

[Go to TT Reports Index 23-24](#) [Back to Home page](#)

TT REPORTS 2023-24

updated 12/03/24.

TT No.126: *Jon T Green* - Saturday 9th March 2024; **RISBOROUGH RANGERS** v Milton United; Combined Counties Football League - Premier Division North; Venue: Windsor Playing Fields (Kamtech Stadium); Result: 4-0; Admission: £8; Programme: Online only but squad lists given away free on entry; Attendance: 138

“You can sit down if you want” smiles Phil Read indicating an empty tan leather armchair (one of five which somehow have found their way to the back of the main stand). I explain to him that after a few hours in the car standing up is a really good idea. Phil has kindly invited me to join him for a mid-morning cuppa and whilst I drink, he tells me that he has been with the club for nigh on 20 years. This morning he’s busy putting the final touches to today’s pitch preparation; I comment that it looks remarkably good but Phil, in the way of all groundsmen, is never quite satisfied and replies that there are “still a few bald patches out there”. He goes on “I just get it right; we have a match and it all cuts-up and then the hard work begins again”. Sadly, it was always thus....

Phil is a mine of information and explains that when the club was formed in 1971 this site was an unkempt meadow, and it took a huge amount of work to turn it into a playable surface. One of the founders was Ken Sheppard whose efforts “to almost single handedly build the clubhouse” are acknowledged by the walkway through the main stand being named in this honour (there are small black and white “road name” type signs at either end of this side of the ground). Notwithstanding the armchairs, there are two rows of bright red backless plastic seats giving a covered capacity of 64. The stand is raised above pitch level, and the players and officials enter down a short flight of steps cut into the grass bank. Club badges also adorn the banking which is a really nice touch. There are three further stands all named in recognition of past or present club officials; the largest of these is the Richard Woodward (chairman) Family Stand, a modern affair with seating for just over 100 and then two wonderful small wooden constructions (primarily for standing) Derrick Wallace (founder and Life President) and Nibbo Makepeace (ex-manager and now Vice-Chairman). If there is a better named stand on the non-league circuit, then we need to know....I hear that Nibbo (real name Colyn) is something of a comedian so hopefully he sees the funny side of his rather Monty Pythonesque name.

Milton United have made the hour journey from Oxfordshire and sit five points and five places above Rangers. Crucially they occupy the last of the play off places and, having played a game less, it feels like a “must win” game for the hosts. United have the first chance as full back Kieran Cooper heads over from a corner but it’s Rangers who open the scoring in the 14th minute; the highly impressive Greg Hackett steals the ball off Matty Crowther as the ‘keeper comes out to gather before firing home through a crowded penalty area. A few minutes later Matt Peake-Pijnen is caught by a thigh high tackle, the perpetrator is Milton’s centre-back Ty Lee who is lucky to only receive a yellow card as punishment. Lee might

still be on the pitch, but a minute later there is nothing he or his fellow defenders can do as Hackett doubles both his own and his team's total with a smart finish through Crowther's legs. Two becomes three as centre-forward Lewis Toomey, a man with more facial hair than on his head, collects a Hackett through ball and finishes with a curling shot beyond the exposed Crowther. What looked a tough game on paper is turning into a relative stroll for the home side. Milton's only notable effort comes after Craig Hill rather flaps at a cross but is rescued by his defence as they block Tyler Webb's drive.

Half time is enlivened by the purchase of a chicken tikka pasty (it was the closest thing available in National Pie Week) and having given myself a thorough brushing down to remove some stray bits of pastry, I watch as Rangers almost add another. Toomey flicks on a high ball, Hackett (who else?) centres and Adam Smith is inches away from making contact. Smith doesn't have to wait long to get on the scoresheet as after 54 minutes he beats the on-rushing Crowther to a long goal kick lifting the ball over him into an unguarded net. Risborough might have inflicted more pain on their opponents as Adam James and then Smith both go close but the match ends without any further goals. It's been a great afternoon for Rangers as they force their way back into the play-off picture and an even better one for Phil Read who, if my hearing doesn't deceive me, wins the 50/50 raffle prize. Fix I hear you cry...

contributed on 11/03/24.

TT No.125: *Craig Dabbs* - Saturday 9th March 2024; **Ipswich Wanderers v Gorleston**; Isthmian League North Division; Venue: SEH Sports Ground
Result: 1-2; Admission: £10; Programme: 32pp, £2.50; Attendance: 174

I wasn't planning on going to football today. It was a family day but by this morning the plan changed, and I found myself driving to Suffolk to visit a ground that's been on my agenda for a while. The SEH Sports Ground on the north eastern edge of Ipswich has been home to the club since 1987. They had only been in existence for seven years before joining the new Division One of the Eastern Counties League as Loadwell Ipswich.

The ground is affectionately known as The Doucy after the name of the road it's on, Humber Doucy Lane. A civil engineering firm that owns the ground hence SEH Sports Ground being the name. The ground ticked all the boxes for me: it's a little ramshackle and has plenty of charm. Despite having five areas of cover it is nevertheless causing ground grading problems. With the club are at step four, they are putting more hard standing in, then there's new toilets, new turnstiles to be done, the fence has gone up over the far side, oh, and a new 40-seater stand which is on its way to bring seating up to the required 150. They've made improvements to the clubhouse I think and before I forget a players' tunnel is needed! The club are spending a fortune to stay at this level otherwise it's a return to the Eastern Counties League following back-to-back promotions that has put them here. I just hope that charm isn't lost in the process.

By comparison, the visitor's ground problems are far greater. They haven't got one following the loss of Emerald Park and currently share at Great Yarmouth Town FC.

They arrived in Suffolk lying in mid table with Ipswich Wanderers a little further down but safe enough I think to avoid the drop. The two sides played out a terrific game with Gorleston edging it but there was very little in it. That first goal was a little bizarre with Ipswich's keeper saving it but the linesman judging it was over the line - boy did he get some stick which wasn't helped with his positioning (similar to mine) and there was no way I could tell. The rest of it was without controversy, the penalty was this time caused by the Gorleston keeper scything down the attacker, that was much more a given than the one in the first half. Then a little later Gorleston restored the lead and managed to hang on.

I do hope Ipswich Wanderers appease the ground grading gods and manage to stay up and that the changes don't impact negatively on what is a lovely little ground.

contributed (via Via Buck) on 10/03/24.

TT No.124: Steve Hardy - Saturday 9th March 2024; **Melbourne Dynamo** v Mayfield; Central Midlands Alliance Premier Division South; Result: 4-0; Admission: Free; Programme: £2; Attendance: 28 H/C

My memory isn't what it...er...what am I thinking...was. When I lived near Ashby De La Zouch a few moons ago, I seem to remember going to watch Melbourne Dynamo in the now defunct Midlands Regional Alliance, but they played at the next village of Ticknall and not in Melbourne. Now they have a splendid set up on a hill above Melbourne which apart from footie, houses a rugby pitch, cricket square and floodlit tennis courts. Changing rooms are in the impressive social club which has a bar on the first floor and Sky Sports on as well.

The footie pitch is fully railed off with a small stand along one side. The only thing missing are floodlights, but as the tennis courts already have them it can only be a matter of finance that is holding them back.

The match itself was very one sided indeed. Poor old Mayfield were overwhelmed by Dynamo and their long ball game which meant that from anywhere on the pitch if you had a minute, then you should pump a high ball into the area. According to the Mayfield Twitter account after the game, three goals were scored from defensive mistakes. The first was the best, when a high ball into the area was left to each other by the keeper and defender which left a Dynamo defender with the simple task of tapping the ball into an empty net. That was on 14 minutes and by 26 minutes it was 3-0.

Three minutes after the break the Mayfield keeper dropped an attempted catch at the feet of the Dynamo attacker, and it was four. I thought plenty more goals would follow but perhaps Dynamo took their feet off the gas, as none did. Mayfield didn't have a single shot on goal all game, but they did well not to concede in the final 40 minutes.

Melbourne are now second in the table, but are some way behind leaders Pinxton. I certainly enjoyed my trip to Melbourne as I look to recomplete the Central Midlands Alliance.

contributed on 10/03/24.

TT No.123: *Keith Aslan* - Saturday 2nd March 2024; **GARSTANG** v Ashton Town; North West Counties Division 1 North; Kick Off: 14.01; Result: 3-2; Admission: £3 for the elderly; Programme: £3; Attendance: 388 (95 home, 18 away & 275 neutral)

This is the only ground I needed to complete the North West Counties League. Since Covid Garstang have resolutely refused to issue a programme, not even an 'e' one. So, imagine my happiness and joy when they not only came up on a hop, but with a 2 o'clock kick off on a Saturday it's the only slot possible to do it on a day trip. Something had to go wrong. They were going to change it? They didn't. Avanti were going to have a meltdown? Usual pants service but they got me there. The weather would intervene? It passed a morning inspection while the following two hop games were postponed with waterlogged pitches. Yes, today was a good day.

Garstang is a smashing little town (big village?) with a half hourly bus service from Preston that drops you off outside the ground. Preston is a depressing place with the train and bus stations at opposite ends of the town requiring a long walk through the bulldozer friendly High Street. Garstang is mentioned in the Domesday Book but its main claim to fame is that it's home to the legendary groundhopper named after a northern seaside resort's transport system. When the fixture first came up I suggested I could pop round to his house for a pre-match meal. His reaction was a bit disappointing, with a two-word response, the second one being 'off'.

Like the rest of the country they'd had much rain in these parts and there were some doubts whether the game would go ahead. In truth the pitch was heavily sanded and full of boggiess, but a surface you wouldn't have given a second thought about playing on forty years ago. A unique (or it was to me) aspect of the pitch marking were the penalty spots, which weren't spots but crosses. A couple of small non-Atcost plastic shelters are behind one goal and that's your lot, but this looked like a proper non-league venue. A disused railway line behind the ground added to the aura. The clubhouse served hot drinks and outside was a well-stocked burger van although I suspect this was only there for the Groundhop match.

Got a copy the precious paper then retired to a local hostelry to caress both it and a glass of Fosters. Back at the ground and it was good to meet up with people I only get to see at these events. It looked like an 'Age Concern' outing with hoppers from all over the country having escaped from their Old Folks Homes to enjoy four games of football in a day, which unfortunately only turned out to be two due to postponements. A really good vibe, and as people crowded round a whiteboard religiously scribbling down the teams, substitutes etc. I realised just what an amateur I actually am. As always brilliantly organized by both the club and 'Groundhop U.K.'

A game to entertain the large crowd with Garstang taking an unassailable 3-0 lead early in the second half before Ashton came on strong and almost assailed it. Their second was a penalty, taken from the penalty cross.

Tons of cancellations on Avanti, but my trains ran. Sixteen minutes late back into Euston, which missed my connection and I arrived back at my country dacha an hour later than I should have done. Even that failed to cast a dampener on a day that is known in Groundhopping parlance as a 'champagne job'.

contributed on 03/03/24.

TT No.122: Jon T Green - Saturday 24th February 2024; **CIRENCESTER TOWN** v Bedford Town; Southern Football League - Division One Central; Venue: Corinium Stadium; Result: 1-1; Admission: £10; Programme: £2 plus free team sheets available in the clubhouse; Attendance: 273

Corinium is the original Roman name for Cirencester, so it was fitting when the club moved to their new ground in 2002 that it took on this historical reference (at least in the non-sponsored version of events). Although only a couple of miles from the centre, the stadium feels incredibly rural and with car parking stretched to the limit today an early arrival was necessary. Once through the turnstiles the Steve Abbey stand sits to your immediate right; although it holds only just over 100 seats it has the feel of being the main accommodation, if only due to its location close to the clubhouse and the highly recommended snack bar. The clubhouse has some nice touches including a statue of a centurion although on closer inspection it turns out to have been made in Taiwan and not an authentic Julius Caesar age original...

Across the pitch is the larger Talent Hire Stand, a red metal and breeze block structure with room for 172 spectators. There is hard standing on all sides with the Shed End providing a covered area behind one goal - the construction here is slightly unusual as the back of the stand is behind the perimeter wall with only the roof actually fully inside the ground. Of note are the two dugouts which rather sensibly are a considerable distance apart; given managers' ability to wind each other up, this seems like an idea that needs to be more widely adopted. Also of note is the slight slope on the artificial surface, it's not immediately apparent but walking around you are at one point below pitch level and then a foot or so above it at the diagonally opposite corner. The bulk of the Cirencester Arena, an indoor sports facility, helps close off the end without any spectator amenities.

Table toppers Bedford Town are the visitors today and, with the hosts sitting in fifth place just seven points behind, this promises to be an absolute cracker. Bedford begin the brighter with Ben Walster hammering a 25-yard free kick narrowly wide before centre forward Liam Dulson wriggles free of his marker only to see his low shot saved by the legs of Stuart Nelson. It takes until after the quarter hour mark for Cirencester to register their first serious attempt on goal; Felix Miles breaks away and feeds a pass out to Ben Whitehead whose effort from inside the box is flipped over by Mark Smith. Miles then has a glorious chance as he finds himself one on one with the 'keeper but fails to keep his chip on target. It's a big miss and one which sets the tone for the home team's afternoon. Cirencester are now in the ascendancy with substitute Harry Burns narrowly failing to get on the end of a George Peare flick-on. As half time approaches Miles has another great chance as he once more finds himself unmarked but again fails to trouble Smith as he drags his shot back across the face of goal.

The second half begins with the home side again looking the more likely to score but then with 57 minutes played Bedford take the lead. Nick Peare, a no-nonsense old-school centre half, has been having a commanding game at the back but when Leon Lobjoit makes a run across the box, the defender is judged to foul him. It all looks a little soft but referee Mr. Ouchene is well placed and immediately points to the spot; Lobjoit duly converts with a well struck penalty. Cirencester respond immediately with Smith fisting away Whitehead's curling effort before the same player cracks his shot against the angle of post and bar with the 'keeper grasping at thin air. With ten minutes remaining the home side finally draw level; Luca Robinson isolates his full back, cuts inside and fires a fierce shot beyond Smith. Bedford, who seem to be playing out for a draw, are almost undone in added time; a long ball bounces over the visiting defence and Aidan Bennett finds himself with only Smith to beat but sadly his shot is high and woefully wide. The player sinks to his knees as the last chance of the game is spurned. A point apiece undoubtedly suits Bedford the better as they open up a three-point lead at the top of the league. One home fan describes his team's performance as "gutsy" which is fair comment but those missed chances certainly cost them all three points in what was a hugely entertaining encounter.

contributed on 26/02/24.

