a field day now...

On the pitch Town have made a decent start to their Ardal South East League campaign winning all three home games without conceding a goal. Things have been a great deal tougher for the visitors from Monmouth who have picked up just two draws from their opening five fixtures albeit they are yet to play a home match.

Today is a cup game and it's rumoured that Caldicot are giving a run out to a few of their squad players. This might explain their slightly sluggish start as Monmouth's Sam Beckett strikes the bar and Iwan Mooney is only inches away from turning in Shemar Parkes' right wing cross. Parkes is a tricky winger with sublimely quick feet; he has pace to burn and looks a class above anyone else on the pitch. Town gradually work their way back into the contest and then score twice within

eight minutes: Sam Swann clips a neat pass into Ben Donoghue who is brought down not far outside of the box. The free kick looks ideal for a left footer and Matt Swann makes no mistake with a low bending effort which 'keeper Daniel Keane touches but can't keep out. Donoghue is again involved in the second as he whips in a low centre where Luke Evans applies the finishing touch.

On a distinctly Autumnal day, the home players remain on the pitch at half time and in consequence the break is less than 15 minutes, and we are back under way bang on time. Monmouth are working extremely hard, but you sense their frustration in failing to reduce the arrears, in fact it's Caldicot who nearly add a third through substitute Tyrone Tucker-Dixon. There are some pretty meaty challenges being handed out, but immense credit must be given to the players who are neither rolling around in mock agony nor retaliating. This attitude of "getting on with it" seems particularly prevalent in the Welsh game and it's certainly very refreshing to see. Monmouth continue to create chances; Mitchell Palmer sticks out a leg and deflects a shot narrowly wide and full back Curtis Hurley heads wide from a corner. Palmer goes near again in added time but Matt Sandiford palms away his half-volley to ensure another clean sheet at Jubilee Way and to send the home side safely through to the next round.

*contributed on 05/09/22*

**TT No.27: Steve Hardy** - Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> August 2022; **Amble** v Whitley Bay Sporting; Northern Alliance - Division 3; Result: 2-1; Admission: Free; Programme/TS: None; Attendance: 14 H/C

My annual Northern Alliance match whilst on holiday in Northumberland. Last year it was North Sunderland, and today it was the latest in a long line of clubs called Amble.

Amble play at the Amble Welfare ground, as have most of their predecessors, although I suspect the Welfare Ground has lost a great deal of the pomp it would have had in the past. For one thing, there is no Welfare club anymore. The pitch they are using now is just that. A pitch. No roping off here, and why should there be, as the league don't worry about such things below the top division. There is a decent looking changing room block along one corner of the pitch though, and a mystery ground behind the small mound of earth I stood on to get a few lofty photos. I asked one of the locals about this overgrown ground and was told it was once the best pitch in the area. Sadly, it is owned by a local school who don't let people use it anymore, so it has fallen into total disrepair.

Last week, Amble had won 8-1 and they started as if they fully expected such a score again, despite having just a bare eleven available. Sporting had other ideas though and scored after either 3 minutes (my reckoning) or 12 (club reckoning). After that it was nearly all Amble, and they got a deserved equaliser from a far post header on 40 minutes.

The second half was one way traffic and with Amble getting the winner on 65 minutes, courtesy of a Sporting OG.

Another cracking game then, and I can't wait for next year and the chance to visit another Northern Alliance game.

*contributed on 05/09/22*

**TT No.26: Craig Dabbs** - Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2022; **Moulton** v Rugby Borough; Spartan South Midlands League Division One; Venue: Brunting Road; Result: 5-3; Admission: £5; Programme: 16pp, £2; Attendance: 135

A few miles from home lies former Northants Combination side Moulton who are newly promoted to Step Six this season. Now and let's be honest here, it's a 3G cage with a kit stand in it which isn't exactly inspiring and one I really didn't want to do on a Saturday hence a rare midweek outing.

However, to be fair I have been in much worse 3G grounds than Moulton's. The cage here is three sided for spectators with ample space around the pitch. It's definitely no oil painting but it does the job and of course the surface means it can and does get an awful lot of use. I think the club said they have around thirty-seven sides plus, as per the programme notes, one of the biggest 'walking football' teams in the world, quite the statement.

The club were formed in 1896, when they played in the village of Old. They moved to Brunting Road in 1953 and have been steadily developing facilities here since 1979. This has culminated with the installation of the current facility in 2018, previously the old grass pitch ran at 90 degrees to the new 3G

Upon arrival I thought it was a nice touch to have someone in situ by the pay hut welcoming you to the club, something as simple as that sets the tone nicely. From the clubhouse to the left were some steps/ramp, leading up to the pitch above, all very neat and tidy.

The match was hugely enjoyable and was only really killed off when Rugby gave away a senseless penalty resulting in a red card.

All in all, a good evening out, although I still prefer the more ramshackle grounds.

*contributed via Brian Buck on 02/09/22*

**TT No.25: Keith Aslan** - Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2022; **CAPEL** v Charlwood; Southern Combination Div. 2 (nee Sussex County League); Kick Off: 15.00; Result: 0-1; Admission & Programme: Free; Attendance: 44 (38 home, 0 away & 6 neutral)

I don't normally travel by car from one season to the next, but this was the second successive weekend I availed myself of a horseless carriage. Fellow Thanetarian 'Spud' enjoyed my companionship so much last week that he wanted to share my company again this afternoon. Well, that and it halves the price of his petrol. Travelling to Capel using public transport is a piece of urine, Holmwood Station is a 17-minute walk away, with an hourly bus service to Dorking stopping three minutes from the ground. Plus, an irregular service to Crawley with its stop behind the goal offering a perfect view of the game. With this bus due 16.48 it should be just right

with today's punctual kick off and a 12-minute half time, but Mr. Referee had other ideas and added on a total of 13 minutes just because he could.

Newcomers to the league this season, the club play at Bearwood Green, a hamlet a mile or so north of Capel. Deep in the Sussex countryside it was only spoilt by the close proximity of the A23. Completely roped off with handily placed seats for the hard of standing, teas and coffees were available at half time. Be warned, programmes sell out very quickly and my chauffeur got us here super early to ensure we bagged the paper. Having achieved our aim I was treated to a wonderful drive through the North Downs as my pilot ticked off a couple of real ale pubs, a pastime that doesn't have quite the same kudos as ticking off Greggs.

The scenery is magnificent and in a fabulous village called Abinger Hatch I noted from the bus stop outside the pub, that it had one bus in each direction on Wednesday and Friday (does anybody actually use this service?). Still, it's more buses than from my dacha to the sea front now since the embodiment of evil that is my local council took away all the subsidies. On leaving Abinger the Sat Nav 'went down', but I got us to the next pub thanks to my trusty Ordnance Survey Map. You don't need a satellite connection if you've got paper!

The match was very, very good, a thoroughly absorbing 103 minutes which could have gone either way, but unfortunately for Capel, didn't go theirs. Sitting in the sun on a village green chatting with like-minded individuals, supping caffeine and watching football. Can't beat it.

*contributed on 04/09/22*

**TT No.24: Brian Buck** - August Bank Holiday, Monday 29<sup>th</sup> August 2022; **Buckland Athletic** v Bridgewater Town; Toolstation Western League Premier Division; Result: 1-3; Attendance: 268.

With marriage contractual relations breaking down today, I wasn't allowed to get in a new ground, so I settled for a revisit to Buckland Athletic, a ground I had first visited a few years ago now. Most of it was much as how I remembered it, although the car park seemed to be smaller than I recall. But at least I got into it. The ground, another one cut out of a hill, is nice as are the people who run the non-playing side of the club.

They have a decent stand on the far side of the pitch, but it's a 'Luton Town' one, which means that there are posts everywhere and I moved seats at least three times to try and improve my view, without really succeeding. During the game I bumped into an old friend, namely Kerry Miller, a Groundhopper (even though he denies this!) and author of many articles on non-league football and quite a few books.

As for the game it was what you get when you move higher up the leagues. My other four games down here had been generally played out in a good spirit. This was a 'win at all costs' game. As the dugouts were right in front of the main stand, I had to listen to all the dross uttered by both sets of managers, especially those of the hosts, who should be ashamed of themselves for swearing when there were

young children sitting right behind them. Nonetheless, in a fairly even first half it was they who took the lead on 35 minutes, with an angled shot from the edge of the six-yard box. Then on 45(+7) minutes, the well supported visitors equalised from the spot when a player was 'armed' off the ball. In the second half the ref rightly got fed up with proceedings and on 56 minutes he sent off a home player for getting two yellow cards. This action effectively handed the game to Bridgewater and on 73 minutes they took the lead with a goal which looked offside to me. Then three minutes later the ref decided to have a drinks' break, which the home players didn't want, and then on 84 minutes the visitors got a third goal with a 'hit first time' effort from about 15 yards out.

