

TT REPORTS 2022-23

updated 25/09/22

TT No.39: Keith Aslan - Saturday 24th 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 24th 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 16th 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 17th 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 16th 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 17th 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 undoubtably 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 93rd 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 17th September 2022; **SAHA** v Prees United; Shropshire Challenge Cup - 1st 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 6th September 2022. **Stanway Pegasus** v Haverhill Borough; Thurlow Nunn League Challenge Cup 1st 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 3rd 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 2nd 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 27th 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 0509/22

TT No.26: Craig Dabbs - Tuesday 23rd 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 3rd 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 29th 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 27th 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 26th 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 24th 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 23rd 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.

Dunkerswell 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 27th 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 Snods 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 Ragogue 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 20th 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 20th 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 100th 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 13th 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; Boulaïd 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 13th 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 2nd 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 13th 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 6th 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 26th July 1980, when I saw them draw 3-3 with Mansfield Town in a friendly and again on 3rd November 1994 when I saw Matlock Town beat them 3-2 in a Northern Premier League Challenge Cup 2nd 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 57th minute and then the game died until the 71st 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 5th 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 6th 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 sharing 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 27th 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 13th 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 23rd 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 13th 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 71st 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 40th 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 1st 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 lot 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 9th 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