TT No.121: Craig Dabbs - Saturday 24th February 2024; **Woodhouse Colts v Dearne & District**; Central Midlands Alliance Premier Division North; Venue: Forest Town Arena Bottom Pitch; Result: 0-4; Admission: £3; Programme: 16pp, £1.50; Attendance: 59

Nineteen years have passed since I was last here, and much has changed. Back then Forest Town was the side on the bottom pitch nicknamed The Clod. They have since gone as has the opposition that day, AFC Barnsley. Forest Town didn't have use of the main pitch with its Velodrome around it as back then this was used exclusively by Mansfield Town whose lights you see as you drive in.

These days, AFC Mansfield are on the Forest Town Arena. Forest Town did play there and now Woodhouse Colts are down the pathway, around the corner on the bottom pitch. Colts have been going almost as long as I have. They were formed in 1977 and they represent Mansfield Woodhouse in name, a separate place to Mansfield. The club have many youth sides and a ladies section and it's the non-senior sides that play out of former Central Midlands League Bilsthorpe's old home. There's talk here of the lease on The Clod being up in two years; indeed, there is housing that has sprung up on the one side of the ground, what price on further encroachment?

There are limitations on the ground which is one sided at present. There has been improvement with a tea bar added saving the long walk back to the clubhouse at AFC Mansfield next door. But what about lights? Well, with the new housing that has gone in I doubt very much that would ever happen so what is clear is that should they wish to progress its likely they will have to move from here. So, maybe

it's Bilsthorpe that Colts look towards for a more longer-term solution, we'll have to wait and see.

Dearne & District provided the opposition today. They are top and have really captured the interest of the locals with huge crowds that are comparable to step three, never mind step seven, the order of the day in those parts. The gulf in class showed; if you've ever seen Andorra or San Marino on telly playing England for example this is roughly the approach Colts took, a sort of 10-1-0 formation. They were peppered but survived the onslaught in the first half occasionally getting the odd break but with nothing coming of it.

The second period saw the floodgates open a little with Dearne popping four away and continuing to wreak havoc on Woodhouse. It was fair play to the home side though, they stuck at it, and even had one shot on target. Dearne are different class as are the other team fighting it out for top spot Doncaster City with all their recent international signings; for the record, Charlie Mulgrew, Ross McCormack, Wes Hoolahan and Scott McLaughlin showing the level of money that's been thrown at City's promotion push.

contributed (via Brian Buck) on 25/02/24.

TT No.120: Keith Aslan - Saturday 24th February 2024; HEDGE END RANGERS v Hedge End Town; Hampshire League Division 1; Kick Off: 14.37; Result: 1-0; Admission: Free; Programme: £2; Attendance, take your pick: official 147 and my headcount: 115 (50 home, 57 away & 8 neutral)

It's the Hedge End Derby, 'El Hedgio' apparently, and games of football don't come any bigger than this. To add an extra piquancy, Rangers are top of the league, Town are five points behind with five games in hand. So momentous is this that Rangers produced a one-off programme to commemorate the event. Their twitter feed advertised '50 available copies on a first come first served basis' which suggests a somewhat optimistic sales projection. They would have shifted a lot more if somebody had made the effort to sell them. Why would you bother to produce a 20-page glossy colour programme and leave it festering in a box?

The station for the Hedge End derby is unsurprisingly, Hedge End. On a good day there is an hourly direct service from Waterloo. Today was not a good day, I've left the catalogue of railway atrocities till last so the discerning reader can skip them should they feel inclined. The ground is a 20 minute walk from the station if you know where you're going. Unfortunately my map showed neither roads, houses or the station, so the walk was a bit of a lottery. I really should update my Ordnance Survey collection, but I have a sentimental attachment to the old ones. The downside is they are useless if any building work has taken place in the last sixty years.

It's plastic so no stress about the game being on. To my joy and surprise Atcost have paid a visit to the ground, providing most welcome shelter from the heavy bouts of rain that punctuated the afternoon. The much-publicised refreshment shack was shut and a husband-and-wife team set up a table at the entrance serving hot drinks. What devotion to duty, they must have got soaked. It's in the

grounds of a leisure centre which had nothing else on offer - except exercise - so I gave it a wide berth.

Depending on where you looked on the internet this was a 2 o'clock kick off, the programme showed it as 3, but in the event it was 2.30 which was perfect for my train home. Not quite so the 2.37 it eventually got going with no discernable reason for the delay. The hopper who was going to watch Bournemouth afterwards wasn't best pleased either.

A great atmosphere with most of the players and spectators knowing each other, so no aggro on or off the pitch and an entertaining match settled by an own goal in the second half. The return fixture in April should be a corker, I wonder if they would consider issuing a programme for that one?

Train watch: Total bobbins today. Engineering works meant we were diverted slowly, so slowly, all over West London adding 50% onto the journey time. Fewer trains meant no direct services either with a change now required at Basingstoke. After taking over an hour to get to Woking the train just stopped there. The driver was somewhere on the railway network but not at the front of the train. After 20 minutes of non-movement I decamped onto another service that would comfortably miss my connection and I was faced with the horrific prospect of spending 50 minutes in Basingstoke. I needn't have worried, that train was delayed as well, this time the Guard was A.W.O.L. South West Trains were a mess today, primarily caused by the engineering nonsense which they now laughingly call 'Railway improvement works'. I doubt even the Hubble telescope would be able to detect what these improvements are. They certainly aren't visible to the naked eye.

contributed on 25/02/24.

TT No.119: Jon T Green - Saturday 17th February 2024; HANWORTH VILLA v Uxbridge; Isthmian Football League - South-Central Division; Venue: Rectory Meadow; Result: 1-0; Admission: £10; Programme: £2.50; Attendance: 131

Rectory Meadow achieves that rare distinction of both feeling rural and urban at the same time. With the grounds of St Michael Steiner school abutting and Hanworth Park (home of both Middlesex Sunday League team Hanworth Sports and Feltham RFC) a short stroll away, there is no shortage of green space. The urban element is provided by a constantly busy section of dual carriageway leading to the start of the M3 just over a mile away. Villa's home is certainly a work in progress with two prefabricated stands having been recently built on the near side of the pitch. The Tony Buss Stand has 99 black seats and includes a neat press section which is nicely protected from the elements by the addition of screened ends. The other is a metal covered terrace. Behind these are an outside drinks bar and a food outlet. Just inside the turnstiles, which will soon have new surrounds and roof, is a well-stocked club shop and to the right of that is the cream-coloured clubhouse and changing room facilities. The clubhouse looks fairly unremarkable from the outside but once inside the bar area is state of the art with digital displays which even show the current weather forecast (they could of course just default this to rain given the seemingly incessant wet conditions) and a TV screen showing today's

line-ups. Hard standing is currently available on three sides of the pitch with the fourth (at the road end) scheduled for completion over the next few months. Continuing the original cream colour scheme, and standing out boldly in front of a mature laurel hedge, the far side of the stadium houses a low covered stand containing a total of 56 seats. These are heavy duty, well sprung and seem a cut above the normal cheap plastic sort (some sort of seat snobbery going on here I think). A 4G pitch is also high on the list of priorities as the club look to make Rectory Meadow a venue suitable for the National Leagues. It's a bold project and, with not all of the current first team squad on contracts, it's one which clearly requires considerable investment on the playing side as well.

Not that Hanworth, nor visitors Uxbridge, need to worry about the National Leagues for a couple of seasons as they both sit comfortably mid-table. Those positions are reflected in what turns out to be a tight encounter with a paucity of chances. Both teams look to get the ball forward whenever possible which is a refreshing change from sides playing 35 passes without ever getting out of their own half. Villa's Kyen Nicholas hooks a half chance wide and, in the process, manages to injure himself whilst at the other end the impressive George Moore fires just over from 20 yards. Sam Merson directs his header from a right-wing corner narrowly wide but it's the visitors who are creating the better opportunities; Moore's delicate chip is turned over by Terry Buss before Christian Johnson goes desperately close to opening the scoring as he narrowly fails to get on the end of Mahlondo Martin's cross shot.

Johnson continues to be a nuisance to the home defence and tests Buss with a snapshot early in the second half. The same player is then brought down on the edge of the box, but Martin's free kick is rather wasted. Ben Geraghty is seeing an increasing amount of ball for Hanworth, and he flashes a shot over George Legg's crossbar with 20 minutes remaining. A few moments later he plays a big role in what turns out to be the only goal of the match; Geraghty receives a short pass on the right and clips a delightful ball into the area. Merson climbs above his marker and directs his header into the path of Guy Ansah-Palmer who strokes it off his instep beyond Legg. With regulation time about to expire Martin creates a yard of space but Buss is equal to his fierce shot and parries it away for a corner. Like most parts of London, the local football scene is already crowded but Hanworth seem to have a sensible sustainable plan which, with a slice of good fortune on the pitch, should see them in good shape for the future.

contributed on 20/02/24.

TT No.118: Steve Hardy - Saturday 17th February 2024; **Maidenhead Town** v Henley Town; Thames Valley Premier League Berkshire Trophy Centre Senior Cup Quarter Final; Result: 2-0; Admission & Programme: Free; Attendance 19 h/c

Back to my old stomping ground today, and a trip to the impressive Bisham Abbey National Sports Centre, near Marlow. The centre once hosted the England football team for training, but with St Georges Park now open, the England team have moved away. They have been replaced, I was told, by the England Women's Rugby Union team instead.

The facilities are vast, but football wise we have a 3G pitch in a cage, a grass pitch next to it and the Women's rugby pitch next to that. Further afield there were a couple of girls matches finishing on outside pitches when I arrived, and a small golf course which was flooded today.

Maidenhead Town have come to an arrangement with the Centre for all three of their sides to use the footie pitches. The Reserves and 'A' team use the 4G pitch and the first team the grass pitch next to it. This Maidenhead Town club are no relation to the old the old one that folded in 1990. The current side started in 2004 and have progressed to the Premier division of the Thames Valley league or (Reading Senior league as it was when I lived there).

I really enjoyed the game I must say. Both teams are in the Premier Division of the TVL and a really entertaining game ensued. Maidenhead took the lead on 35 minutes with Henley missing a golden chance to equalise on half time when a clean through striker was bluffed by the keeper and put his shot just past the post. The second half was nip and tuck before Town sealed the win with header from a corner on 78 minutes.

To conclude I should point out that Bisham is pronounced *Bizzam* locally, and that the Bizzam Abbey itself is right next to the sports centre, and a beautiful looking building it is too.

contributed on 19/02/23.

TT No.117: Craig Dabbs - Saturday 17th February 2024; **Colliers Wood United v Farnham Town**; Combined Counties League Premier Division South; Venue: Wibbandune Sports Ground; Result: 0-1; Admission: £8; Programme: 20pp, £2; Attendance: 110

The Capital can be a tricky place to navigate around and find parking and Colliers Wood United is no exception. The journey down was slow and quite diverted with the sat nav spitting me out onto the A3 off the M25 meaning I had to pass the ground on the way in, go down to the next junction and come back up the A3. I also had to be prepared to slow down and not miss the entrance otherwise the whole process would have to be repeated. On top of that the car park is very small so timing was important to arrive very early to ensure a spot. Thankfully it all came together, and I was parked up at 1320 which gave me plenty of time to chat with the club and do all my usual pre match photos including going up the footbridge nearby to take a couple of aerial shots of the ground.

Colliers Wood United are celebrating 150 years as a club this year which is quite an achievement in a time when so many struggle and sadly go under as a result. They, like so many others cut their cloth accordingly - they are in an area where there is a saturation of clubs, many of which are much bigger fish than Wood and as a result they go about their business knowing big numbers aren't going to make their way through the turnstile, and it is what it is.

When you look around you immediately notice how hemmed in the pitch is. The club actually moved one set of goalposts forward to create a track to allow cars to park over on the opposite side, something they allowed yesterday but weren't recommending owing to the soggy state of affairs. The obvious solution in my eyes would be pitch rotation as they have bags of room running parallel to the A3 however it comes down to cash, so a non-starter at present. They would like to convert the pitch to 4G, but can't at present, due to finances.

Having said all that, they have three areas of cover, lights, hard standing and a homely clubhouse with all sorts of photos and trophies which they've picked up down the many years they've been playing. The ground is perfectly adequate for what they need right now, more room would be nice of course, but it isn't essential.

On the pitch, Wood are having a torrid time, bottom of their Division, on just thirteen points and expecting relegation. So, with high flying and big spending Farnham Town at the Wibbandune (with an incredible record so far having played 22, won 22), it was always going to be a difficult assignment and it was, but oh boy how they tried.

Colliers Wood had, I think one maybe two shots on target, played their hearts out and their keeper was inspired, making save after save after save. As the game wore on Farnham were getting frustrated and for once I was really hoping for a 0-0 but with just five minutes of normal time remaining the keeper Toby McKimm was finally beaten to seal a 23rd straight victory for the visitors.

contributed (via Brian Buck) on 18/02/24.

TT No.116: Keith Aslan - Saturday 17th February 2024; **KENTISBEARE** v Clyst Valley; Devon & Exeter League Premier Division; Kick Off: 14.58 - final whistle 16.38; Result: 4-0; Admission: Free; Programme: £2; Attendance: 29 (21 home, 4 away & 4 neutral)

'Grassroots Football' seems to mean different things to different people. To me, this was it. A village club with everybody connected to it putting on a game of football for enjoyment of the beautiful game and a billion miles away from the Premier League.