*contributed on 02/09/22*

**TT No.23: Brian Buck** - Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> August 2022; **Lyme Regis** v Clyst Valley; Devon & Exeter League Premier Division; Result: 2-2; Attendance: 70 approx.

I had been waiting to visit Davey Fort for many years and so after dropping my wife off around my aunties house in nearby Seaton I set about trying to reach the ground. Luckily, I had spoken to the home secretary earlier in the morning, as he told me that the road was closed in the middle of the town and how to reach the ground by going through the back streets.

On my arrival, the club car park looked full, so I parked in the adjacent expensive public car park instead. But as I didn't have any change, I went into the ground to get some. Here the nice bar lady pointed out that there was a space to park in the main car park after all, so I did. Admission to the ground was free, as were the programmes which were brought around after the game had started. In it I read that the club's four-year £140,000 development programme is nearing completion and the things that interested me included installing a 63-seater stand and improved drainage. They have also widened the pitch by two metres although it still looks very narrow to me. It also slopes up and down and from side to side. As usual in these parts the pitch is carved out of a hill, which means that the tree lined banking on two sides makes it look very attractive. The pitch looked awful, playable at this level, but perhaps not at some of the Step 1 to 6 leagues.

There was a good atmosphere here today, with many spectators choosing to sit at the trestle tables dotted alongside the pitch between the stand and the clubhouse in the corner. The game was very physical, and the ref came in for a lot of ear bashing, which subsided after both sides had scored. Clyst scored first, after 35 seconds, from the edge of the area. Then on 27 minutes they scored again after the ball was shot into an empty net following an accidental collision with the keeper. But a minute later Regis pulled a goal back with a placed shot from 20 yards out. The same player got the equaliser on 62 minutes after shaking off some defenders before running on to score. As I left my seat just before the end, I overheard two spectators sitting near me ask each other who I was. They thought I was a scout! It's great not to be recognised sometimes! I enjoyed my visit to this delightful little ground.

*contributed on 02/09/22*

**TT No.22: Brian Buck** - Friday 26<sup>th</sup> August 2022; **Upottery** v East Budleigh; Devon & Exeter League Division 1; Result: 2-1; Attendance: 30 approx.

Earlier in the day I'd been to a funeral in Exmouth for one of my wife's aunties, where parking for three hours on the seafront costs more than it does for a pint! Upottery is a pretty little place and can be found down a country lane a few miles from Honiton off the A30. Having done my homework beforehand the ground was easy to find, even though some of the roads to it were extremely narrow. This was a lovely scenic landscaped venue, with football and cricket each having their own pitches. There is a small wooden clubhouse which serves both sports and I suspect that this is why tonight's match was brought forward by a day. Parking was also easy for once.

On my arrival some youngsters were having cricket net practice and as I looked for a vantage point from where to watch the game I nearly got hit by a wayward shot! There were wooden benches scattered round the pitch, which was on a raised plateau, and I got a good one, close to the halfway line, from where I had an undisturbed view for the whole game, free of any plonkers coming round to stand nearby to block my sightlines.

As for the game, a week earlier Upottery had won 7-0 so hopes were high for another win tonight. The game was competitive but largely friction free and the ref was not called upon to produce any cards. In the first half although the hosts attacked more there was never much between the sides. Then on 57 minutes both teams scored within a minute. Firstly, Upottery with a 25 yards out direct free kick, merited on their first half performance, but not in the second half as Budleigh had started this period better. But the visitors were soon level with a shot which was squeezed in between the keeper and a post. By now the dark clouds above produced some light drizzle and the light became poor at times. Both sides pushed for the winner and that came the hosts way on 71 minutes when from 30 yards out a shot went through a ruck of players. Then as I left the ground afterwards, I tried to follow some cars down the narrow country lanes to the A30 but couldn't keep up with them because they went too fast for me!

*contributed on 02/09/22*

**TT No.21: Brian Buck** - Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> August 2022; **Starcross Dons** v St Martins; Devon & Exeter League Division 5; Result: 0-2; Attendance: 20 approx.

On the next night I picked the nearest game to the guest house where we were staying, at nearby Dawlish, about five miles away. Luckily it was a bright night as after I got halfway to the ground, I suddenly realised that I had left my glasses 'at home'. As I was busy driving at this point, some of you might find this disturbing! When I got to the ground, I found that the car park was essentially full and as there was nowhere else to park and everyone seemed to be parking where they wanted, so I joined in. I must have blocked someone in, but during the course of the game no one asked me to move my car. Although there was a nice church to look at, this ground was the least attractive of the grounds I visited whilst on holiday and to be honest I could have been at any recreation ground in any part of the country. It was a big venue and there were at least three full size pitches in it

and there were youth team games taking place all over the place tonight. 'Our' game took place on the pitch nearest the car park and the changing rooms.

As for the game, it wasn't great, but it did improve as it went on. The players annoyed the ref, who at one point told them "You shout at me quicker than I blow my whistle!" At half time he told me that he failed his fitness test on the previous Sunday. But for me he didn't do too much wrong on the night. Also, his lot improved as he sin-binned a St Martins player on 39 minutes. The break must have done him so good, as it was he who scored the only goal of the game on 70 minutes. Then, after the game had finished, I suddenly remembered that I always keep a spare pair of glasses in my glove compartment, so at least I got back safely!

*contributed on 02/09/22*

**TT No.20: Brian Buck** - Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2022; **Farway United** v **Dunkeswell Rovers**; Devon & Exeter League Division 2; Result: 0-2; Attendance: 25 approx.

Time for a football tour, or as my wife puts it, our holiday! We also had a family funeral to attend as well while we were down here. We arrived at our guest house without too many hiccups, but some 45 minutes later I was back on the road again, back from where we'd come, but this time turning off at Honiton where a series of narrow 'no passing places' lanes awaited me. I knew what to expect, as over the years I've driven past the ground, by accident.

However, as I neared the ground my sat nav indicated that I had taken a wrong turning but finding a place to do a three (times 20 plus) turn was very difficult and I attempted to do it in a gate to a field. I had nearly managed it when a car, plus a couple more, came the way I now intended to go. I soon discovered that they were the players and club lino of the hosts and furthermore, had I not tried to turn round then I was actually on the right road and the ground was only a few yards further on! The club lino re-parked my car for me, the other cars went on to the game and I joined them after finding somewhere easier to turn round.

Upon arrival at the ground, I found the small car park full, so I had to park half in a hedge a bit further down the road. I was still back in time for kick off though. The ground is a real gem. For those who have been there, imagine a poor man's Brimscombe & Thrupp. It's cut out of a steep hill, so you watch the game from high up on one side. It must have taken years to create and looks wonderful, but I kept asking myself why anyone would want to spend so much time and energy in creating such a delightful ground in a place which isn't even mentioned on a road atlas, and which could barely be described as a hamlet. For me Farway stands for 'as far away from civilization as possible'. You could sit on benches to watch the game on a pitch largely surrounded by trees.

Dunkeswell went a goal up after 8 minutes and for the rest of the game the hosts struggled to get back into the match. At half time I found that the coffee only cost 50p and was told that the car park was so full because they don't usually get crowds this big here! The visitors wrapped up the game with another goal on 75 minutes. Afterwards as I walked back to my car a young lady caught me up. I asked her if she was going back to Honiton. She said that she was and so I asked if I

could follow here. She agreed and so my return journey was much easier, as I'm quite good at following young ladies!

*contributed on 02/09/22*

**TT No.19: Jon T Green** - Saturday 27th August 2022; **HOLWELL SPORTS** v. Dunkirk; United Counties League - Division One; Venue: Welby Road; Result: 2-2; Admission: £5; Programme: £2; Attendance: 62

It's difficult to go anywhere near Melton Mowbray without someone asking if you are here for the pork pies. There are however a few more interesting things to see than a meat and pastry combo and Holwell Sports, just a few minutes' drive from the town centre at Ashfordby Hill, is most certainly one of them. The club were formed in 1902 as Holwell Works and affiliated to the Holwell Iron Company who mined and smelted metal in the area. Adjacent to the ground is St John Road, where you walk past houses built for the factory workers and on into the nearby woods where you'll find remnants of the site - if you are into a bit of industrial history then this is certainly worth a few minutes of your time. As with most heavy industry, the furnaces and chimneys, which once dominated the area, are long gone but water and sewer pipes along with drain covers are still made close-by. Check beneath your feet when next you are standing on a manhole cover, and you might just see the name of Holwell looking back at you. Amazing what you can learn from this groundhopping lark isn't it?

Welby Road is currently undergoing something of an upgrade with white plastic paddock style fencing installed during the close season and new dugouts arriving over the next few weeks. The ground is an eclectic mix of old and new: outside is a wonderful 1960's curved metal sign boldly painted in the club colours of yellow and green whilst inside, and situated behind the near goal, is a long low covered terrace. The Main Stand contains three rows of seats, salvaged from Coventry City's Highfield Road ground, which goes a long way to explaining the otherwise out of place sky blue colours. The stand would be neat, if fairly unremarkable, were it not for a number of open spaces in the rear wall which provide a "window" style view of the next-door bowls club. With a lengthy tournament taking place on the day I visited, I was able to keep track of its progress when there was a lull in the football. Two sports for the price of one can't be bad, eh?