Kentisbeare is in the heart of the Devon countryside. If you're doing it by public transport, you can't. Wednesday mornings with an 11 o'clock kick off would be the optimum time to fit in with the bus. Luckily, I was once again indebted to Stockport Taxis for a lift from nearby Tiverton Parkway station. I've always liked this train stop, a little cafe serving hot drinks and food as well as selling newspapers and various other sundries, privately owned so relatively cheap. A welcoming waiting room with a staffed booking office. Plus, a bus service into Tiverton. Unlike the recently built Thanet Parkway, no waiting room, no staff, no buses, no refreshments and you wouldn't want to leave your car there after dark. The council stumped up three hundred thousand quid towards this white elephant. This is the same council that has decimated the local bus services because they can't afford the subsidies!

They've had a lot of rain round these parts of Devon with the pluvial conditions continuing throughout the afternoon, but the pitch was in fine fettle. The building in one corner contained the changing rooms, a hatch serving welcoming hot drinks at a quid a go, and it incorporated a sort of small, covered stand which would have given a perfect view of the game if they could clean the windows. The ground is half surrounded by a wooden picket fence, there was only a small area around the changing rooms where everybody stood. You could watch the game all along the far side, but to reach it while the game was going on you needed to leave the ground, walk 80 yards up the road, and come back in at another entrance. Importantly, three seats were situated behind the goal for those of us with dodgy knees. Rural barely covers it, it's over half a mile from the village itself. Add on a programme and this was nirvana for me.

This is a local club for local players, none of your big city slickers from Taunton and Tiverton here, they all come from the surrounding villages. A system that works, this was Kingbeare's seventh consecutive victory which elevated them to top of the table, overtaking Alphington, who do have games in hand. Here were two teams and a referee who just wanted to get on with the match. A punctual start and 7 minutes for half time. Kentisbeare went into the changing rooms at the break and emerged five minutes later. Their manager should run a seminar on concise half time team talks.

Kentisbeare is what groundhopping is all about.

contributed on 18/02/24.

TT No.115: Craig Dabbs - Saturday 10th February 2024; **Maltby Main** v Silsden; Northern Counties East League Premier Division; Venue: Muglet Lane; Result: 0-1; Admission: £6; Programme: 40pp, £2; Attendance: 125

This wasn't plan A yesterday, this wasn't even plan Z to be fair. Everything went out of the window at 1am when we had the order to evacuate our home again, the second time this year. Needless to say, things had to be done before considering football and it was getting on time wise when I found myself sat on a fuel forecourt looking at X on a day of many postponements. The first thing I saw was game on at Maltby and confirmation of a programme so that was that and the sat nav was set for Muglet Lane.

This venue, in some eyes, is perceived as awful, not in mine though. The pitch has a slope and there are raised areas to make it quite uneven. The ground has two stands, one for standing and one with bench seating, views can be restricted due to the dugouts in front of them and in my eyes it's full of charm and character. It is very much what you would find in a typical northern ex-mining community ground; it's wonderful and I'll tell you what else was wonderful, the people that live and breathe this club.

Whilst taking photos I bumped into Wilf Race, the senior club advisor. I was then ushered into hospitality where I was made a fuss of and introduced to various officials who clearly not only love the club but have a plan to develop it. Maltby

Main are sitting bottom of their division, they need some impetus and that will come in the form of developing a youth pathway and hopefully a tie up at that level with Rotherham United to start a prospective conveyor belt of talent that will hopefully feed into the first team to help the club grow and move up.

The pitch with its many flaws was also heavy and this actually helped in producing a very entertaining match with Silsden, edging it with that single goal. Both sides went at it with full vigour - it wasn't the beautiful game by any means, it was wild, route one and somewhat desperate. Maltby Main are trying to avoid relegation and Silsden were on a run of poor results, one of which I witnessed last week.

Maltby's struggles continue for now on the pitch but off it they are in a good place and are doing the right thing with the future in mind.

contributed (via Brian Buck) on 11/02/24.

TT No.114: Brian Buck - Wednesday 7th February 2024; **FC Romania** v London Lions; Spartan South Midlands League Premier Division; Venue: played at Cheshunt FC; Result: 5-3; Attendance: 53.

Tonight, I was very happy to revisit Cheshunt, my 6th most visited ground, for my 240th game here. During the course of the last year, significant changes have been made to the ground, brought about by their one season presence in National League South last year. Even though they knew that they were almost certainly going to get relegated, which they were, they were obliged to bring the ground up to a standard to meet the requirements of that league.

Now they are back in the Isthmian League where the demands of the ground graders are not so high. But having done the work the ground now looks good, compared to what it was. They have double the amount of seating in the main stand, put pitch width standing terracing in behind both goals, some of it covered and put in two small stands of covered terracing either side of the dugouts on the far side. FC Romania have been ground sharing here for a few years now, but on a match day these days, it seems to me that off field the club is organised by Cheshunt based people rather than anyone from within their club, on their behalf.

As for the game, it was probably the best one I've seen all season, which meant plenty of creativity on the pitch and plenty of goals and no shilly-shallying about at the back. Romania took the lead on 12 minutes when the ball was lashed home from near the corner of the area. Four minutes later Lion's equalised from the spot. It was a difficult decision for the ref to make as the ball had long since gone before the natural momentum of the keeper took him into the player, but after thinking about it for a few seconds, he gave it. Then a minute later a shot from a narrow angle, gave Lions the lead. Romania then rolled up their sleeves to set about getting back into the game and generally in this period they were the better side. But on 36 minutes they shipped another goal when from a long pass the scorer took the ball on to shoot home from about 15 yards out. 3-1 down at the break Romania set about taking the game to Lions even more and on 52 minutes they reduced the deficit with a goal scored from close range. Then seven minutes later they equalised by way of a similar goal. They then went searching for the

winner, but Lions were still very much in the game. Then on 90 minutes with a glancing header from near the corner of the area, following a corner, which the late ex-Spurs superstar Alan Gilzean would have been proud of, Romania took the lead. Finally, three minutes later, a fifth goal arrived and despite falling over the scorer still had time to run on and net his fourth goal of the night, to bring to a close a great game. If only more matches were like this!

contributed on 08/02/24.

TT No.113: *Craig Dabbs* - Saturday 3rd February 2024; **Silsden** v Golcar United; Northern Counties East League Premier Division; Venue: Keighley Road; Result: 2-3; Admission: £6; Programme: 24pp, £2; Attendance: 164

This little corner of West Yorkshire is a beautiful part of the world to take a game in. I've visited both Steeton and er Steeton when they were at Keighley Cougars in this area sitting just to the north of Bradford.

Silsden have also played out of the rugby club like Steeton and for the same reasons their respective grounds not being up to standard. Steeton still have their original ground but also have use of the Marley Stadium. Silsden, however, went about a massive upgrade to Keighley Road for pyramid compliance.

What you see today wasn't all that long ago little more than a pitch with a wooden stand. The club initially raised £100,000, they had a grant of £663,453 from the Football Foundation and when they were given notice from the rugby club to move, they had a five month push to raise a further £110,000 which they did, meaning the work could be completed and in 2010 they returned to Keighley Road after a six-year gap.

So, what you have today is all completely new and with an eye to progression it's been built to a higher specification to enable the club to climb through the system as and when they are in a position on the pitch to do so.

Let's start with a word about the pitch before we go onto the match. it was soft and indeed I was told that a few days ago it wasn't playable. If there is any Achilles heel, it's the pitch. It drains across the fields into the nearby River Aire and if the Aire is full, drainage becomes a problem. At present the river is high with the water draining not as quickly as the club would like to see.

The match was a belter. Both teams went at each other as you would expect. A first half that would end in Silsden's favour reflected the slight advantage the Cobbydalers had. The second half was much livelier. Silsden lost a man after 62 minutes to a robust tackle, but this spurred them on, and the lead was restored after the mother of all goal mouth scrambles led to someone sticking it in their own net. Then it all got a bit interesting as we headed past 1645 and towards the now normal finishing time of 1700. Golcar drew level and with 94 minutes played a draw, surely! No, there was a final twist in the tale, a late penalty for a poor tackle inside the box that also saw Silsden reduced to nine men was well taken giving the spoils to Golcar and a bitter taste in the mouth to all at Keighley Road.

contributed (via Brian Buck) on 04/02/24.

TT No.112: Keith Aslan - Sunday 4th February 2024; **CRAY WANDERERS** v Oakwood; South East Counties Women's League Kent Division 1 West; Kick Off: 14.05 (Cray wouldn't leave the changing rooms); Result 2-0; Admission: Free; Programme: £1 (one of the best I've ever seen); Attendance: 124 (98 home, 0 away & 26 neutral)

There's always a frisson of excitement in watching the first ever match on a new ground and well done to Cray for allowing their women's team that honour. Flamingo Park has been a long time coming, the Wanderers have been ground sharing at Bromley since 1998 which must be some kind of record for longevity, but hopefully they will have a ground to call their own by the start of next season. Still a way to go. Floodlights in place, fully enclosed, paved walkway right around the ground and the foundations of a stand along the side. Other than that, it's still a building site.

A raised clubhouse did a roaring trade and must be a money spinner for the club. Plenty of grub available. They've had to scale down the original grandiose plans as costs have spiralled and the ground will now just be up to the minimum level for the Isthmian League. They still intend to extend it when the economy picks up, so not for some time then. Situated in the middle of a triangle of New Eltham, Sidcup and Chislehurst stations. Eltham is probably the nearest, one hopper walked it in 25 minutes. But being in London there are buses everywhere and I chose to go via Bromley South. As it's the first Sunday this year South East Trains have a run a direct service between there to Broadstairs I took advantage of their philanthropy.

The programme was magnificent and ludicrously priced at £1. An article detailing all the grounds Cray have played at, and there's been a lot of them, all illustrated with either old photographs, or pictures of where they were. A history of the club which dates back to 1860, an article on women's football in the area during the first world war, again with some wonderful old photographs. The research that must have gone into all this. And as today is the anniversary of Buddy Holly's death there was of course a long article on the fifties rocker. Manager's notes, results, fixtures, league tables, it's all there. Plus, the player profiles, somewhat more circumspect than yesterday's programme which made all Westfields players seem like world beaters. Today some were rather enigmatic with Danelle Smith being described as 'quite intrinsic' I've never come across a footballer called intrinsic before. All in all, this was the best read I've had in ages and kept me occupied for the entire journey home. Whoever is responsible deserves some kind of award.

The Oakwood players along with the mayor, were lined up outside the changing rooms waiting for Cray to join them. Cray were enjoying a social far too much to come out and play a game of football and kept everybody waiting. I had a chat with referee Jemma Cripps who was standing by the dugouts on the far side of the ground, and I mentioned the kick off time and lack of home players. She said it must be something she'd done as when she came out to get things underway, the Cray players all ran off the pitch back to the dressing rooms and had so far refused to come back out. I got the impression Jemma was as hacked off with them as I

was. When they finally did emerge and said hello to the mayor, she was supposed to lead the two teams out side by side. As far as she was concerned Cray were messing her about, so she wasn't going to bother. They eventually came out leaderless and lined up for the ridiculous 'respect' handshakes which the referee also ignored. Well done Jemma. Cray hadn't shown you any respect so far, so why should you shake their hands. Crays actions displayed contempt for the opposition, the mayor, the referee and the spectators just so they could have a chin wag. Not a good start to the new ground. Incidentally I hope the mayor realises he can't count the game as he watched it from the clubhouse.

The game was much closer than I thought it would be when league leaders and unbeaten Cray scored after three minutes. Chole Ashdown (always positive in negative situations according to her profile) had the honour of scoring the first ever goal at Flamingo Park. Something to tell her grandchildren. But Oakwood gave it a real go and only conceded the second in the last 15 minutes.

For the second day running all the transport was spot on time. Unlike the Cray Wanderers players.

V2 contributed on 04/02/24.

TT No.111: Keith Aslan - Saturday 3rd February 2024; **WESTFIELD** v Balcombe; Mid Sussex Premier Division; Kick Off: 14.06 - late start due to Westfield's reluctance to leave the changing rooms, probably getting their breath back after all that running around cones for 45 minutes! Result: 4-2; Admission: Free; Programme: £2; Attendance: 74 (65 home, 0 away & 9 neutral)

Last week I stated that Reigate was the only team in this league to issue programmes which goes to show you shouldn't believe everything you read on the internet, particularly if it's written by me. Mind you, at the time it was true. Westfield produced a one off for their ground opener last Saturday which passed me by, as it did for a lot of hoppers judging by today's turn out. But joy of joys, they were issuing again for today's match. Whether they just had some paper left over, or this is going to be a regular thing, I know not.

Easy to get to, there is an hourly bus service from outside Hastings station to within five minute of the ground. A wonderful train journey for me, Ashford then across Romney Marsh, a magical place full of mist, sheep and dinky little stations like Appledore and Winchelsea that are in the middle of nowhere and light years away from the villages after which they're named. Incidentally this is the only line in the South East of England that isn't electrified. Not a lot of people know that.

Westfield's new ground is looking good, with an overhang outside the changing rooms to keep you dry. And a small room selling teas, coffees and sweets which was up and running over 2 hours before kick-off. Fully enclosed, and as they can take a gate, they'd make more money charging people £2 to get in and giving the programme away with admittance. Floodlights and a visit from Mr. Atcost are high on the agenda for future improvements. The pitch wasn't too good, and the yellow grass could do with some rain on it. But not too much, it cut up rather badly. It's

over the road from their old ground and I popped in and saw the first 20 minutes of their reserve match. The memories came flooding back of my previous visit. Of course, they didn't, I don't remember anything about it. I asked why they couldn't have expanded their old ground, but the pitch is deemed too small for the Sussex County League. You would have thought pitch dimensions would be pretty standard, but apparently not. OK for the Mid- Sussex but not the Sussex County. All very strange.

A good programme, and the fact whoever printed it made a right Horlicks of things with half of it upside down only added to its charm. Reading the player profiles, they're littered with words like 'classy' 'supremely talented' and 'technically excellent', just a few of the epithets bestowed on their players. Given how good they seem to be makes you wonder how comes they're playing for Westfield. Captain Joe Dickens is 'blessed with great pace and a force in the air. A real leader and respected by everyone' But the most important thing that fans want to know is that his favourite drink is Guinness.

They got an amazing 327 for their ground opener, not so many today, but those that turned up were treated to an entertaining game of football. One all inside the first four minutes, 2-1 at the break, a couple more in the second half before Balcombe reduced the arrears late doors.

The trains ran perfectly. Were that it was always so.

contributed on 04/02/23.

TT No.110: Steve Hardy - Saturday 3rd February 2024; **AFC Sandiacre** v FC Cavaliers; Nottinghamshire Senior League Division One; Result: 0-3; Admission and Programme: Free; Attendance 5 H/C

Back to the same league and division as last week for me, for a couple of very good reasons. Firstly, having watched second in the table FCV Grace Dieu last week, I wanted to see top of the table Cavaliers in action to compare the two teams who are miles ahead of everyone else in the division already.

Second reason was the venue. AFC Sandiacre are Sandiacre Town Reserves in disguise, and they normally play at St Giles Park with the first team. Today though, for no reason I could fathom, they switched the match to Draycott. Some hoppers may be interested to learn that Draycott once had a team in the Central Midlands League and as I never got to visit them then I thought that now was an ideal time to visit them, especially as they may never play there again.

Cavaliers are a very LOUD team. Laughing and joking amongst themselves from warm up to final whistle, they won at a canter today against a Sandiacre side who only had one tactic and that was to boot the ball upfield at every opportunity.

Cavs took the lead from a fabulous free kick from the edge of the area on 15 minutes. No chance for the keeper as it soared over his head, and for once I actually captured the goal on camera! After that it was all Cavs, although they didn't increase their lead until the second half. It was soon 2-0 and they rounded

off an easy win with a penalty near the end. They did waste a good, few chances though, and with the situation at the top likely to be decided on goal difference, those chances could make all the difference.

contributed on 04/02/24.

TT No.109: Jon T Green - Saturday 27th January 2024; **ATHERSLEY RECREATION** v Nostell Miners Welfare; Northern Counties East League - Division One; Venue: Sheerien Park; Result: 1-2; Admission: £5; Programme: No but team sheets distributed prior to kick off; Attendance: 142

A full moon illuminates Sheerien Park on a Friday night which promises to bring a nip to the fingers and toes by the end of the game. Situated a few miles to the north of Barnsley, Athersley's home is wedged between a sprawling housing estate and open countryside. Entering via a pay box, the large revolving metal turnstiles were not in use, there is a sense that something is not quite as it should be for a club who has spent their relatively short history (they were founded in 1979) playing in local football; then joining the Sheffield and Hallamshire County Senior League prior to earning promotion to the Northern Counties East League in 2012. The mystery is solved when I spot a small but yet significant reference to Shaw Lane FC on the side of a redundant wooden press box. A quick internet search reveals that Lane ground shared here for a single season as members of the Northern Premier League before folding in 2018. This explains the proliferation of stands and facilities which are far in excess of what you would normally expect to find at a Step 6 club. Behind each goal there are seated prefabricated covers with a total of nearly 350 seats whilst along the near touchline are three structures: a large, covered metal terrace closest to the corner flag, a smaller one named the Rec In Crew Stand (terrace with a single line of eight black and white seats) and then a modern looking white building (use unknown) in front of which are two blue park benches. The far side, which houses two striking black and white dugouts, is flat standing. A small clubhouse and excellent food facilities complete the scene.

Athersley are fresh from a 6-1 win at Armthorpe Welfare just three nights ago which gives them a comfortable cushion of nine points above the three relegation places. Nostell are neatly 13th and 13 points better off than their hosts and, after a 4-1 win against Rec back in September, they must be confident of another win this evening. They begin the better and go close to opening the scoring when centre back Jack Bull climbs highest at a corner but sees his header come back off the bar. On the left flank James Woodhouse is seeing plenty of the ball for Rec and is giving Harry Atkinson a torrid time. The full back doesn't seem to have warmed up properly given the additional stretches he is doing every time the ball goes dead. On one occasion only sheer force of numbers stops Woodhouse as he surges into the penalty area but it's little surprise when the visitors take the lead; the ball is played up to centre forward Harvey Booth who lays it inside his marker where Nicky Lalousis finishes with a low drive beyond Ellis Pickard. With Luis Penny Carter breaking up attacks in front of his back four, and Lalousis surging forward, Nostell's midfield is giving them a strangle hold on the game. They almost extend their lead eight minutes before the break as Tom Lavin flies down the left wing, but Booth can only find the side netting with his effort at the far post.

The second half almost begins in spectacular style with Athersley's Ollie McQuillan flashing a shot just over but then the game rather dies. Rec are certainly playing better but don't seem to possess the creativity to find an equaliser whilst some of Welfare's composure seems to have gone as they regularly give up possession in the final third. Less than ten minutes remain until the game sparks back into life; Richard Williams tries a shot for Rec and when the ball ricochets clear Ethan Hargreaves doesn't miss the target by much. The let off seems to act as a wakeup call for Nostell as two of their substitutes combine to double their lead; Fryzo Benton runs at the heart of the home defence before slipping his pass into the path of Hayden Swift. The youngster steadies himself before finding the bottom corner with a crisp right footed drive. A few seconds are left on the clock as Rec finally get some reward for their evening's efforts; a free kick is awarded at a tight angle on the far edge of the penalty area with Kenneth Tafireyi's whipped centre seemingly going straight in - the league website suggests an own goal but unsurprisingly no one from Nostell is putting their hand up to claim it. At the final whistle the crowd seem unwilling to leave maybe considering a swift half in the warmth of the clubhouse...

contributed on 29/01/24.

TT No.108: Craig Dabbs - Saturday 27th January 2024; **Wick** v Avonmouth; Gloucestershire County League; Venue: Wick Sports Ground; Result: 1-3; Admission: Free; Programme: 36pp, £1; Attendance: 68

My second Wick 'tick' of the season after taking in Wick on the Southern Combination hop and it will most likely be my last as I don't think I will manage a trip to Wick Academy this season, it looks closer to Norway than London.

The Gloucestershire Wick isn't that far from Bath and is a real gem tucked away down a single-track lane out of the village. You can't help but be impressed by the log fire in a homely clubhouse, it's certainly a rare thing to see and very welcome it is too.

Obviously, there's much more to the Sports Ground than a log fire. Venture outside and two railed pitches are set side by side, space is clearly at a premium here as they are both wedged in on a very small footprint of land. You stand between the two pitches and it's then that you realise the limitations of room here as it's only wide enough for one and this theme extends around the pitch with very little space. The first thing that crossed my mind is why are they using the far pitch and not the one right next to the clubhouse, not obvious to the naked eye but the near pitch is too small for senior Football and so with that in mind why not simply rotate it. However, by doing that you lose a pitch which would impact on the reserve team and put increased pressure on what would be the only playing area. Then you think, with all the restrictions what sort of future do the club have? Yes, it does have limitations, but the club do have ambition. Cover can go in the one corner and after jumping through various hoops the club can have lights when funds become available.

The lack of lights has cost the club this season. They won the league a couple of seasons back and didn't go up. Since then, the manager has left taking the playing

squad with him and the club have had to rebuild. They are fighting relegation and I sincerely hope that they win that battle as the welcome I received was second to none.

That battle was evident today on the pitch. Put simply Wick were the better team, they controlled the game, and it was just a case of Avonmouth being clinical in front of goal when they had the opportunity. Wick were very unfortunate not to come away without something.

Finally, I want to mention the programme. Full credit to the club for putting together a newsy effort, one that actually fares slightly better than their near neighbours Bath City in my opinion.

contributed (via Brian Buck) on 28/01/24.

TT No.107: Steve Hardy - Saturday 27th January 2024; **FCV Grace Dieu** v Bilborough Town; Nottinghamshire Senior League Division One; Result: 6-0; Admission and Programme: Free; Attendance: 25 H/C

FCV are an academy set up where lads wanting to become footballers can get an education as well as train and play organised football too. After years of being based in Stamford, they took the opportunity to move to the wilds of Leicestershire when the former Grace Dieu school closed in 2020. Currently they have a 4g pitch with floodlights, a swimming pool, sports hall and tennis courts, but it is obviously a work in progress at the moment, with huge diggers everywhere.

They currently play in the Nottinghamshire Senior league Division One where they are engaged in a titanic struggle with FC Cavaliers at the top of the table. Visitors today are mid table Bilborough Town whose orange/black kit was almost the same as FCV's Red/Black ensemble, causing much confusion (to me anyway).

A look at the scoreline would suggest a completely one-sided match, wouldn't it? In fact, it was nothing like it, especially in the first half where Bilborough looked really sharp. Eventually though, FCV took advantage of two of their many chances to score in the 5th and 18th minute for a 2-0 half time lead. After the break it was more of the same with four more goals coming in the 52nd, 59th, 69th and 90th minute. My man of the match was the Bilborough goalie who made save after save to keep the score down including long range and close quarters clearances.

Getting to the ground is fairly straight forward really. Take the A511 from Ashby-de-la-Zouch to Shepshed and the entrance to the ground is on your right just past the Thringstone turning. Naturally, as someone who lived near Ashby for a while, I got lost, so perhaps not as straight forward after all!

contributed on 28/01/24.

TT No.106: Keith Aslan - Saturday 27th January 2024; **REIGATE PRIORY** v AFC Ringmer; Gray Hooper Holt LLP Mid Sussex League Premier Division; Kick Off:

13.01; Result: 1-1; Admission: Free; Programme: £2; Attendance: 25 (15 home, 2 away & 8 neutral)

Stress free groundhopping at its most stressless with a visit to the back pitch at Horley where Reigate Priory are currently domiciled. Never found out why they are playing here, they have their own ground in Reigate where their reserves had a match today. But good news for me.

Easy peasy to get to. Gatwick is the station you want with a regular door to door bus service. There is a station in Horley, far fewer trains and a long trek out to the 'New Defence'. Unusually for me I had the choice of two new grounds with programmes when I arrived at Gatwick. There was a flight to Jersey leaving in an hour which would have got me there in plenty of time for the Bulls kick off, operated by my favourite airline, Easy Jet. Mind you, as the only other airline I've flown on is Aeroflot, the bar is pretty low. Decided to stick with Reigate which got me home 18 hours earlier. The 100 service drops you right outside the ground, run by Metrobus who can't make any money in spite of having plenty of passengers. The ticket reader wasn't working going out, so everybody travelled for free. Different bus coming back, and again the ticket machine wasn't working on that one either, so another freebie. Not that it made any difference to me with my bus pass which I got six years after everybody else.

You have to go through the main ground to get to the back pitch. As soon as I walked in it was instantly unrecognizable from my last visit. My excuse is it was dark at the time! With ground sharers Lingfield at home in the afternoon the bar was open with the footie on TV. At half time in my match they'd just got the burgers going, well recommended, washed down with a coffee for a quid.

Reigate Priory have a long and illustrious history which is detailed in the programme. Formed in 1870, they entered the very first F.A. Cup in 1872. What the programme failed to mention was they didn't actually play a game and withdrew when they got drawn against the Royal Engineers, presumably fearing a bit of a tonking. They did however make it through to the second round in 1876. In 1883 they won the first ever Surrey Senior Cup. There aren't many clubs still going that can boast this pedigree.

When I say the day was stress free, it wasn't quite as the pulse started to race at the programme famine. Given Reigate normally only shift three or four copies a match, understandably the print run is pretty low, too low when you get an infestation of groundhoppers. Some of our number went without. Not me, who in spite of my infirmity, showed a fair turn of speed in grabbing one of the few available copies. Reigate is the only club in this league that issue. 16 pages containing everything you could want. League tables, match reports, manager's notes, history, it was all there. Well done boys.

The back pitch at Horley is very much as it sounds. A couple of ropes set up to cover part of the touchlines and that's about it, but with everything you could want all available at the main ground, what more do you need. This was the biggy, second v top, with Reigate two points behind their visitors with two games in hand. As such I would imagine they are more pleased with the draw. Could have

been all three points when last knockings Reigate hit the inside of the post and the ball went skimming across the goal-line.

With the match finishing at five to three I could either have popped next door to watch Lingfield play Steyning or I could go home. I went home.

contributed on 28/01/24.

TT No.105: Jon T Green - Saturday 20th January 2024; **LEWISHAM BOROUGH** v K Sports; Southern Counties East Football League - Division One; Venue: Ladywell Arena; Result: 2-1; Admission: £6; Programme: £2; Attendance: 124

I'm halfway through my fry-up when my phone pings with the news from Lewisham Borough that their game is "definitely on" - a big sigh of relief all round and a chance to relax with a second cuppa whilst I finish off the bubble and squeak.

In the clubhouse a few hours later, programme editor Lester Ford tells me "We came and looked at the pitch yesterday and with temperatures only dropping below freezing for a few hours last night we were pretty confident of playing." The layout of the Ladywell Arena has no doubt helped with getting the match on; home to Kent Athletics Club (as well as Borough and Forest Hill Park FC) the one prefabricated stand, resplendent with 99 teal-coloured seats, sits with its back to a busy railway line, and crucially, across a six-lane running track so there are no nasty shaded areas of the pitch where the sun can't reach. With other games in the area falling foul to the cold snap, Lester is hopeful they'll pick up a few fans from Dulwich Hamlet and Peckham Town eager to find their Saturday fix of live football. "We've only just opened the kitchen to serve hot and cold drinks" he explains whilst pouring a glass of sarsaparilla (a fruity drink rather like hot Vimto), "We served hot food near the entrance, but it was proving so popular that the queues were stopping people from getting into the ground. We now have to set up and clear away everything before and after each match but it's certainly an improvement." "The Athletics Club have priority over the ground" he continues "so we can't play a home game until after the end of August as they run meetings on most Summer Saturdays. We applied to the league a few seasons back to change our midweek night from Tuesday to Wednesday and that's certainly helped to get a few extra people along." Manager Lloyd David arrives so I leave them to it and stroll outside where the smell of burgers and fried onions cuts through the cold air. Watching from the wide raised concrete area in front of the clubhouse proves popular although it's a distant view to the far goal behind which rises a tall chimney belonging to the Lewisham Maternity hospital. To the far left a curved walkway spirals over the railway line from where it's just about possible to get a view of the game, whilst to the right is a walkway that separates the ground from the back of a row of elevated terraced houses.