On the pitch it's been a tough start for a young and inexperienced Sports team, a couple of draws have been punctuated with a number of defeats and, after six games, they are winless. The visitors, Dunkirk, sit in upper mid table and start much the brighter. George Harrison looks a class act on the right-hand side and is whipping in some quality crosses which cause considerable discomfort amongst the home defenders. Harrison then forces Ben Challis into a sprawling save before, against the run of play, Holwell take the lead. 28 minutes have been played when Kai Biggs-Finney moves smoothly onto a clever through ball and although his low shot is well parried by 'keeper Jake Want, Harry Allcock is on hand to roll the rebound into an unguarded net. Dunkirk go straight back onto the offensive with Harrison, Aaron Large and Sam Harbottle all having good attempts. It's therefore no surprise when with four minutes of the half remaining the scores are levelled: Harrison is of course involved as he feeds Max Taylor, the striker strides to the by-

line and, when he centres, Harbottle makes no mistake from close range.

Holwell begin the second period clearly unperturbed by having been pegged back and within seven minutes they regain the lead: leading scorer Tom Pope bursts through on goal only to be crudely stopped right on the edge of the area. With the home fans calling for a red card justice is done as Allcock rifles the free kick into the bottom corner. The game is turning increasingly fractious as Dunkirk sense it is slipping away from them; Pope has another free run on goal but never looks confident as Want does well to narrow the angle. Seven minutes of added time are signalled by referee Mr Wade and it's in the last of these that Holwell hearts are broken; Dunkirk have been ramping up the pressure and when they earn a corner, substitute Lorcan Hickey finds a way of squeezing in his shot at the near post. It's probably a fair result but you can't help but feel sorry for the home side who have been positively encouraged by their management team all afternoon. With the club moving forward off the pitch, survival at United Counties League level will be key but on the evidence of today Holwell's youngsters have the ability and attitude to achieve just that.

*contributed on 01/09/22*

**TT No.18: Keith Aslan - Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> August 2022; LLANHILLETH v P.I.L.C.S;**  
Autocentres Gwent Premier League Division 1; Kick Off: 15.01; Result: 2-0;  
Admission: Free; Programme: £1; Attendance: 26 (22 home, 2 away & 2 neutral).

With the bank holiday being spent on another superbly organized hop in South Wales, I decided to go off piste on Saturday with the two afternoon venues having already previously had the pleasure of my attendance. I had been warned in advance that the ground at LlanHILLEth was on top of a mountain and with two taxi companies unable to supply me with transport, I took a chance that my dodgy knees would hold out on the climb if I took it slowly. If they didn't, I had no plan 'B' other than to collapse in a heap and wait for an ambulance.

LlanHILLEth is two stations down from Ebbw Vale, and I got more excited than I should have done as this was a new line for me. On previous visits down this way the train service didn't exist. 2008 was, I believe, the grand reopening. To add to the excitement the train left from Platform Zero at Cardiff, a new platform for me as well. (Note to self: must get a life). Transport for Wales was on top form today. This is a country that has a more mature attitude than England to subsidising public transport with train and bus fares very reasonable. Still a bit miffed that I had to pay on the buses, my free pass (which I got six years after everybody else) isn't valid across the border.

LlanHILLEth is a typical mining village. At least it was when there were some. It's sad now to see them all closed down, but I might not feel the same emotion if I'd actually had to work in one. Their old ground, which they left a couple of years ago, is right next to the station. If only they hadn't moved, I could have saved myself so much pain and suffering. Even with two fully functioning knees I wouldn't advise attempting the climb. It was 35 minutes of pure torture and when I finally limped into the ground, I must have wiped at least five years off my life expectancy. German philosopher Fredrich Nietzsche is quoted as saying 'What

doesn't kill you will make you stronger'. What a load of old tosh that is. Just about had the energy to get a programme before collapsing onto the wooden sleepers that double as terracing, and vegetating there for the duration of the match. I consoled myself with the knowledge that at least if I was going to die, I wouldn't have very far to go to get to heaven, I'd already climbed halfway there.

There is a small stand which is usually open but today was all shuttered up. Fully railed, but no refreshments. What they do need is a supply of oxygen masks. Not much to choose between the sides with two second half goals sealing it for the homesters. They were a mouthy bunch and if I was the official, I'd have walked off and told them to see how they'd get on without a referee. But what else can you expect in a country that doesn't have 'Respect' handshakes. Nice to see so much green grass around, obviously had a bit of rain in Wales. Everything in Thanet is a dirty yellow colour with months since we last saw any of the wet stuff. If Noah had lived in Broadstairs he wouldn't have needed to bother building an ark. A cracking little programme accompanied the match. Big bald centre half Dane Morgan was the subject of the Player Profile. All you need to know about him is that his favourite team is Manchester United.

I figured that the descent back to the station would be less stressful. It wasn't. Just as painful going downhill, but at least it was easier on the lungs. Cardiff was buzzing when I got back. Many a time I've been in the principality around six o'clock in the evening with another four hours on a train to look forward to before I would get home, and I was almost euphoric that all I had ahead of me tonight was a 17-minute bus ride back to my hotel. By 7 I was luxuriating in the hotel bar with San Miguel for company which at £3.70 a pint was just about in my price range.

Another great Ground Hop, nine games, seven new grounds, two new Greggs ticks, a new railway line travelled, and best of all, I survived my mountaineering caper to live to see another Saturday. Just about.

*contributed on 30/08/22*

**TT No.17: Jon T Green** - Saturday 20th August 2022; **AFC TOTTON** v. Melksham Town; FA Cup Preliminary Round; Venue: The Snows Stadium, Salisbury Road; Result: 3-0; Admission: £12; Programme: £3; Attendance: 258

With apologies to any Star Trek aficionados out there "It's Non League Jim, but not as we know it". Totton may currently be a Step 4 club, but their ground is not far short of being Football League standard. The back story is something of a familiar one: club has traditional ground close to town centre, value of land rockets; club sells land and moves out to the suburbs. All of this was true here on the South Coast other than the company, Linden Homes, who bought Totton's Testwood Park ground and then did a remarkable job in building them a new stadium. Opened in 2011, at a reputed cost of around £2.5million, The Snows Stadium (naming rights have recently been sold to the chairman's company) is a superb example of what can be achieved if you move away from the normal prefabricated type of construction.

The Main Stand is a beauty, an open jaw cantilevered design with steeply banked

rows of royal blue seats. It sits astride the halfway line with light coloured concrete terraces to either side. These standing areas continue around behind each goal and onto the far side of the ground. Here there is a nice touch as one of the original stands from Testwood Park has been relocated; it's a low building complete with four lines of wooden bench seating. The scene is finished by the pitch and what a pitch it is! Maybe it's because everywhere is so parched right now that the vivid green stands out even more, or maybe it's because it's cut six times a week and has a set of 12 inbuilt sprinklers to provide the perfect amount of moisture. In every story there is a twist and this one is no different as Ken, groundsman and 29-year club veteran, explained: "Southampton FC use our pitch for their B team games and up until the end of last season the women's side also played here. Saints insist the pitch is trimmed to an exact level and now want to install an extra six watering heads as they believe that provides an even better surface. They've put a lot of money in, and the changing rooms and press facilities are state of the art. Totton and Eling FC have relocated here as well and their Wessex League ground is only a few yards away. We are trying to work more closely with them to develop young players".

With both sides in Southern League Division One South this had the makings of a closely fought cup tie; well, that was the theory. In reality this was something of a stroll in the sunshine as the home side ran out three goal winners. From the start Totton dominated as Scott Rendell put his header narrowly wide from an acute angle. Moments later Ethan Taylor had Alfie Burnett scrambling in the Melksham goal as his curling left footed drive didn't miss by much. The visitors were rarely seeing the ball in the attacking third but when they did Albie Hopkins and Chris Zebroski were their focal points. It was the latter who came closest for Town as his downward header was taken at the second attempt by Lewis Noice. With four minutes of added time being played Totton broke the deadlock: substitute Jireh Oyebamiji put in a perfect cross and this time Rendell made no mistake with his header.

Any lingering doubts over the winners were erased as Totton doubled their lead after an hour; Taylor's over hit right wing centre somehow eluded Burnett before dropping into the far corner. With 20 minutes remaining, the excellent Hopkins, again combined with Zebroski, but the striker could only head harmlessly wide. It was to be Town's last positive moment of the match as, following a tangle of legs, full back Will Christopher needlessly kicked out and was rightly shown the red card. A couple of minutes were left on the watch when Taylor fed Jordan Ragguette who made no mistake with a fierce drive inside Burnett's near post. It closed out a thoroughly comprehensive win and one which suggested that come April these two sides could be at opposite ends of the table.