Lewisham currently sit third in the table and, although they are nine points adrift of leaders AFC Whyteleafe, they have two games in hand which could yet make things very interesting. K Sports are solidly mid-table with certainly less to play for although you would never know this as the visitors force a succession of early corners. For the home side Darrell Thomas is the first to test K's 'keeper Adam Lovell who makes a fine diving stop. The same man then fires over a rising shot as

Boro' begin to assert their authority on the game. With 23 minutes played Zacc Ajose, who is having a great battle with right back Chester Smith, gets the better of his man and slips the ball inside. Thomas is once again on the spot and, jinking past a couple of defenders, slides his cross shot low beyond the reach of Lovell. Much to everyone's surprise the lead only lasts a matter of minutes, as midfielder Adekunle Adeyinka gives the ball away and Segun Ikudehinbu executes a perfect curling lob from some distance to bring the scores level. Nick Harvey then goes close to restoring the home side's lead before following a mad scramble from a K Sports corner, the ball rolls gently against the foot of a post before being heaved clear. All square at the break is probably a fair reflection of play with Sports having plenty of the ball but Boro creating the better clear-cut opportunities.

Lewisham begin the second period with more intensity, but a series of long injury stoppages breaks up any rhythm to the game. Josh Davidson is having an impressive match for the visitors, sitting in front of the back four he is increasingly called into action as Boro' begin to dominate possession. Adeyinka goes close to making amends for his first half error but can only guide his header wide after a far post centre from Donnell Scarlett. It's an increasingly rearguard action from the visitors although Ikudehinbu isn't far away with a curling free kick. Only 11 minutes remain when Lewisham score the winner and what a real belter it is too. The home side win a free kick around 30 yards out from where substitute Bryan Zepo absolutely launches it into the left-hand corner. It's a brilliant strike with Zepo setting off on a wild celebratory run with his teammates in hot, but distant, pursuit. At the final whistle the home players come to the touchline to celebrate with their supporters: none of this fake applause from 20 yards away as we see in the professional game but proper back slapping, hand shaking and hugging from both parties. It certainly raises a warm smile on what has been a chilly afternoon.

contributed on 22/01/24.

TT No.104: Craig Dabbs - Saturday 20th January 2024; **Notts Olympic** v Wollaton Reserves; Nottinghamshire Senior League Division Two; Venue: Redhill Leisure Centre; Result: 2-1; Admission: Free; Programme: Did not issue; Attendance: 11

Hats off to Notts Olympic. Along with many others, I saw them play earlier this season at The Gallows. Since that time, they have moved to another set-up in Birchover Park. With a 50% chance that their game would be on due the cold snap we've been having, they booked the 3G at Redhill Leisure Centre (connected to Redhill Academy) in Arnold, to get the game played.

When this facility was planned eight years ago fortunately it came with a viewing area instead of just a basic cage. Clearly, it's well used. There's plenty of crumb laid down but the pitch itself is looking pretty threadbare these days. The bounce of the ball was certainly more exaggerated than what you find today and reminded me of an earlier generation pitch. However, such unpredictability made for a great game.

Olympic got off to a great start taking a two-goal lead. Wollaton looked the poorer side until a mix up in the home defence allowed them to pull a goal back. Despite any further scoring in the second half, this was as good as anything I've seen so far

this season - it was end-to-end stuff and full of mistakes mainly I think down to the pitch.

contributed (via Brian Buck) on 21/01/24.

TT No.103: Keith Aslan - Saturday 20th January 2024; **MINSTER** v Cuxton 91; Kent County League Premier Division; Kick Off: 14.47; Result: 4-1; Admission & Programme: £4; Attendance: Official 81 - actual 53 (49 home, 3 away & 1 neutral)

Let's start with the big news of the week. On Wednesday, 10 weeks after the match, a fellow hopper received a PDF copy of the Madeley White Star FC programme, and I will soon have a paper copy to cuddle. Charlotte has finally succumbed. After months of excuses one of our number ran out of patience and got on to the Staffs County League and within a few days it was they who sent him a copy, presumably after an exchange with Charlotte. She will think twice before messing groundhoppers about again. The mystery still remains that as there always was a programme for this match (allegedly), why did it take so much aggravation to get it delivered?

What of today's match I hear you ask. With the thaw taking somewhat longer than the BBC predicted, I no longer have the enthusiasm to go wandering round the country searching out new grounds that may still have a football match played on them, and stress-free local games are becoming increasingly attractive. And since their move to Ramsgate, I have to confess to being a bit of a Minster fan.

First and foremost is the sixteen-page glossy programme, a terrific effort which sensibly is included in the admission price. By my reckoning over one third of the teams in the Kent County League issue paper, which these days, at this level, is unique. Usual food options are all available (bacon and cheese burger for me) and the clubhouse offered heat and a chance to see Roy Hodgson's retirement party on a big screen. Many of the attendees chose to watch the game from the warmth of the clubhouse which would account for the disparity between the official crowd figure and mine. These cowards can't count the game, so no way do they deserve to be included in the attendance. Real men stand on the terraces and take hypothermia in their stride.

Full Time and the league website both showed this match as a two o'clock kick off. It was in fact 2.45 which caught a lot of people out. Minster's current form is second to none, and after a shaky start to the season they have been virtually unbeatable over the past three or four months. They went 1-0 down and equalized dead on 45 minutes, with the referee blowing for half time immediately after the goal went in leaving the crowd wondering what happened to the obligatory extra minute that all of his mates add on. In the second half Minster asserted their authority to run out comfortable winners. Surprisingly considering they don't get games called off due to the plastic pitch, Minster have played quite a few less games than anyone else in the league and have yet to reach the half way point in their fixtures.

My only reservation is that a team called Minster should really be playing in Minster. They are a village club and if they can't do anything to their ground to

move up the leagues, then so be it. Having said that, things are really swinging at Ramsgate. I wonder where the money comes from to hire the pitch?

A half hour bus ride dropped me a couple of minutes from my country dacha and I was home by five thirty. As I get older, I can't help thinking this is the way forward for my Saturday afternoon entertainment.

contributed on 21/01/23.

TT No.102: Brian Buck - Saturday 13th January 2024; **FC Peterborough** v Dussindale & Hellesdon Rovers; Thurlow Nunn league First Division North; Result: 0-0; Attendance: 91.

Rubbish! There were less than 50 present, a figure arrived at by making frequent head counts to relieve the boredom of this dreadful game. Why can't they be honest? Once again, I was very gratefully driven to a game, this time door to door.

FC Peterborough play at the old Peterborough Northern Star ground, which they took over from after they vacated the premises and folded. They previously played at the nearby Fullbridge Road Recreation ground where I saw them play a few years back. They say that they are happy to be playing here as it saves the three-pitch site from being ripped up for housing and also it gives their many youth teams somewhere to play. Before the game we revisited the best pub in Peterborough, the Hand & Hart, thus renewing acquaintances with their landlord, a Leicester City fan, whom we half knew. He told us that after being here for over 15 years and having invested over £60,000 in it, he is now intending to close it down, because business is so bad. The trouble is that when it first opened it was well used by the nearby locals. But these days few of them drink alcohol.

Back at the ground nothing much had changed from my last visit here, for a youth match on 15 February 2018, except perhaps for a new entrance signage to the pitch for the players. There are two 50-seater stands here, with the large dugouts separating them. There is also covered standing behind the clubhouse goal and along the far side close to one corner of the ground. We sat in the seats closest to the far goal. The pitch was awful. It needed a haircut and was exceptionally bumpy, so not being conducive to having good football played on it. In this respect it suited today's teams!

The hosts had slightly the better of the first half, but it was minimal. We watched the second half from the other stand and this time the visitors were minimally the better side. But both teams created very few serious goal scoring chances between them throughout. When the lights came on quite a few of the bulbs weren't working, leaving a number of dull patches and right at the end we had some light drizzle. Although on the day, both sides were poor, I'm sure that they would both offer more on another day. The hosts beat Whittlesey Athletic 8-0 here earlier in the season and the visitors beat today's hosts 5-2 at their place, near Norwich Airport, back in September. I felt a tad sorry for the hosts today, as they have moved here with good intentions. But the ground, although seemingly suitable for

up to Step 5 football, needs investment to spruce it up and also more spectators to help fill it!

contributed on 16/01/24.

TT No.101: Jon T Green - Friday 12th January 2024; **LLWYDCOED** v Canton; Ardal South West; Venue: The Ron Jones Stadium; Result: 1-1; Admission: £5; Programme: No; Attendance: 65

It's a time of transition for Llwydcoed as, since their traditional home at the Welfare Ground has been deemed unsuitable for Tier 3, they have found themselves playing a few miles away in Aberdare. In order to meet the league criteria, they need to extend their pitch by four metres - it doesn't sound much but anyone who has tried to dig a new flower bed in the garden will know that it's a monumental task. They also plan to install floodlights and to level out other parts of the ground; work is scheduled to begin in a few weeks' time and, if all goes according to plan, they'll return home for the start of the 2025/26 campaign. Named in honour of the Welsh sprinter, a 4 x 110 yards 1963 world record holder and two times Olympian (he also held executive and directorial posts at QPR, Cardiff City and Portsmouth) the Ron Jones stadium is without doubt a great venue for track and field events but, as with every other athletics venue, it really doesn't lend itself to watching football. The only covered accommodation is provided by a modern elevated steel and concrete grandstand with 233 comfortable black theatre style seats. The down-side being it's located above the finishing line which is roughly adjacent to the corner flag. In effect, from the far end of the stand you are not actually facing the pitch although this rather dubious vantage point didn't stop a few fans watching from here. Entrance is through the main administrative building which houses both toilets and changing rooms. There is a kitchen facility where one of the committee members is explaining the use of his wife's air fryer to his colleagues. He assures them it's extremely easy to use and judging by the amount of chips and hot dogs being consumed on a chilly evening he certainly seems to have mastered it.

With the bottom three being potentially relegated from the Ardal South West division the home side are in the thick of a relegation fight. Tonight's visitors Canton sit comfortably mid-table so this is just the sort of game that Llwydcoed will be targeting for three points. It's the away team who begin the better on a surface which looks in pretty decent shape having been scarified the previous day. Captain Bo Cordle and Loke Webbe have a fine understanding for Canton and are linking up to good effect on the left-hand side. It's therefore something of a surprise when Cian Cable gets on the end of a long ball and the visitors are only rescued by Suleimane Susso, their Guinea-Bissau borne 'keeper. Canton also have a Portuguese, a Nigerian and a Saudi on their team sheet whilst the hosts name 16 home grown players which is something of a rarity in the Welsh leagues. At the mid-point of the half Cordle goes close with a low shot before, following a corner, Gabriel Williams takes a nasty blow to the head. The Llwydcoed centre-half receives lengthy treatment on and off the pitch before returning with a large white bandage stuck to the back of his head. Cable continues to look the focal point for the home attack but fails to get his shot away when in a decent position. Play is tense and tight and then from nowhere the hosts go one up; a free kick is

pumped in from the left, Ricky Carter flicks it on, and the bearded Ross Daniels guides his header inside the far post leaving Susso flat-footed. The goal seems to spur both sides into action with Daniels and Dylan Davies both going close. For their part Canton are looking to explosive wide man Thierry Otu whose forays down the right are giving the home defence some nervous moments.

The second half opens with Cable dancing inside his marker but his weak shot results in a routine save. Canton have made tactical changes at the break with Cordle now appearing on the right and Otu working right across the front line. They are seeing plenty of possession in the Llwydcoed half but, for all their good approach play-off, they are failing to trouble Kieran Evans between the sticks. Home attacks are rare but when they do get forward Susso rather flaps under a high cross and, when the ball falls to Cable, he slashes his shot wide. Just five minutes remain when Canton equalise and it's a bit of a horror show: Evans receives a back pass and is so nonchalant about completing his clearance, when he does try, he smashes the ball against centre forward Andre Phillips who has the simplest of tasks to score into an empty net. Less than sixty seconds later Phillips almost scores again as he thunders a free kick from 25 yards against the cross bar. Incredibly Llwydcoed almost snatch victory in added time as a corner to the far post reaches an unmarked Carter, the striker flails wildly at the ball and blazes over. At the final whistle you can't help but think that a lack of composure in front of goal has cost the home side a much-needed win. If they are to retain their senior status for next season, then it's a problem that needs to be addressed and quickly...

contributed on 15/01/24.

TT No.100: Craig Dabbs - Saturday 13th January 2024; **Everett Rovers** v Colney Heath U23's; Hertfordshire County Senior League Premier Division; Venue: Leggatts Playing Fields 3G; Result: 3-4; Admission: £3; Programme: 4pp, Free; Attendance: 46

There are plenty of places in the USA and one in Canada called Everett but none this side of the pond, so where is it? Well, the answer is Watford, and I was rather impressed, not with Watford but with Everett Rovers.

As you drive towards the ground it's actually signposted, which isn't something you see at higher levels of the non-league pyramid often let alone Step 7. On arrival you see a very smart clubhouse which has been recently extended and a 3G pitch which is yet to have its first birthday. So, who are they?

Well, Everett Rovers FC were formed in 1997 being a splinter club from local youth side Herons Youth. The new club held a meeting at the present site which was then the Bill Everett Community Centre and decided to name the club Everett Rovers. Bill Everett was well respected in the town, he was a councillor, mayor and President of Watford FC.