There is no doubt that the club's association with their near neighbours has been mutually beneficial, but one can't help feeling that with Southampton's badge prominently displayed around the ground, a slight loss of true independence has prevailed. Our game in this country has never been based on a feeder club system and I truly hope that this will not become the case here. For now, though, everything is rosy in the Totton garden, and it's certainly a ground that you should add to your "must do" list.

*V2 contributed on 22/08/22*

**TT No.16: Brian Buck** - Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> August 2022; **AFC Coventry Rangers v Inkberrow**; Midland League Division 2; Result: 4-2; Attendance: 50.

With the trains continuing either not to run or being unreliable if they did, it was yet another trip out in the car today, but with most of it being on the uncongested A14/M6 this was no great hardship. Furthermore, unlike last week, the game was actually on when I got there and not only that, but the bumpy looking pitch was greener in colour than brown.

The ground is to be found on the most easterly point at the most northerly end of Mitchell Avenue, from where you paid your admission and obtained matchday programmes. It is called Coventry Technical Rugby Club and although none of that stuff was going on today it seemed that the football club might be either renting or leasing the pitch from them. But the football club and the rugby club have separate entrances. The football club pitch was roped off for the most part and I noticed that in my pre-drink(s) in the bar inspection of the ground, that they had no stand here. Although on making enquiries I was told that they did have one. I looked around trying to find it before I was told, "It's over there in the car park, waiting to be assembled!"

Later, as I watched the match from my garden chair on the far side of the pitch, with the sun on my back, I noticed that they did have some seats here, on the clubhouse side, in the form of benches and chairs either side of the dugouts and they were well used. So, pre-match I spent some time in the bar, where Spurs v Wolves was showing on the TV. Spurs were winning but not playing well. So, as they more often than not, lose when I watch them on TV, I was very grateful when someone thought that the Hibernian v Rangers match offered better viewing instead. I for one was happy as this simple action meant that Spurs hung on for their win!

As for the game I'd come to see, it wasn't bad either. Inkberrow deservedly took the lead from the spot on 10 minutes, following a trip. But Rangers worked their way back into the lead, equalising on 36 minutes before taking the lead with a thunderous 25 yarder on 44 minutes. The second half saw Inkberrow gradually fade, especially after Rangers got their third and fourth goals on 60 and 63 minutes, although they did pull a goal back, deep in added on time at the end. Overall, a decent day out at a ground which had a bit of a family feel to it.

*contributed on 22/08/22*

**TT No.15: Steve Hardy** - Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> August 2022; **Wombourne Allstars v Pelsall Villa Colts**; West Midlands Regional League - Division Two; Result: 0-2; Admission: £3 including programme; Attendance 45 H/C.

My return to football after a self-enforced break was a local affair being only 18 miles from home. It was also a chance to recomplete the West Midlands Regional league again too. The WMRL has fallen on hard times in recent years, and after losing its step 6 status it is now reduced to just two divisions with a whole host of

new clubs being admitted making up the numbers. Today's match featured two such clubs as Wombourne Allstars (formed in 2020) entertained Pelsall Villa Colts who I understand took over the mantle of the now defunct Pelsall Villa a few years ago.

The pitch is yet another 4G pitch in a cage (my 100<sup>th</sup> such pitch visited in England). Spectators are allowed inside the cage though and can stand the full length of one side. The crowd was a very healthy 45, most of whom were attracted by the first match programme the club has ever issued. Sadly only 10 copies were printed, so most people went without!

Despite finishing the first half goalless, I thought both teams tried really hard, but without getting any telling shots off at all. I spent the half catching up with a herd of fellow hoppers, some of whom I hadn't seen for years. In the second half I was allowed to walk round to the far side of the pitch where I had spotted a chap snapping away in the first half. Turns out he was the dad of the Wombourne keeper and had photographed his career since he was a lad. Very touching.

I have to admit I was hoping for a home win here, but it wasn't to be. A penalty on the hour mark, and a killer second goal on 80 minutes gave Pelsall a well-deserved win and keeps their 100%-win record going (OK, this was only their second game, but you know what I mean).

No problems for me in navigating through the centre of Wolverhampton to get to Wombourne either or going home again. You know what? I might just try this groundhopping lark again.

*contributed on 21/08/22*

**TT No.14: Craig Dabbs** - Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> August 2022; **Ingles** v Droitwich Spa; Midland League Division One; Venue: Homestead Road; Result: 3-4; Admission: £5; Programme: £1 (12pgs); Attendance: 75.

Writing this piece, I can't help but draw comparison between the last game I watched prior to our first lockdown and this one. Back then I attended The Welfare Ground (long term home of now defunct Ibstock Welfare FC) to watch Hinckley. The club saw the opportunity to move in ensuring that Saturday Football returned to the venue. Elsewhere in the county Ingles have done exactly the same, moving into Homestead Road, the former home of Thringstone MW who folded back in 2020. However, the difference here is that Hinckley's tenure at Ibstock lasted only one truncated season whereas Ingles have signed a fifteen-year lease to take on the ground and have a home to call their own three miles out of Shepshed where the clubs roots lie in the Ingles estate in Shepshed.

Much work has been undertaken by the club to transform what was fast becoming a more than tired venue. The club set about removing the post and rail and reconfiguring the pitch because it was too narrow (hence the padding around the lights which are now really close to the touchlines). The lights themselves needed to have work done on them as well. The cover has had a makeover with seats

added and a new name board placed over the top; new dugouts have been added; hard standing laid and a new homespun wooden cover has been erected behind the goal furthest from the entrance, although this still needs the necessary groundwork doing to it.

Further work is also planned with hard standing to be laid on the side (currently out of bounds) where the dugouts are located. This currently serves as a driveway to a grassed area out the back used for car parking. A MUGA is going to be built there with the connecting footpath due for a slight re-route. So, as you can see Ingles are very keen to develop the ground in order to progress. However, they do need time to build up a local fan base here. The attendance today was given as 75 which is a little higher than the 57, I counted. Indeed, if you take into account the number of visiting fans and hoppers, I reckon that no more than thirty present were locals, most of them being committee members. There is a real challenge to be had there to attract more support.

The match was a belter, played on a scorched surface in equally searingly hot temperatures. The first half was played at quite a tempo with Ingles looking poor initially. However, they quickly got going and we were treated to some good football in the heat. The second half was a surprise, I thought legs would tire but the tempo was maintained before coming to grinding halt around thirty minutes in, when we ran out of footballs as the game looked, momentarily, to be in jeopardy. Thankfully, a couple of spares were found and the game came to a conclusion without any further incident. Unexpectedly we were also treated to a seven goal thriller with the points going to the visitors.

*contributed (via Brian Buck) on 14/08/22*

**TT No.13: Jon T Green** - Saturday 13th August 2022; **HORNCASTLE TOWN** v. Louth Town; Lincolnshire Football League - Premier Division; Venue: The Wong; Result: 1-2; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 110

If you've ever watched a game in Lincolnshire, you'll know that it's, without fail, windy. Not just a gentle breeze but a proper strong gusty wind, enough to freeze your fingers in winter and to blow unsuspecting livestock into the next field. It blows across the farmland, the gentle hills of the Wolds, off the North Sea coast and along the Humber estuary; wherever you go you cannot escape its constant presence. Today was different though as with temperatures still in the high 20's it was both cool and refreshing; it was to be welcomed and not cursed; this was a first and something that I do not expect to experience ever again in my lifetime!

Horncastle is an attractive town and if you like poking around in antique shops then it's positively heaven on earth. The place is absolutely chock-a-block with them, but it was in a little charity shop that I made a wonderful discovery. Excuse me now whilst I talk nearly exclusively to our readers over 50 but there, sitting on a high shelf, was a near mint special edition Subbuteo set. I say near mint as one of red team players was missing (in case you are worried I have managed to source a replacement online) but it was still a thing of immensely beauty and at a knock down price it was soon safely stowed in the boot of my car.

The football club is headquartered at The Wong - what a great name that is and, along with The Giant Axe and The Dripping Pan, must rate amongst the strangest titled grounds in the country. According to the club website "Wong" is a Scandinavian word meaning "pasture or common land" - who said that this football lark doesn't improve your IQ? Situated within an easy stroll of the town centre, it's a well-maintained venue with smart white railing on all four sides, floodlights, and a modern clubhouse - outside of which is a covered area which would provide decent protection on a wet afternoon.

Today sees the start of the Lincolnshire League and pairs the home side with near neighbours Louth Town. The visitors finished fourth last season with Horncastle closer to the wrong end of the table. With only a little over a dozen miles separating the teams, this has the feel of a proper derby match with plenty of away support in attendance. Given how warm it is, the game begins at a cracking tempo with Horncastle's Nadir Boulaid seeing plenty of action in the centre of midfield. For Louth, Harry Crawford has the first chance but under pressure pulls his shot wide. The black and white hooped visitors win their first corner midway through the half and referee Mr Norriss halts proceedings for the first drinks break of the afternoon. When play resumes, Bradley Coulam climbs highest to powerfully header home Jordan Smith's centre.