The club are new to the league this season and are forward thinking with plans to climb the pyramid in time. They still have a strong emphasis on youth with over

200 children connected with the club. The new 3G will really play its part with the various teams and mean they can now take a gate and potentially install a small stand which will enable them to look towards step 6 in time.

Prior to the pandemic the league had a ruling that a programme must be issued in the Premier Division but since then this has seemingly fallen away. So, it was nice to see the club making an effort with a simple four pager and I wish more clubs would do something simple like this than not at all.

The match was belting. Colney Heath were shaky to start with but when they did get going the game went from end to end. Although you could see the visitors were slightly stronger you couldn't call it and when Everett got the goal three minutes into injury time it made for a grandstand finish with the referee adding nearly ten minutes on, almost dare I say it looking for a 4-4 for his records. It didn't happen of course and Colney Heath's U23's survived for all three points but only just.

contributed (via Brian Buck) on 14/01/24.

TT No.99: Keith Aslan - Saturday 13th January 2024; **HUCKNALL TOWN** v Deeping Rangers; United Counties League Premier Division North; Kick Off: 15.00; Result: 0 - 3; Admission: £5 for old folks; Programme: £2 - superb; Attendance: 232 (218 home, 12 away & 2 neutral)

Today I fulfilled a lifetime's ambition that I've had for the past 12 months and ticked Hucknall's new ground. Numerous failed attempts have been down to weather and trains. With the pluvial (*copyright Len*) conditions now a distant memory and Jack Frost being wiped out with a balmy 5 degrees, no pitch problems. And those nice people at East Midlands Trains were providing a service to Nottingham this weekend, and as an extra special treat for their passengers, were running trains that actually matched up with the timetable. And to cap it all, 'Gladiators' was back on TV in the evening. It's days like this that make me almost glad to be alive.

Hucknall is the first stop out of Nottingham on the 'Robin Hood Line'. It's also the northernmost terminus of the city's extensive tram network. A 15-minute bus service takes you door to door, but a bit problematical on the return with sparser intervals that don't fit in with a 4.55 finish. To ensure I caught my train I walked it back. It took 35 minutes, but if your knees aren't falling to pieces like mine, you could knock a bit off this. The bus stop is adjacent to the old ground, although you would never know that football was played here a year ago. Now it's just a barren wasteland.

The new ground is just a couple of hundred yards away from the old and what a good job they've made of it without any help from 'Atcost'. A long stand straddles the entire touchline with excellent views, it makes such a difference when the dugouts are on the opposite side of the ground. A small, covered terrace is behind one goal. Everything is as it should be - a tea hut serves tea and a nearby burger van serves burgers. The clubhouse was opened by Nigel Clough in December 2022 where you can watch the lunchtime football. It was advertising 'non-alcoholic gin'.

In my foolish youth I tried a pint of non-alcoholic lager and it was the most revolting thing I've ever drunk. It doesn't bear thinking about what the gin tastes like.

There was a real buzz about the place, plenty of Hucknall scarves on show, and an enthusiastic and noisy support which didn't wane even when the match became a lost cause. And this for a team that is useless. I would imagine the place would be really rocking if they could manage to win a few games.

Hucknall are very much bottom of the table and look nailed on certainties for relegation with only one win this season. Today they didn't look at all bad, with very little difference between them and their mid table opponents. Apart from the fact Deeping scored three goals and Hucknall didn't.

A terrific programme. It's good to see there are still a few clubs left willing to produce something of this magnitude. Forward Daniel Odunaiya's favourite film is Avengers: Infinity War while his striking partner Ayleal Dill's ambition at school was to be either a tattoo artist or a commercial fisherman, a somewhat unusual combination. People who don't buy programmes miss out on all this useful information.

contributed on 14/01/24.

TT No.98: Steve Hardy - Saturday 13th January 2024; **Solihull Municipal** v Leaffield Athletic; Birmingham & District League - Division 4; Result: 3-1; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 26 h/c

Almost a year ago, I visited Solihull Municipal for a division 6 game in their first season in the league. During the summer they were promoted to division 4, and also changed grounds, which was why I found myself in Shirley, near Solihull, today.

Their new home is Moseley Cricket Club, where a grass football pitch has been laid out, behind the main cricket square. In last year's report I said that the pitch they played on then was terrible. The new one is a bit better, but all the recent rain had made it very heavy indeed. Today's visitors were Leaffield Athletic, who brought a good few very vocal supporters with them, creating an excellent atmosphere, I thought.

At start of play it was 4th v 2nd in the table and it turned out to be a good game all round really. Municipal scored first on 11 minutes with Leaffield equalising on 24 minutes after a defensive shambles by the hosts. The turn around looked to be complete four minutes later, when Leaffield were awarded a somewhat dubious penalty, only for the home keeper to make a great save. Alright, the shot was straight at him, but it was still a good save! Leaffield looked the better team at this point, but their world fell apart on 40 minutes when Municipal themselves were awarded a penalty. It was handball in the area from a Leaffield player, who was shown a straight red by the excellent referee. The penalty was duly despatched giving Municipal a 2-1 half time lead.

After the (very short) break, Leaffield were not as sharp with their ten men not looking like scoring. Municipal scored a third later on and are now up to second in the table with Leaffield dropping down to third.

Just one ground left to visit now, for me to recomplete the league for another season. Think I will leave it until later in the season though as it will give me something to look forward to.

contributed on 14/01/24.

TT No.97: Brian Buck - Saturday 6th January 2024; **Hutton** v Dunmow Town; Thurlow Nunn League First Division South; Venue: played at Billericay Town FC; Result: 2-3; Attendance: 100.

Today I accepted an offer to be given a lift to this game, which I was very grateful to receive. This was my first visit here since my last, getting on for 40 years ago. I was first here in 1979 with my second game coming on 4 October 1984 when I saw Billericay Town beat Chelmsford City 3-1 in an East Anglian Cup 1st Round match, (attendance: 277). Before the game today we had a leisurely pint in a micro-brewery pub which is close to Waitrose, where we parked. We were back at the ground in good time for kick off, but my driver may have regretted parking in the pothole strewn club car park.

In the time since my last visit here the ground has improved enormously. It now has a capacity of 4,800 (2,000 seated). The seats are along both sides, with covered terracing behind the goals. These days it has a 3G pitch, which slopes slightly from side to side. It looks very nice, but my only gripe would be that there are posts holding up the stands on all four sides of the ground, making it difficult to get a post-free view of proceedings if you are sitting down. Nonetheless it is an impressive ground and today I sat in the Glenn Tamplin main stand. I'd seen ground sharers Hutton play before at home, at their Polo Fields ground in their village, when on 30 October 1999 they drew 0-0 with White Notley in an Essex Intermediate League Division 2 match, (attendance: 20 approx). It's tucked away, almost out of sight and at the time I recall that as I walked from Shenfield station to get there, it looked out of place, compared with some very expensive looking houses en route.

As for this game, which was watched by a lot of noisy girl mascots, accompanied by their parents, in the first half it was like a lot of games I see these days. It saw the ref being harassed by both sides, surrounding him like demented schoolboys each time a foul was committed against them. It was fast and physical, so much so that at one point the ref was actually knocked over as a player accidentally crashed into him. But after treatment he was able to carry on. Hutton were the better side in the first half. They took the lead on 30 minutes when a raking cross was finished off at the far post. Then on 45(+4) minutes they scored again. It was an own goal really, as a defender turned a corner into his own net with an outstretched foot, but later I noted that the goal has since been credited to the corner taker.

After the break, Dunmow upped their game and on 58 minutes they pulled a goal back with a forty yarder. Two minutes later the 'own goal' scorer got the equaliser with a shot from about 10 yards out and on 70 minutes he got their winner, thus completing an unofficial hattrick. Then the visitors' time wasted to excess, with fake cramp being the favourite and the game finally finished at 5.08pm! All in all, this was a good day out, mainly because there was a lot going on and a lot to take in.

contributed on 09/01/23.

TT No.96: Jon T Green - Saturday 6th January 2024; **OJM BLACK COUNTRY** v Droitwich Spa; Midland Football League - Division One; Venue: Triplex Sports Association; Result: 3-3; Admission: £7; Programme: No; Attendance: 43

It's a surprisingly busy afternoon at the Triplex Sports Association Ground in Kings Norton: cars are triple parked on the narrow approach to the clubhouse entrance with every newcomer being sent away to search for a space in the nearby industrial units. On further inspection something is not quite right as instead of kit bags and balls it's all trays of sandwiches and balloons. The large function room is a hive of activity, but it's peopled by a noisy group of under-fives busily enjoying a birthday party and, when an elderly clown arrives dressed head to toe in bright yellow, the few of us there to watch the game beat a hasty retreat to the turnstiles.

The ground was originally home to Pilkington XXX, the works side of the glass manufacturer, who sadly folded at the end of the 2015/16 season. OJM have arrived here this year after a spell ground-sharing at Lye Town. If, like me, you are a fan of old school grounds with plenty of overgrown, moss-covered terracing, and a slightly run down air, then this is the place for you. Entrance is past the immaculately kept bowls club and alongside the large clubhouse there is a smart new wooden pay box but no actual turnstile. This side of the pitch is flat grass standing only but all other areas provide hard standing. A raised patio area, set behind some attractive blue metal gates, fills the near corner and leads onto a concrete terrace behind the goal. Along the far side are high grass banks, behind which frequent trains pass, and where there is a smart combined covered terrace and seating area. 95 buttermilk yellow seats are arranged in four rows and contrast nicely with the blue metalwork of the stand. From here you can see the needle-sharp spire of St. Nicolas church where the Reverend W.V. Awdry (creator of Thomas the Tank Engine) once served. The far end of the ground is sparsely used but once again provides some wonderfully overgrown terracing.

On paper it looks like this is going to be a very competitive game; OJM sporting the best defensive home record in the division sit in eighth place but only two points behind Bilston Town in the last of the play-off slots. Droitwich occupy third place but are a distant 18 points adrift of runaway leaders Hinckley AFC. The playing surface is understandably heavy with the linesman in front of me ploughing ankle deep through the mud "Didn't bring the paddle boat out with me" he wryly comments as the players line-up. The game starts at a lightning pace with Eshan Greer forcing Spa 'keeper Dom Rogerson to turn away his shot which Nathan Binner then scrambles away for a corner. Droitwich only partially clear the resulting flag

kick, Taylor Hommer re-centres, Callum Nimmo thumps his header against the bar before Louis Conway applies the final touch. The visitors are soon level as Conor Collins sets up Perry Moss to drive beyond Tom Clapp from 12 yards. Parity does not last long as the hosts are soon back in front, Spa lose possession and when the ball is worked wide to Hommer his pass to Greer sees him rounding Rogerson for a simple tap in. It's been an exhilarating start and just 13 minutes have been played. Unsurprisingly the pace slows but each side have good headed chances which they squander; Nimmo goes close, but Spa's Charlie Tilley should do better when unmarked. Three minutes of the half remain when OJM score again; the impressive Hommer chases a long ball into the corner before nonchalantly flicking it with the outside of his left boot onto the head of Jordan Sangha to bury his header from close range. It's a superb piece of skill from Hommer who looks like a young man who should be playing at a much higher level. There is just time for Cory Rudd to try his luck from a distance before the referee blows for the interval. It's breathless stuff and one of the best 45 minutes of football I've seen for a good while.

They say that a two-goal lead is a dangerous scoreline and there is an element of this as OJM seem uncertain whether to push for a fourth or consolidate what they have. In the end they rather do neither and end up paying the penalty (literally). Approaching the hour mark, Moss is tripped as he turns inside the box and Collins beats Clapp from the spot. Liam Spink almost restores the home sides advantage but then they self-destruct; Collins moves smoothly onto a through ball and Conway covering from full back hauls him down. It's a clear straight red card but with the striker still some distance from goal perhaps the challenge isn't even necessary. The free kick comes to nothing, but Spa are now in the ascendancy. Man of the Match Hommer is replaced and with it OJM's attacking options reduce. Through the gathering gloom (and it really is quite tricky to see the middle of the park) the visitors equalise. Moss is once again the tormentor; he wriggles towards the touchline where Stefan Cameron lunges in and brings him down. Collins steps up and converts the penalty this time going to Clapp's left. In the end both sides will see this as points dropped but for the neutral fan it's been a highly entertaining afternoon.

contributed on 08/01/24.

TT No.95: Craig Dabbs - Saturday 6th January 2024; **AFC North Kilworth v Ellistown**; Leicestershire Senior League Premier Division; Venue: North Kilworth Sports Club; Result: 1-3; Admission: £5; Programme: 20pp, Free; Attendance: 53.

AFC North Kilworth is the latest version of a club that was formed back in 1903. Re-launched as recently as 2020 the new club is having a great season and currently sit at the top of the table for the first time in 27 years. As an aside, its over thirty years since the last time I watched a game in this league owing to the general lack of programmes.

North Kilworth Sports Club is a bit of a gem. Fully railed, lights and a covered terrace along with a very good clubhouse, make it an ideal candidate for further progression. To meet grading requirements seats are needed (the stand used to

have them until recently) with some hard standing and a pay hut. So yes, there's more to do when the club are ready.

Ellistown are having a good season sitting in fourth, but Kilworth (themselves in eighth) are no slouches either. They worked hard against the higher placed guests hitting the bar three times in a ten-minute period in the first half and whilst just one goal down in the latter stages of the second they tortured the Ellistown defence only for the injury time sucker punch that sealed it on what was a very heavy pitch.

contributed (via Brian Buck) on 07/01/24.

TT No.94: Craig Dabbs - Monday 1st January 2024; **Winchester City** v Gosport Borough; Southern League Premier South; Venue: The City Ground; Result: 1-1; Admission: £12; Programme: 24pp, £2; Attendance: 469

First up, a Happy New Year to you all.

I wasn't driving down to Hampshire this morning. In fact, I was debating whether or not to go anywhere. Eventually the itch of Football got the better of me and I contacted Canvey Island who informed me via *Facebook* all was well. After getting in the car, I decided to give the secretary a quick ring, I'm pleased I did. The secretary informed me that due to illness there wasn't going to be a programme, so it was a pick anything and quickly check it moment. I chose Winchester because I knew it wasn't far, so I phoned them, got the green light, and headed south.