Liam Cotton is proving a handful for Louth's defence as he works across the entire front line. He seems to be involved in everything and certainly gives as good as he gets. You sense a bit of "history" between the teams and the referee calls together the two captains to remind them to concentrate on playing the ball rather than the man. The warning seems to work as the official gets through the entire 90 minutes without reaching for his cards. Added time is being played when Horncastle draw level; a cross from the right is met by Alec Enderby who rises above a cluster of defenders to head powerfully beyond Ben Smith.

Louth begin the second half much the brighter and Jordan Smith, having beaten his full back, pulls the ball back but Cole Nelson, arriving late from deep, can't keep his shot down. With the game on the pitch becoming increasingly irritable, there is excitement off it as an ice cream van arrives; it's parked just a few yards from the touch line and does a roaring trade. Perhaps a Cornish Mivvi break would have been in order but maybe that is against league rules: just imagine the potential damage players could do to each other with a Fab lolly or a chocolate Cornetto!!!

With just less than 20 minutes remaining Louth score what turns out to be the winner; once again Smith works some magic on the left wing and this time as the ball is centred Paul Coulam sees his strike slip through home 'keeper Lewis Burchnall. Horncastle step up the intensity and should have equalised; Boulaid finds Scott Bowman unmarked in the box, but the home captain can only steer his side footed effort wide. Michael Harness then goes close in added time but he's just unable to get a solid enough connection after Louth only half clear a high cross.

And so ended another thoroughly enjoyable day out, a good quality game well officiated and a pitch side ice cream. I'm off home now to recreate my youth by flicking little plastic men across the lounge carpet.....

*contributed on 16/08/22*

**TT No.12: Brian Buck** - Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> August 2022; **St Andrews** v Clipstone; UHlsport United Counties League Division 1; Result: 0-2; Attendance: 78.

Things started off so well for me today and in truth didn't finish too badly, but it was the middle bit I had a problem with! My intended match was at Northfield Emerald, of the Leicestershire Senior League. I had a lovely trouble-free drive to the ground, where I arrived 90 minutes before kick-off. I even got a good parking space in their small car park at this lovely looking ground. I was even told that the game was on. But as the bar wasn't yet open, I sat and ate my sandwiches in the car.

At around 2pm I returned to check out the situation and by now there were people on the pitch staring at it. I was now told that it was 50/50 as to if the game was on or not. Soon the match referee arrived, and it didn't take too long for him to call it off, some 40 minutes before kick-off, due to the cracks in the pitch. Now, far be it for me to moan, but these cracks wouldn't have suddenly appeared overnight, would they? It felt like inviting your friends over for a party and then when they have all arrived, tell them that they have to go home because you had forgotten to get in the food and drink.

So, I headed off to my back up game instead, which was on a 3G pitch (I believe) at Beauchamp College, on the south side of Leicester. I arrived here some 20 minutes before kick-off. The College gates were open, but I couldn't see any cars parked in the car park. So, I assumed that this match was off as well. As I had driven to this ground my heart wasn't really in standing inside at 3G cage with no shade to stand under in 30 plus degrees heat. Later I found out that the game did take place, so the pitch must have been hidden away behind the main buildings and people must have somehow parked down there.

So, I headed off to St Andrews instead, where I knew that the game was likely to be on and that I could also sit in the shade. And so, it was, and I arrived just three minutes after kick-off, missing no goals. I hadn't realised just how pretty this ground is. A canal runs close by (the ground is in Canal Street) and the ground forms part of the Aylestone Meadows Local Nature Reserve, none of which I really remember from my only previous visit, on 4 September 1989. On that night I saw the hosts lose 2-1 to Wigston Town in a Tebbutt Brown Cup 2<sup>nd</sup> Round match (attendance: 65 approx). In those days facilities were sparse and apart from the clubhouse the only other football furniture was a railed off pitch.

These days they have a stand with seats and two over areas of standing cover. Furthermore, the people running the club were pleasant, polite and helpful, especially when I accidentally left my wallet in the bar at half time. It was waiting for me to collect when I realised that I had lost it. As for the game, which was punctuated every 15 minutes by drinks breaks, it was one which the visitors just about deserved to win. They scored their first goal with a 25 yards out free kick on 15 minutes, and they wrapped up things on 84 minutes when the home keeper

didn't gather the ball cleanly and had it taken off him and shot into an unguarded net.

*contributed on 15/08/22*

**TT No.11: Keith Aslan** - Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> August 2022; **RAMSGATE** v Cray Valley Paper Mills; Isthmian League South East Division; Kick Off: 15.03; Result: 3-0; Old people's Admission & Programme: £5; Attendance: 485 (official but looked a bit less to me and included 14 away & 0 neutral).

Trains? I remember them. None again today so it's either Margate or Ramsgate for me. It's the Gay Pride Festival in Margate so I could make a day of it, but after much vacillation I opted for Ramsgate which is cheaper, and the grub is better. The ground is a 17-minute walk from the station, but buses take you much closer. It's one of the famous resorts along the Cote D'Thanet with many attractions which include the country's largest Wetherspoons and well...that's about it. But Ramsgate's main selling point is that it isn't Margate.

Much has been happening to the WW Martin Stadium in the last few years. The pitch has been moved, plastic has been installed, looking incongruously verdant today, and a new bar and patio has been built inside the ground to compliment the clubhouse outside. Only downside is the programme hut has gone with the contents being donated to Folkestone. New floodlights have been installed that light up the whole of Kent. Still looks like a proper ground with the banks of terracing behind each goal remaining in situ.

On entry there was no sign of the programme seller, and on enquiring at the turnstile, I was cheerfully informed it was on-line only this season. I was just about to go on a killing spree when the gateman said: 'you can have one of these though' and from under his table he produced - a paper programme - with the word free writ in large letters on the cover. This was the real deal, 16 pages, only two of adverts, and it contained everything a programme should. It was as good as any you will come across, with the paper brazenly un glossy. Must cost a fraction to produce compared with last season's 48 pager which was 30% adverts and eight pages of pen pictures and the history of Ramsgate which were the same every match. This was really a much better option, and they would sell a whole lot more of these even if they started charging a quid for them. I hope this continues, must be the only club that have stopped issuing paper programmes but are still issuing paper programmes.

At the moment the man in charge of Ramsgate is ex. Gillingham and Millwall player, Steve Lovell. Given that the life expectancy of a Ramsgate manager is on a par with a first world war pilot nobody is expecting him to still be around come the end of the season. This was his eighth game in charge, so it looks like he'll be making it to double figures, an achievement not all of his predecessors have managed. The team is looking good, which it should do with the amount of money that's being pumped into it. A first half penalty was supplemented by two really well worked goals in the second to give the 'Rams' a solid start to the season. We're being told to conserve water, but this was ignored by the players who were drinking the stuff like Oliver Reed drank beer. Usual stoppages in play to give them

time to down as much as possible. Maybe if they hadn't pointlessly run around cones for over 40 minutes prior to the start they wouldn't have got so thirsty? With a breeze blowing in from the North Sea it was hot, but not that hot.

Usual excellent range of food on offer and the teams came out to football's most famous anthem, The Liquidator. They are proud to have reinvented themselves as a 'community club' and from last season all the local cup finals were played here, and Ramsgate didn't charge them a penny. They have kids open days and are major contributors to local food banks and various other charities. A force for good.

Regular readers will have spotted my gentle criticism last week of Avanti for late cancellations due to staff shortage. They've got round this by bringing out a brand-new timetable with half the trains pre-cancelled. That's one way of doing it, another would be to employ more staff. Three (usually full) trains an hour run to Manchester. Only one an hour now so plenty of train crew to go round. No trains for me again next week but an afternoon spent at Ramsgate then home in time to listen to the latest chapter of the Man. United tragedy is a really good alternative to trying to get anywhere by train these days.

*contributed on 14/08/22*

**TT No.10: Brian Buck** - Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> August 2022; **Boston United** v Southport; Vanarama National League North; Result: 3-5; Attendance: 1,575.

With nothing much new to go to in my travelling range these days, I settled on this 150-mile round trip to visit the Jakemans Community Stadium for the first time. I'd been to the club's old York Street ground twice, firstly on Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> July 1980, when I saw them draw 3-3 with Mansfield Town in a friendly and again on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1994 when I saw Matlock Town beat them 3-2 in a Northern Premier League Challenge Cup 2<sup>nd</sup> Round match (attendance: 500 approx). Along with the old Chelmsford City and Yeovil Town grounds which are some of my favourite non-league grounds, York Street is still there at present, with Boston & District League side Railway Athletic playing there until they get kicked out when the ground gets knocked down.

The new ground is south of the town, in Wyberton on the east side of the A16 and is less than a mile from Wyberton FC, who play in the Lincolnshire League, whose ground is visible from the carriageway. We got here early, too early perhaps, but we got a very good parking spot close to the stadium, in a side street about five or so minutes' walk from the ground. We then sorted our match tickets out and headed off to the bar, where it was difficult to get a seat. From the outside as you approach the ground, it looks like you are at a Football League venue, but once inside things don't fully fulfil this optimism, but it's still a very good ground. The main stand seats over 2,000 people and is comparable to that of Stevenage's. There is standing for over 1,000 behind the north goal. There is also shallow covered standing along the far side and the south stand has yet to be built.

As for the match, it was poor if you were a Boston fan. Southport took the lead on 18 minutes, but then a minute later the ref, (not brilliant,) waved away a rather obvious spot kick for a foul to deny Boston the equaliser which might have kicked

started their game for them. But it didn't and by half time they were losing 3-0 to a Southport side who played like I had expected Boston to. In this period there were lots of stoppages, mainly for head injuries, not all genuine and I would have expected the two Boston coaches to gee up their side during these breaks, but for the most part they stood there motionless, although I expect that they might have heard the booing when the third goal went in!

In the second half Southport made it 0-5 by the 57<sup>th</sup> minute and then the game died until the 71<sup>st</sup> minute when Boston belatedly pulled a goal back as Southport relaxed. Then they scored twice more in added on time to make the final score slightly unrealistic. At the time we left the ground I felt that we had seen a poor game, but as I write this report a couple of days later I now realise that I actually did enjoy my day out overall and it made a pleasant change from the recreation grounds and park pitches I usually visit on a Saturday, and which I equally enjoy!

*contributed on 11/08/22*

**TT No.9: Brian Buck** - Friday 5<sup>th</sup> August 2022; **Stansted** v Hadley; Emirates FA Cup Extra Preliminary Round; Result: 1-0; Attendance: 214.

This was my first visit here since 23 July 2008 when I saw Brighton & Hove Albion first team beat Stansted 3-1 (attendance: 190 approx.) in a friendly match to mark them signing a player from the Airportmen. Since then, apart from a lick of paint in the main stand, which with its viewing limitations for those who sat in it, the ground has changed little. In fact, I reckon this stand was designed by the same people who built Luton Town's main stand, as it was nigh impossible to get a clear view of proceedings if you were sitting down! You could walk round most of the pitch, including the part which shares with the cricket, but it is difficult to see how the club's advertised 2,000 capacity could be met, should the need arise. The pitch was brown, bumpy and bone dry, although it was not rock hard. But it did take a stud.

The game was fairly awful, and even in the first half there were fears that no one would score. In this period Hadley had a good opening 25 minutes before Stansted had a decent spell themselves. But by the break exchanges had become roughly even. Chances were created, mainly by Hadley but neither keeper was severely tested. As the players came off the pitch at half time four of the Hadley management team remained in the centre circle for a pow wow. Apart from letting their own players sort out the pros and cons of the first half performance, I suspect that the main thing on their minds was how were they going to break down a side which defended in depth when they weren't in possession, especially at set pieces? This scenario is happening in lots of the competitive games I am seeing this season.

The second half continued in the same way. Hadley looked more likely to score but couldn't. Stansted kept defending, hoping that they would get something on the break. Then on 76 minutes and pretty much against the run of play, they did, with their only created chance of the half. A deep and wide free kick from close to the halfway line was somehow headed home. The lights here are poor, so I couldn't completely see clearly how the goal was scored. By the end Hadley would regret

not making more of the ball when they got it into the opposition penalty area. If things weren't dark enough on the pitch, it was even worse for us as we made our way back to the car afterwards as the street lights weren't working either!

*contributed on 11/08/22*

**TT No.8: Jon T Green** - Saturday 6th August 2022; ALCESTER TOWN v. AFC Coventry Rangers; Midland Football League - Division Two; Venue: Stratford Road; Result: 4-1; Admission: £3; Programme: No; Attendance: 53 head count.

Mick, the facilities manager, is anxiously waiting at Alcester's Stratford Road ground early on another gloriously sunny Saturday morning. "I'm only here at this time because we've lost the key to the officials changing room and I'm expecting the locksmith along very soon." He visibly relaxes as a white transit van swings into the car park setting up a cloud of dust behind it. With a new key soon safely in his possession Mick continues "our chairman, Dave Taylor, was taken ill during the epidemic, rushed into hospital and passed away a few days later. It was incredibly sad and left a huge hole at the club. The committee asked if I'd look after things on a temporary basis and now two years on, I'm still doing the job". "The club is heavily based around our youth teams", he explains "we have 20 plus sides at various levels, as well as a local Sunday League team who play here." Since 1977 the Warwickshire town has been twinned with Vallet (close to Nantes in France); "we're taking a group of youngsters out to play a match at the end of August. Flying out late from Birmingham on a Friday evening and back first thing on Monday. It's going to be a bit manic" he grins "but everyone will have a great time".

We talk outside the clubhouse/changing room area, there is a high slightly angled roof which would provide decent shelter on a wet afternoon although whether you could actually describe it as a stand is open to debate. The pitch is looking in surprisingly good condition and Mick explains that over a six-year period the club have been awarded a £50,000 grant to make improvements. "We were going to re-seed this summer but with the dry weather that's been put on hold for the time being. We've got hard standing on all sides and it's fully railed off but if we get promotion we'd have to put in a seated stand; not that we're thinking about that right now". I ask about their chances for the new season; "to be honest, I don't really know" he replies "I'm more of a Worcester rugby man myself but we do have a new manager who has bought in some fresh players so I think we'll do alright".

Today's visitors are Coventry Rangers who won the Third Division title by an impressive 10 points last season and are playing their first game at this higher level. Despite a positive start when Toby Curran goes close within the opening two minutes, Rangers soon find themselves behind: Odane Barnes, a strong muscular player, who is not knocked off the ball all afternoon, gets to the by-line and sends over a deep cross. Connor Perry-Holmes hooks the ball back into the area where centre-forward Liam Fullerton strikes it on the half volley into the roof of the net. Much to their credit Coventry respond and are level on 19 minutes; Liam Doyle plays an exquisite cross-field pass into the path of Alpha Wurie. Wurie is blindingly quick and once clear of the defence there is little doubt that he will score; his low

drive giving 'keeper Tom Walker no chance. In an even first half there are chances at both ends but the best falls to the blue shirted Coventry team not long before the break: Fola Fagbemi gets free on the left-hand side of the box, Walker does well to close down the angle, but Fagbemi cleverly lays the ball inside to Doyle who looks to have the goal at his mercy. The midfielder's shot is struck well enough, but Joseph Cole does what every good defender should do in covering back and makes a great clearance off the line.

I get the sense that the second half will be a tight affair, but this proves to be wildly inaccurate as Alcester score three times in quick succession just after the hour mark. The first arrives as Barnes holds his marker and when the ball breaks free Luke Dugmore is on hand to drill it low into the corner. Less than 90 seconds later it's three: Perry-Holmes latches onto a long pass and as it bounces, he neatly lobs the advancing Declyn Duggan. The long ball then again proves Rangers' undoing; Barnes proves far too strong for the defence and his clipped cross is confidently converted by Fullerton for his second and the games last goal of the afternoon. Barnes at times looks unplayable at this level and with Fullerton a natural finisher they could prove an irresistible combination. For Rangers, Toby Curran worked extremely hard in midfield and Wurie is a real speed merchant; despite the score line today they look to have more than enough to remain competitive.

Alcester is an attractive town full of old black and white timbered houses, a splendid church and a busy High Street offering a good variety of pubs and cafes. The ground, although a little basic, is set below gently rolling hills with woods and farmland as its backdrop. On an early season day with the sun shining down it's a great place to catch a game.

*contributed on 08/08/22*

**TT No.7: Keith Aslan - Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> August 2022; STANWAY PEGASUS v Barkingside;** Eastern Counties Division 1 South; Kick Off: 15.04; Result 2-2; Admission: £3 for old people; Programme: £2; Attendance: 91 (79 home, 5 away & 7 neutral)

With the only Saturday this month when there are actually any trains, I decided to make the most of this rare event and tick off Ashville or F.C. St. Helens in the north west. Went onto the computer before I left home to check on timings and the nightmare began. If you're only interested in the football bits, I recommend you skip the next paragraph.

Avanti had cancelled both the return trains from Wigan and Liverpool due to a 'shortage of crews'. Indeed, half of their rubbish train service was cancelled, and I wasn't going to get home until sometime the next day. What a country we live in, the expenses fiddling, amoral politicians we elect use our taxes to increase the profits of foreign companies instead of putting the money into actually running trains for the benefit of the people who pay for them. Remember what these liars said about privatization. The companies, like Avanti, would be giving us money to run the trains, not the other way round, and we'll have a railway that will be the envy of the world. Oh yes, and with privatization will come cheaper fares.