The City Ground has been home to the club since 1981 when they leased the pitch from the council following the loss of the lease of Airlie Road from the Army. The ground had to be upgraded straight away even though the club at the time were in the Hampshire League. It's been further upgraded as the years have gone by and the club have progressed. Now at step 3 The City Ground, in order to comply with gradings, has a mish mash of six different sections of cover and has had some temporary fencing erected at the far end to truncate the large expanse of grass that is due to the oval shape of the venue.

Three areas of cover are on the rugby club side; a temporary canvass covered seated stand; a kit stand and a small section of uncovered seating. There's another small kit stand at the car park end and two more areas of cover - one has been erected with scaffolding and the other looks to be the original stand and is part wood and part metal.

One thing in my haste I hadn't considered was the weather. The pitch was already a little heavy and it drizzled prior to kick off. After further heavy rain, the players had difficulty maintaining grip and by the end the ball was holding up a little in one or two places.

Overall, the game was excellent. I was convinced it was going to be 0-0 but Winchester, who were the better side, got the first goal to break the deadlock. With the pitch deteriorating and Gosport suddenly sensing the urgency to reply it

made for a cracking last twenty minutes. Indeed, the visitors scrambled one home ten minutes before the referee blew up for full-time.

contributed (via Brian Buck) on 07/01/24.

TT No.93: Keith Aslan - Saturday 6th January 2024; **SNODLAND** v Rusthall; Southern Counties East (nee Kent) Premier Division; Kick Off: 15.01; Result: 1-0; Admission: £6 for the elderly; Programme: £2; Attendance: 185 (150 home, 33 away & 2 neutral)

I didn't so much dodge a bullet today as avoid a machine gun battery. With the far north west missing out the worst of the rain I was all set for a trip to Carnforth. Their very helpful secretary confirmed the pitch would be ok but on Friday evening I decided I didn't want a 600 mile round trip to watch a game of football and bottled out. Got a text from the aforementioned secretary at 11 o'clock Saturday morning apologising that the game was now off due to a frozen pitch. My reaction to the message was totally different sitting in my country dacha drinking tea than it would have been if I'd read it on an Avanti train winging my way up to the Artic Circle. Fortune favours the cowardly.

It was a stress-free day to Snodland, with a leisurely Saturday morning shop in Asda, and taking advantage of their amazing offer for the over sixties of soup, roll and unlimited coffees for a quid. I'll be able to afford to eat every day this winter. Got a train around midday and arrived at the ground in plenty of time to watch the second half of some North East set to in the Snodland clubhouse.

The station for Snodland is, hold on to your hats, Snodland. It's on the branch from Strood to Paddock Wood, a line surprisingly full of passengers considering it goes from nowhere to nowhere. The ground is a 20-minute walk from the station. A newish build without the aid of *Atcost*, with a capacious stand with perfect sightlines next to the clubhouse. To enter you walk through a gravity turnstile, you won't see many like this at any level. It was acquired from the old Wembley Stadium.

In the excellent programme managerial assistant Adrian Lacey was bemoaning the number of missed chances they had in the one all draw with Hollands & Blair when they had 68% of the play. How does he know this? Much of the same today with chance after chance going begging and Snodland should have been out of sight long before half time. Their profligacy kept the result in abeyance until the final whistle, but at least they managed to hold on to the one goal they did score for a deserved victory. Considering the amount of rain we've had, the pitch looked in good nick and didn't cut up much as the game progressed. Rusthall bought a fair few with them and a good bunch of lads they were to.

Technically a new ground for me, you can still see where the old ground used to be next door, which I visited many moons ago. Sometimes when old and new are so close together I pretend to have done them both. No pretence needed at Snodland anymore. Definitely a new tick today.

Home at a sensible time after a cracking day out. This could be the future of Groundhopping for me.

contributed on 07/01/24.

TT No.92: Jon T Green - Saturday 30th December 2023; **HAREFIELD UNITED** v Wallingford and Crowmarsh; Combined Counties Football League - Premier Division North; Venue: Preston Park; Result: 4-0; Admission: normally £8 but this was a charity “pay what you can” match; Programme: online only; Attendance: 165

I can remember a time when Winter brought a slew of cancelled games because of frozen pitches; rock hard treacherous surfaces you couldn't stand up on. Nowadays, it's rain, rain and more rain with grounds looking increasingly like paddy fields. So it is with some trepidation that I speak to the groundsman at Preston Park on another horribly wet morning. “No problem here” is his reply “we had a few of us working on it yesterday so unless there is torrential rain between now and kick off, we are good to go” he adds with a quick glance to the heavens.

Harefield's home is a short distance from the shops and pubs of the village centre and, although on a main road of sorts, the ground is largely surrounded by open countryside. The main stand, a long low wooden and brick construction, straddles the halfway line and holds 150 black tip-up seats. To its left are the turnstile block, including a now seemingly defunct club shop, a burger van, and towards the corner flag, a toilet block and the players' entrance. To the right a new concrete base has been laid but I couldn't ascertain what will eventually be built here. On the far touchline there is a metal shelter atop which sits a camera gantry. The stand, named after former club President Dave West, has no back or sides so the level of shelter will depend upon the direction of the wind. Hard standing surrounds the pitch as does a very attractive green wooden fence (so much more aesthetically pleasing than white plastic) supported by red metal posts.

With both teams at the wrong end of the league table it's a big game today; the hosts sit just three points above the relegation zone, with Wallingford one better off. It's already nearly dark as the players take to the field at three o'clock led out by referee Mr Rister who, through the gloom, seems to have a passing resemblance to Freddie Mercury. Wallingford's Thomas Carter completes his warm-up routine in front of me - he's a very big lad for a full back; whatever happened to those nippy little players? (maybe I am still back sometime in the late 70's - I really must embrace these new-fangled ways). Carter and his colleagues are soon under pressure with Prince Mbengui firing over. Mbengui is one of those players who gets his head down and is always looking to get a shot on goal, all well and good but I suspect a little frustrating for his team mates. The physical stature of the visitors is making life a little tricky for Harefield with youngster Will Bailey spending as much time on the floor as he does on his feet. United are on top, with Alfie Tucker dragging his shot wide of the target when very well placed. A goal is always on the cards, and it duly arrives five minutes before the break; a cross from the left is headed on by captain Harry Tamplin to his centre-half partner Dave Thomas who finds the net from close range.

Wallingford have been outplayed in the first period and I am expecting a reaction from them after the break. Instead, things rapidly go from back to worse. Mbengui spurns a couple more chances before, from a corner, Harefield make it two. Luke Brophy swings in a left footed free kick and in the melee, Tamplin gets the final touch. The scoreline is tough on Wallingford's Sam Baldock who is showing himself to be a fine 'keeper. The visitors respond by making a triple substitution and, although for a while they see more of the ball with the dribbling skills of David Tembua very much in evidence, they seldom look like reducing the arrears. A little over ten minutes remain when Mbengui finally gets his goal; Cain Wright sees his shot bounce back off the chest of Baldock and the striker has the simplest of finishes. Substitute Jake Tones then adds the best goal of the afternoon as he creates some space on the right before smashing a cross shot into the roof of the net. It's been a highly successful end of the year for Harefield and one which gives them a considerable boost moving into the second half of the season. For Wallingford it was a poor display in a game where they would have expected to be competitive, the alarm bells will be ringing loud and clear if there is not an immediate improvement.

contributed on 03/01/24.

TT No.91: Craig Dabbs - Saturday 30th December 2023; **Stowmarket Town v Lowestoft Town**; Isthmian League Division One North; Venue: Greens Meadow; Result: 0-6; Admission: £10; Programme: 36pp, £2; Attendance: 357

Nestled in the shadow of the A14 and on the edge of Stowmarket lies Greens Meadow home to the club since 1984 when they relocated from Cricket Meadow.

The council were instrumental in the re-location and building of Greens Meadow. They wanted Stowmarket's home for a supermarket and moved some old wooden terracing and turf to the new site adding covered standing and a 200-seater stand. The ground was formally opened by Sir Alf Ramsey in the December with Norwich City providing the opposition. Ten years on from that initial season Ipswich Town came along for a friendly setting the record attendance at 1,200.

The ground today has all its facilities on the Bury Road side of the ground; the main stand, further cover with a small amount of seating and, in front of the clubhouse, an overhang is what you find with the rest of the ground flat uncovered hard standing.

The club's small band of volunteers clearly have a passion for their club with everything neat, tidy and looked after. There's a small club stall and alongside it a local bakery too though I'm not too sure the latter is a regular thing. I make mention of the appearance and volunteers because the club are having a rotten time of it. They currently sit bottom on two points and all too often over the years I have visited clubs in similar situations and it's very evident that the writing is on the wall not only on the pitch but off it. I don't know the 'in's and out's' here, but I can say for all the woes on the pitch, off it was a different story - well looked after, staff were warm and friendly, no hint of any problems. Indeed, I was made a fuss of in light of my milestone today and ended up presenting the man of the match award which I gave to the goalkeeper for his sterling work.

Onto the match. Well, I made comment straight away that Stow were going to have a difficult time of it, they did. They weren't completely overwhelmed and had a few chances but overall, it was the men from Crown Meadow that ran the show this afternoon further cementing their place at the top of the table. Stowmarket may well go down this season. I doubt it's recoverable to be honest but a return to the Eastern Counties League may be no bad thing with less travelling and reduced costs. They can re-group and, in time, when they are ready and hopefully without overstretching bounce back.

contributed (via Brian Buck) on 31/12/23.

TT No.90: Keith Aslan - Saturday 30th December 2023; WOMBOURNE ALL STARS v Dudley Kingswinford; West Midlands League Division 2; Kick Off: 15.04; Result: 6-2; Admission & Programme: £4; Attendance: 47 (36 home, 6 away & 5 neutral)

It takes a bit of motivation to do a plastic pitch in Wolverhampton, but I'd geared myself up and munching a breakfast of toast and marmite, I was all good to go. Switched on the radio to hear travel guru Simon Calder reporting live from St. Pancras that there were no trains due to flooding at Ebbsfleet. That's just dandy, now it's a very slow train to Victoria. Except it isn't. Victoria is shut due to our old friend, Mr. Engineering Works. So, it's a stop start run through the south London suburbs to be deposited at London Bridge, which is about as far away from where I want to be that's still in the same time zone. The railways have been appalling over Christmas with major disruption everywhere. But no need to worry, the Department of Transport has said they will 'hold railway companies to account if they let passengers down'. What, by giving the worse one a brand new eight-year franchise! Railtrack hoped to get trains running by midday. Yes, and I hope Santa Claus will bring me lots of presents. So it's home via London Bridge again, arriving back at my country dacha one and a half hours later than I should have done. In fairness it has to be said that the 'Avanti' bit of the journey took place without incident.

An easy one to get to with a bus every quarter of an hour from Wolverhampton dropping you a 12-minute walk from the ground. Wombourne is a not an unpleasant place compared to its surroundings and today was the big local derby with Dudley Kingswinford which is three miles down the road. A plastic 3g cage, with spectator facilities down one side. While these set ups are very samey, it should be noted that of the 13 games scheduled today in the West Midlands League, 8 were postponed and an artificial surface certainly takes the stress out of wondering if the game will be on. The ground is in a leisure centre which contains a drinks machine that requires an advanced degree in engineering to operate. One lady who obviously had the required qualification was showing everybody what to do. Without her we would have all gone thirsty.

Can't complain about value for money at this game. 8 goals, 6 for Wombourne, 5 for Mathew Hogg who was unsurprisingly named man of the match. 3 metalwork strikes (2-1 to the homesters) 3 penalties, all to Wombourne, (1 scored, 2 missed). And what I thought was a somewhat strange sending off for a Kingwinsford player

in the first half. I was very close to the alleged incident and didn't think it was even a foul. Judging by the difficulty his teammates had in removing the alleged miscreant from the pitch, neither did he. 4-minute late start, 21 minutes for half time. Dudley didn't seem to want to come out for the second half and the referee didn't seem to want to make them.

I keep a low profile and it always surprises me (and not in a good way) when I'm identified as a groundhopper. The Chairman insisted on taking my photograph and putting it up on their Facebook page. My fans might like to use it as their screensaver. There were plenty of other hoppers present but the fact I'm the only one to have their picture taken is testimony to my photogenic qualities.

So, another year over, and I'll be celebrating New Years Eve with Jools Hollands Annual Hootenanny. My main wish for 2024 is that someone succeeds where Guy Fawkes failed. Oh, and world peace, but first things first.

contributed on 31/12/23.

TT No.89: Jon T Green - Tuesday 26th December 2023; **MALTBY MAIN** v Rossington Main; Northern Counties East League - Premier Division; Venue: Muglet Lane; Result: 1-4; Admission: £6; Programme: £2.50; Attendance: 101

Muglet Lane (and isn't that just a fantastic name?) is home to not just Maltby Main but also Maltby Miners Welfare Junior FC - the latter play on an adjacent pitch without any spectator facilities. Outside the Junior club there is a touching memorial to the 27 miners who lost their lives in an explosion at the pit in 1923.

Access to Main's ground is through the car park on Outgang Lane and once inside the turnstiles you are faced with the considerable bulk of a two-storey brick building. Built at an angle to the pitch, it's a slightly strange arrangement with a very competitively priced outlet for refreshments on ground level and a committee room upstairs. What's missing though is a bar area; whether this is a licensing issue, or perhaps there is one planned for the future, I don't know but not only does this deprive the club of much needed revenue it also robs spectators of a communal area to socialise both pre- and post-match. Outside there is a well-stocked club shop selling badges, hats and pennants. Covered accommodation is found along the far touchline and consists of two separate stands; the first is a shallow covered terrace; red and black breeze blocks at the rear beneath a metal roof and, towards the halfway line, a bench seated brick stand, again painted in the club colours. Two very large dugouts are also located on this side of the pitch which do somewhat impinge on the sightlines so pick your viewing point carefully!! The remainder of the ground is undeveloped, albeit with hard standing on two sides, with only the "top" end behind the goal being out of bounds for spectators.