Democracy doesn't work, and, given a vote the electorate will always opt corrupt cretins to ruin the country. Remember, Adolf Hitler was democratically elected. Mind you, although he's come in for a lot of bad press, at least he made the trains run on time, something beyond the power of this lot. As the country disappears down the sinkhole of incompetence never forget who put us there. And who voted for them.

So, with a trip to the north west now out of the question, a study of 'Traveller' came up with Eastern League newcomers Stanway Pegasus, with both SouthEastern and C2C managing to find enough staff to run all of their trains. Colchester is the one you want with the S2 from outside the station offering three buses an hour to within a 6-minute walk from the ground. Not much going on in Stanway, and for victuals I would recommend getting off the bus four stops early, just past the world's cheapest chippie. Fish, chips and a coke came with change from a fiver.

I wasn't expecting any architectural magnificence from a plastic pitch with an address of 'Stanway School' and so it proved. It's good to see the Thurlow Nunn League has a very laid-back attitude to ground grading. Spectators permitted along one side and one end of the ground, with a small Atcost stand behind the goal. This provided most welcome shade, the only part of the ground you weren't going to suffer sunstroke today. The whole ensemble is surrounded by, surprise, surprise, a green mesh fence. The ground is named in honour of the West Family, the club's main sponsors with the seating named the Ron West Stand, after the current chairman's grandfather. With Southend United also sponsored by another West dynasty, they have rather unfortunately named one part of their ground 'The Rose West Stand'! A mobile paddy wagon did a roaring trade throughout the afternoon, but with coffee at £3 a throw they didn't receive my custom.

Stanway are unique at steps 1-6 in having a female manager, so let's have a name check for pioneer Rosi Webb. It did seem strange to see the pre. match warm up being orchestrated by a woman. But, like women officials, which used to be a novelty, I expect we'll all become inured to it. An entertaining match, all the goals coming in the second half with Barkingside twice leading. Pegasus, named after a former Sunday League team, seem to have a very enthusiastic supporter base and their ambitions don't appear to stop at their current level. One can only hope they don't swan off ground somewhere else to achieve a higher status in the future. Then the club would cease to be 'Stanway' in my eyes.

Well, that's my groundhopping over for a few weeks, perhaps for ever, as I seriously consider if it's still worth the aggravation.

*contributed on 07/08/22*

**TT No.6: Jon T Green** - Saturday 30th July 2022; **SHIREBROOK TOWN** v. Harrogate Railway Athletic; Northern Counties East League - Division One; Venue: Langwith Road; Result: 0-1; Admission: £5; Programme: £1; Attendance: 102

To rather mis-quote Phil Collins "I can feel it coming in the air this morning"; maybe it was a sense of anticipation for the start of the new league season or maybe it was the gentle rain falling from the low grey clouds which had settled

over the Derbyshire/Nottinghamshire county line. At well before 10am the ground was already a hive of activity, “this rain is just what we need” said one club official “we can’t afford to water the entire pitch so have concentrated on the goalmouths” he added, pointing to the only two areas of bright green grass on an otherwise parched surface. “Come and see our changing rooms, I’ve spent the summer repainting them” the secretary called out as he ferried cans of beer and bread rolls from his car. So, I did and a fantastic job he had made of it too. Freshly pressed shirts hung on hooks and water bottles were lined up ready for filling. A quick note on the shirts which seemed very small so, given the size of some of the players, they must be made of a fabric far more stretchy than when I played. The changing rooms had been opened in 2004 by England World Cup winner Ray Wilson a man who was described “as a great friend of the club and a true son of Shirebrook”.

Langwith Road sits just off the main road between the railway station and the town centre. It’s a classic approach as the tops of the floodlight pylons become visible above the roofs of the nearby houses. They are more akin to the straight legged type commonly seen in railways sidings and give the ground a classic feel. Opposite the turnstile block are two identical seated stands but don’t imagine these are of the regular pre-fab variety. The Eric Stokes and Sid Pepper stands sit on a raised grassy bank and consist of three rows of blue seats beneath a black roll topped fascia. Red supporting steelwork adds a splash of colour to a very attractive set up. Both ends of the ground are undeveloped but there is a long breeze block covered terrace along the tea bar side of the pitch. The well-appointed social club is outside of the ground but close enough to allow for a swift half time pint.

Previous season form is not always a good indicator but, with Harrogate having narrowly missed out in the play-offs and Shirebrook finishing lower mid table, it looked like it could be a tough opener for the hosts.

The game begins in staccato fashion as the match ball turns out to be flat. “Only four months to prepare” mutters home captain Ashley Grayson as he waits somewhat less than patiently for a new one to be found. Grayson and his teammates are the busier early on as Luke Stewart finds a yard of space and goes close with a right footed strike. Town are attempting to hold a high line but the threat of Athletic’s speedy Oliver Norman is a real one as he constantly moves into the space behind the back four. Norman makes another surging run on the half hour mark only to see Joe Crosby have his shot well blocked. The break is reached goalless but Shirebrook might have gone in one goal to the good as Dan Ramsay sees his shot go narrowly wide after some great wide play by Kieran Ordidge.

Only five minutes of the second period have elapsed when the visitors take the lead: there seems to be no immediate danger as Norman receives the ball not far from the halfway line but he picks up pace, jinks past two defenders and then finds the bottom corner with a low cross shot. It’s a quality goal from the best player on the pitch. Sensing victory, Railway press for a second, captain Dan McDaid hits the side netting before Stewart is denied by the quick work of ‘keeper Joe Dunn.

The game then enters something of a hiatus, multiple substitutions and a raft of niggly fouls. Certainly, the two gentlemen to my left have lost interest as they start up an animated conversation about the merits of various types of sausages and which one is best suited to a roast dinner. With time running out Town force a succession of corners with centre half Ryan Ordidge going closest as his shot is deflected wide. In the end this is a deserved win for Harrogate, but Shirebrook showed enough spirit and commitment to suggest that they will have better days against less accomplished opposition.

*contributed on 02/08/22*

**TT No.5: Brian Buck** - Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> July 2022; **Westoning Recreation Club v Westoning Abbey**; Friendly Match; Result: 5-2; Attendance: 20 approx.

It was good to be back here again, because although I have driven past this ground frequently, the only time I've actually seen a game here was on 13<sup>th</sup> April 1987, when Westoning, as they were then known, lost 4-0 to Woburn in a Bedford & District League Division 1 match (attendance: 7). All I recall from that night is that it was a rather wet evening and that Woburn won quite easily despite playing with ten men, possibly nine, throughout the whole match!

Before the game started tonight, we wondered just who Westoning Abbey were, especially as there aren't too many Abbeys in Westoning! It turned out that they are a Sunday side, containing some players from Flitwick Town 'A', who play in Beds County League Division 4. The Abbey aspect tenuously comes from their sponsor's name, which is Abacus Pools & Spas. Westoning Recreation Club are a reformed side and will be playing in Beds County League Division 2 this season.

The recreation ground the match took place in was well used tonight and in addition to this game a ladies team were training elsewhere in the complex and kids were making full use of the playground facilities. Furthermore, the clubhouse bar was open, and some people were just hovering around between the clubhouse and the pitch chatting and not really watching the game. The railway line from London to Bedford and beyond passes right behind the goal, but we saw no trains during the match because this was a strike day!

So, on a night when the clouds suggested rain, but without any actually falling and which grew chilly as the evening progressed, it was the visitors who scored first, on 12 minutes, when their captain looped his long header over the keeper. However, the hosts were level on 28 minutes when their skipper out jumped the keeper to nod the ball in on the line. Then, starting on 32 minutes the hosts scored three times in five minutes, with the last of these looking offside. The second half saw Abbey play a lot better and for much of the half they dominated proceedings. So, by the time they pulled a goal back on 85 minutes, it was deserved. However, three minutes later the hosts claimed the last goal of this decent game, which was well reffed.

*contributed on 28/07/22*

**TT No.4: Keith Aslan** - Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2022; **ISSA v Drumchapel Amateurs**; Paul Millership Trophy; Kick Off: 15.15; Result stands at 1-2 (abandoned on 83 minutes); Admission: £3; Programme: £3; Attendance: 123 (107 home, 2 away & 14 neutral - a Craig Dabbs headcount so should be spot on).

ISSA stands for Independent Saddlers Supporter Association and has one of the best grounds you'll ever come across in Sunday football. They aren't going to transfer to the Saturday version of the game as everyone connected to the club wants to watch Walsall play. Railed on two sides, new brick-built dugouts and an impressive 48 seat stand named after the father of the current manger. Add on a clubhouse and you've got a really top-notch facility here. For the carless, it's a 18-minute walk from Bescot Stadium station, but another 10 minutes in the opposite direction will get you to Walsall.

The match was in aid of player Paul Millership who sustained a serious ACL injury earlier on this year (unusually during training). Reading in the programme of the operations he's had, and still to have, made me wince and is the other side of the beautiful game. He was present at the match hobbling around on crutches, a state he will be in for some time. Based in Clydebank, Drumchapel Amateurs are one of the most famous non-league sides in Scotland and must have travelled the greatest distance for a friendly on this day. And how's this for a list of some of their ex. players. Alex Ferguson, Walter Smith, Davis Moyes, Andy Gray, Archie Gemmill, John Wark, Asa Hartford and John Robertson.

The Saddlers manager, in his programme notes, expressed his appreciation at the oppositions 600-mile round trip to play the match. He hopes to give them 'a good game played in the right spirit, and a day to remember'. Definitely spot on with the last bit, not so the first. And the hopes of making it an annual event seem somewhat unlikely now.

I don't know what to make of the game. Anyone who likes a bit of edge to their friendlies wouldn't have been disappointed although the line between competitiveness and criminality was all too frequently crossed. The football that was played was entertaining enough but was punctuated by too many bouts of naughtiness. The longer the match went on, the more rambunctious it all became, and seven minutes from the end as ISSA waited to take a free kick, from the usual pushing and shoving in the penalty area, a Drumchapel player went down clutching his head. Apparently, he was elbowed in the face, missed by everybody including the three officials. Another fracas ensued, and when it eventually calmed down, the Drumchapel manager said enough was enough and abandoned the game. Unfortunate timing as the cup had just been bought out to the touchline in readiness for the presentation. The players went straight to the dressing room, changed, and I believe just got on the coach and left. Worse was to follow, they were down for the weekend and were having to spend the night in Walsall! I overheard one of their officials saying they needed to get a taxi to take the injured player to hospital with a displaced eye socket. How can footballers do this to each other? A cross border match to promote amity ending with a player being deliberately injured. They're all playing for fun, yet there's no fun in this. Anglo-Scottish relations took a bit of a dip today.

Let's start the season as we mean to go on, a fifteen-minute late start, as with kick off time approaching, both teams scurried back to the changing rooms. Unusually both teams had numbers on their shorts, I believe this might be a thing in Scotland, but you don't see it very often down here. And at half time the oranges came out, that takes me back. There was a barbecue with top grade crusty rolls encasing my meat treats, no soggy buns here. I enjoyed myself in spite of the truncated ending, and the ISSA officials were all models of friendliness. The players would do well to follow their example. I hope they learn that elbows are for barging people out of the way to get to programmes and not for injuring people.

Train watch: Everything ran perfectly until arriving back at Ramsgate, a couple of miles from home, where we got stuck for 35 minutes as it had all kicked off on a train ahead of us and it was stopped in Broadstairs awaiting police intervention. I can't blame that one on privatization. The local youth will have to find somewhere else to fight next Saturday, the trains will be on strike.

*contributed on 24/07/22*

**TT No.3: Brian Buck - Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> July 2022; Ely Rangers Veterans v Cambridge & Impington Veterans; Friendly Match; Venue: played at Pymoor Sports & Social Club; Result: 3-3; Attendance: 6.**

Today was my 71<sup>st</sup> birthday and we celebrated it by going to church, then going off to Boreham Wood so I could pick up my free season ticket for the over 70's. Then we headed off to John Lewis in Welwyn Garden City, firstly to have tea and cake and secondly to purchase a new flask to replace the one I broke at a game a few months earlier. Then just as I thought that life couldn't get any more exciting, I found that it could, after I settled on this match for my evening entertainment!

On the way there I got stuck in traffic and so I diverted via Cottenham, where I lived for the first two years of my life, arriving at the ground some ten minutes after the advertised start. But eventually we didn't get underway until 7.30pm, so that didn't matter. I'd been here once before, on 29 April 1999, when I saw hosts Pymore lose 3-2 to Bluntisham Rangers in a Beaumont Stainless Steels League Division 5B match (att: 15 approx). I remembered asking them why the team was called Pymore when the village is called Pymoor. The response at the time was they were a new team moving in to where they found this ground. They called themselves after the name of the village, but the secretary was told the name of the village over the phone and just guessed the spelling. But having done so they decided to stick with it.

Tonight, before the start the referee recognised me and after he told me that he's just coming up to his 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of refereeing and that he used to be the programme editor of Eynesbury Rovers FC, I worked out that he must be Pat Worrall and he was (and still is!). As for the match, it was played out on a very wide pitch and I sat on the far side, in my garden chair and out of the sun. I'd seen the hosts play a game back in June, at nearby Little Downham, which they won easily, but tonight they were given a stiffer challenge and as such at times the

match became rather competitive. At one point this flying object passed by overhead which seemed to consist of a man sitting in a garden chair attached to a parachute.

As for the game (40 minutes way), played out on a pitch where the grass cuttings still remained, Ely took the lead on 8 minutes. Controversially, just as the shot was going in the ref swallowed a fly! The visitors equalised on 27 minutes and then took the lead moments before the break. Then just before that happened there was a proper bounce up. But from it the ball hit the ref, but rather than give another one he blew for half time instead. In this period the 'offside police' had been working on the visitors lino, but in the second half they had a new one, namely Andy Cranch, who is also manager of the England Under 55's and during this half we had a long chat. Apparently, the age group for England teams now goes up to Over 75's, so there's still hope for me yet! In the second half Ely equalised on 52 minutes and took the lead again a minute later. Then on 60 minutes Cambridge equalised again themselves. Then, right at the end the visitors had a chance to win it from the spot, but the penalty taker blasted his shot over the bar. The people here tonight were exceptionally friendly and I'm glad that I came, although I didn't take too kindly to one gentleman who told me that when I first started to collect programmes, it must have been in the days when they chiseled them out on stone tablets!

*contributed on 15/07/22*

**TT No.2: Brian Buck - Saturday 9th July 2022; Cockfosters v Enfield Town; Friendly Match; Kick off: 3pm; Result: 0-1; Attendance 150 approx.**

After the previous match had finished (see TT No.1 below), it was a 2.8 miles drive (according to the AA route planner) to my other match today. My last visit here was on 15 September 2004 when I saw the hosts lose 2-0 to Wootton Blue Cross in an FA Vase 1<sup>st</sup> Qualifying Round Replay (att: 76).

I don't get to come here much these days, even though it's relatively easy to get here for me, the reason being that parking near the ground is supposedly difficult. But by making full use of *Google Street View*, I found that if you are prepared to walk a little then there is plenty of free parking to be had. Anyway, on my arrival, I dived into the bar where I had enough time to eat my sandwiches and have a pre-match slurp. Then it was off to find a seat in the shade to sit in. This was achieved quite easily.

The ground itself is somewhat countryfied. The playing arena is one of the smaller ones, as are the surrounds. Indeed, behind one goal it is out of bounds. But with plenty of trees around and with cricket going on next door, there are a lots worse places to be at on a day like this.

In the first half Enfield, playing in unfamiliar colours of green and black, were largely the better side, scoring the only goal of the game on 21 minutes with a curling shot from the corner of the area. At half time Enfield changed their side over, fielding a lot of triallists in the second period. Cockfoster now saw more of

the ball, but although Enfield remained the better side, they somehow looked less likely to score again now.

*contributed on 12/07/22*

**TT No.1: Brian Buck** - Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> July 2022; **Wingate & Finchley v New Salamis**; Friendly Match; Venue: played at The Football Pad, Barnet Lane, Barnet; Kick off: Noon; Result: 4-0; Attendance: 80 approx.

Today I was on a mission! First stop was to go to Boreham Wood to pick up my season ticket, free for over 70's this season. On my arrival, I was actually greeted by Danny Hunter, the Boreham Wood chairman, who is one of the more 'hands on' chairmen you'll find in the National League and above. He had bad news for me though, in that the ticket office didn't open until 12.30pm, half an hour after my first game was to start. I like Danny and I shook his hand to thank him for all the good work he has done for the club over the years, but although he treated me with respect, he couldn't quite get over the fact I was trying to pick up a season ticket and then not watch Boreham Wood play Brentford here, some four hours later! I told him that this was because it cost £15 for over 70's to get in! He then told me that I was not a 'real' Boreham Wood fan, and he was probably right! I noticed later that a tweet appeared, timed at about the same time as I arrived here as to what time the ticket office did open today. Just think, had I known this before I left home, I might never have met the Boreham Wood 'legend' again!

Anyway, off to my first game of the day, admission by donation! The ground is in effect the Wingate & Finchley Training ground and is where their Development side played their Herts Senior County League Premier Division matches last season. No one around today seemed to know if they will continue to do so this season. The ground consists of one railed off grass pitch and one 3G pitch and it's a few hundred yards south of Barnet's old Underhill ground which has now been built on. Over the years I saw 84 games played here.

The game today was played on the 3G pitch, and for a while it seemed that during the game the wire crossing it was hit more times than there were attempts at goal. In the first half the hosts took the lead on 19 minutes and generally looked the sharper side. But despite this Salamis had more shots than them. At the break both sides changed their entire line ups. In this period Salamis offered less and Wingate & Finchley went on to score thrice more. This was a decent game and, on this viewing, both sides look likely to have decent seasons.

*contributed on 12/07/22*