This match is a head-line writers dream and, as it's Boxing Day, let's have a man in a tuxedo with a distinctly American accent introduce the action "And now Ladies and Gentlemen it's time for the *Main* event - a contest between two Northern Counties East Premier Division teams. "First, the challengers in the blue corner

fighting out of Doncaster, South Yorkshire with a current season record of 10 wins, 3 draws and 7 losses, it's time to welcome Rossington Main. And now your home-town favourites: in the red corner out of Rotherham, South Yorkshire with a current season record of 4 wins, 2 draws and 15 losses, it's your very own Maaaaaaltby Main".

If the match had been boxing, and not football, then it's likely the referee would have pulled the combatants together and asked them to start throwing punches as, during the first 45 minutes, so little of note occurred that I began studying what the people around me had in the way of left-over food from Christmas Day. Turkey sandwiches were a clear favourite, but the outright winner was a lady who brought along some Christmas Cake - not for her a small slice, or even what might be termed a "slab", but a full quarter of cake complete with thick icing and marzipan. It spent the first half suggestively looking at me and then by the end of the break it had disappeared completely - a mystery I was never able to fully solve...

Play resumed with Rossington having introduced Harry Sheppeard as a striking replacement for defender Liam Nelthorpe. It was a move which was to change the course of the match. With 61 minutes played Rossington won a corner on the left, Brad Grayson delivered the ball into the box where captain Greg Young met it first time to give home 'keeper Harry Garmen no chance. Grayson then added a second as he scored with a fine right footed effort having some good close control on the edge of the area. Maltby were reeling now and a third goal within a nine-minute spell ended any chance of a comeback. Centre-forward Manasse Kianga chased a long ball into the corner, fed left back Cody Prior, who sent a looping cross into the danger area, where Sheppeard cushioned his header past the diving Garmen. Three became four as the hard-working Kianga showed his strength and determination in holding off some close defensive attention before smashing his shot low into the net. With added time being played Harry Spooner did at last give the home fans something to cheer as his beat Jim Pollard at his near post with a well struck right footer. Despite the game being won the 'keeper showed the normal level of dissatisfaction having lost his clean sheet. At the end of the match the teams left the field to the strains of "The Great Escape" - perhaps not the most original but certainly the most appropriate for a Maltby side who have a real relegation fight on their hands.

contributed on 27/12/23.

TT No.88: Brian Buck - Saturday 23rd December 2023; **Kempston Rovers** v Biggleswade; Pitching In Southern League Division 1 Central; Result: 1-3; Attendance: 128.

I was slightly skeptical about coming here today as this season is not going well for the hosts. Having been promoted into this league at the start of the 2016/17 season, this year they currently find themselves bottom of the league. They are not cast adrift from the others, but it's not where you want to be at the start of Christmas. Earlier in the season they also lost their chairman, Andy Kirby, who sadly passed away and to me he was the heart of this club. He was always here, even for non-Rovers games. It's good that the club has planted a tree in his honour

and of course, bearing in mind the club's nickname, it's a walnut tree! So, with all this I expected there to be an air of doom and gloom about the place today, but I was pleasantly surprised as others within the club have stepped up to the plate, with all of them going about their business with enthusiasm.

I like coming here. All the club facilities are along one side of the pitch, most of it under cover. Here you will find the seats, the covered terracing and the uncovered standing which is in effect the veranda to the bar. The rest of the ground is flat standing. The complex also includes a caged 3G pitch along with two smaller size pitches, with the 5-a-side pitch being recently added. Coincidentally, visitors Biggleswade only started to exist as an adult club the very season Kempston Rovers joined this league. They have progressed quickly since then.

This year they are having a mixed season but have improved recently. It was they who took the lead on 27 minutes with an overhead kick from about ten yards. Although it looked inevitable that they would score first, neither side had created much before now. But Rovers equalised three minutes later after the ball was scrambled in at the near post following a corner almost on the line. Two or three players had a go at it and although it could have been an own goal, it was eventually given to the corner taker. The goal gave Rovers confidence. At half time we had the tennis ball challenge, where numbered tennis balls were thrown by members of the crowd at the football in the middle of the pitch, the nearest one winning. This became difficult to judge after a dog ran on the pitch and chased them around!

The second half saw both sides try to get a foothold on the game. But Rovers were strugglingly to get players forward to support the attack when in possession. Meanwhile Biggleswade brought on one of their star players, Alex Marsh and he was the inspiration in all that they did from here on in. On 61 minutes they regained the lead via a near post header from a free kick. Then after a third goal went in on 82 minutes, this time from the unmarked scorer, following another cross from the right, there was no way back for Rovers who accepted their lot graciously.

contributed on 27/12/23.

TT No.87: Craig Dabbs - Saturday 23rd December 2023; **Elite** v Dinnington Town; Central Midlands Alliance Premier Division North; Venue: Dorothy Hyman Sports Centre; Result: 0-5; Admission: £5; Programme: 16pp, Free; Attendance: 54

Normally when I see a club with a name like this I usually say why on earth don't they engage with the local community and in turn try to attract the locals through the gate, a change to Cudworth then, well not for now at least.

The club is quite new. Formed in 2020 and originally linked with Doncaster Rovers in a youth academy role, they broke away to become Doncaster Elite and set up a senior side moving away from Doncaster and in turn dropping Doncaster from the name. Now in the large village of Cudworth near Barnsley they still don't know what the future holds; sure they are very happy in their new home but they aren't quite ready to fully commit and don't want to incorporate Cudworth into the name yet in case they up sticks and the village is left without a team.

The Sports Centre and Stadium was built in 1972 and named after the athlete Dorothy Hyman who came from the village. Dorothy had many accolades during her career and won the BBC Sports Personality of the Year award in 1963.

The Stadium itself is an eight-lane track with a pitch inside it. A large, seated stand runs for much of its length on the Sports Centre side offering a good, elevated view of proceedings and the rolling countryside beyond towards Grimethorpe. On the face of it, little would need to be done for the next level aside from the lights. They do not cover the far side at all, only along the bends and the stand side. Next to it is a 4G cage with spectator access and with a small stand it would be ok for the next level in much the same way Stanway Pegasus is, so that may be a solution. Indeed, another is the development of the other two pitches on site and down the bank on the far side, more 4G cage work is in the pipeline down there.

Both Elite and Dinnington are having solid seasons with the hosts in fourth and Dinnington third. However, there was a much bigger gulf between the two sides today with Dinnington controlling the game throughout, restricting Elite to a limited number of opportunities.

Finally, back to the club. If you have a chance go, it's a nice venue and the club have a small clubhouse on site, do very good food and have a small range of merchandise for sale. Yet another forward-thinking club at this level in much the same way Windsor & Eton are (covered in my last report).

contributed (via Brian Buck) on 24/12/23.

TT No.86: Jon T Green - Saturday 16th December 2023; **MARLOW** v South Park; Isthmian Football League - South Central Division; Venue: Alfred Davis Memorial Ground; Result: 2-2; Admission: £10; Programme: Online only; Attendance: 177

“Marlow is really a rugby town” says the chap behind the clubhouse bar, “it’s very posh down towards the river so we have to pull our support from the housing areas further out. On a good day, with some away fans, we might get 250 through the gate but there won’t be that many here today”. Having just paid £4 for a small bottle of coke in a nearby pub (I won’t name it, but it was The Oarsman should you wish to avoid it), I concurred that although the town and riverfront is extremely nice it most certainly does have delusions of grandeur. Celebrity chef Tom Kerridge owns a couple of pubs/restaurants here and one of them even has a Michelin star - a single star doesn’t seem all that good to me but I am assured by those who know that “they won’t do a big fry-up and it’s way out of your league Mr Green”.

If there was a “grand tour” of English non-league venues, then Marlow would definitely feature as the Alfred Davis Memorial Ground is an absolute beauty - take a look at Gary Spooner’s excellent pictures on the *FGIF* photos page following his visit here in August. The entrance is rather unassuming being via a car wash facility

(I parked here but rather disappointingly my vehicle was still filthy when I returned) but once through the turnstiles you get the first view of the magnificent main stand. Situated at the top of a few steps of terracing it's extraordinarily steep due to its rather shallow design. The white fretwork and glass screen ends are in superb condition and with the club's name boldly emblazoned across the fascia (note the superfluous full stop between Marlow and F.C.) it's an absolute gem. The ground is terraced on all four sides with a deep covered "open jaw" enclosure situated along the far touchline. More cover is provided behind the right-hand goal where there is also a set of, seemingly, now unused turnstiles. Grass banks fill in three of the corners but, because us fans are not really responsible adults, the FA deem them to be out of bounds - hmmm.

It's been a good season so far for Marlow who sit in fourth place with games in hand on those above them. The expectation is that a play-off place is readily within their grasp. South Park arrive from Reigate in mid table but any thoughts that this is going to be a comfortable home win are soon swept away as the visitors jump into an early two goal lead. Midfielder Sam King cleverly feeds Rhys Harper whose cross-shot beats home 'keeper Aaron Watkins before Marco Haigh is clumsily fouled by Sebastian D'Aversa as the centre forward is moving away from goal. King confidently converts the spot kick. Marlow are labouring under a low grey sky which is suffocating the light out of the day. Equally oppressive are Park's two centre halves Ethan Kaiser and Daniel Pappoe whose physical presence is dominating the home attack. The only bright spark is coming from winger Kai Hamilton-Olise with some speedy forays down the right touchline. With half time looming Rhys Harper shows he has some pace too, certainly too much for Kaiser who pushes him to the ground. Referee Ms Joanne Horwood points to the spot for the second time and Marlow have a lifeline. Dawid Rogalski steps up to reduce the deficit with a well struck penalty.

The second half sees South Park "manage" the game which I believe is the modern technical term for going down under every challenge and generally wasting as much time as possible. It's not pretty and the home fans and players alike are getting very frustrated. David Tarpey fires in a low free kick which Park's captain and 'keeper Danny Bracken scrambles away at the foot of a post. Bracken hasn't been setting the best of examples in spending most of the game loudly questioning every decision. The linesman in front of me eventually yells "I've had enough of listening to you" and he isn't the only one. With ten added minutes being played Marlow force an equaliser; Khalid Simmo picks up the ball on the edge of the area and thunders a drive in off the underside of the bar. For once Bracken has nothing to say. A draw is perhaps an unsatisfactory result for both sides with Marlow seeing it as points dropped and South Park a victim of their own rather dubious tactics - with a more positive approach all three points looked theirs for the taking.

Unlike a number of other clubs who, sadly, seem to view an old stand as an inconvenience that needs to be replaced with a shiny pre-fab, Marlow have embraced their heritage and are rightly proud of what they have. To paraphrase Samuel Johnson "when a man is tired of Marlow, he is tired of groundhopping".

contributed on 19/12/23.

TT No.85: Craig Dabbs - Saturday 16th December 2023; **Windsor & Eton** v Shrivenham; The Charles Twelftree Trophy Quarter Final; Venue: Stag Meadow; Result: 5-1; Admission: Free; Programme: 32pp, £2; Attendance: 237

Stag Meadow hasn't changed much at all since my last visit more than twenty years ago. It's still a wonderful place to watch football with ample terracing all around, a decent sized terrace on the Windsor Great Park side of the ground and the wonderful main stand that has been in situ since 1948 in a ground that is now entering its 112th year.

Windsor & Eton FC is the third of the Windsor's to play here and it's fair to say in recent years there's been a bit of bother in this corner of the Great Park.

Windsor & Eton version 1 were formed in 1892 and were dissolved in 2011 after mounting debts caused them to resign from the Southern League. As is the norm, a new club was quickly set up called Windsor FC and they joined the Combined Counties League in 2011. They are still going but no longer playing at Stag Meadow which is owned by the Crown Estates. The ground was built on the orders of the Monarchy back in 1911 to provide football in the Great Park. The Crown Estates terminated the rolling month by month lease at the end of last season, and to fill the void a new Windsor & Eton were formed out of the youth team and Mark Cooper who was the former manager.

Windsor (the phoenix club) are still going but playing out of Beaconsfield Town to small crowds. I feel it's very much 'what's the point' as the new club are riding high in the Thames Valley Premier League and commanding very good crowds, this was in fact one of the smaller ones.

The match unsurprisingly went the way I thought it would. Shrivenham who are now in the Wiltshire League started well and really took the game to Windsor. They scored and then started to run out of steam getting well beat in most parts by the end of the first half. This theme continued throughout the second half as Windsor went through the gears, put the tie to bed and eased off a little. Without a doubt a Step 6 club in the making. You might think a merger with Windsor would be a possibility but in truth there is no need to at all. They have the lease and with it the momentum.

contributed (via Brian Buck) on 17/12/23.

TT No.84: Keith Aslan - Saturday 16th December 2023; **MAYFIELD** v Pinxton; Abacus Lighting Central Midlands Alliance Black Dragon Premier Division South; Kick Off: 14.01; Result: 0-4; Admission: Free; Programme: £2; Attendance: 38 (18 home, 14 away & 6 neutral)

Mayfield play in the Derbyshire town of Ashbourne, a lovely place that oozes money out of every pore. It has the best display of Christmas lights I've ever seen and wandering around the town after the game was a joy. It's an hourly bus from Derby, but being operated by my favourite bus company, 'Trent Barton', they don't have anything so prosaic as bus numbers. It's the 'Swift' you want which drops you

12 minutes from the ground at what Ashbourne calls a bus station but what I call a couple of bus stops hidden away in a side street.

I missed all the pre match excitement when the Pinxton manager wanted the game called off because there was a bit of mud near a corner flag. 'Bit' is the important word in that sentence. As soon as the referee arrived the manager was on his case claiming it was dangerous. It wasn't. The referee and linesmen took a cursory glance and pronounced game on. If this was the criteria for calling games off football would never get played. Why do football managers not want to play football, and I'm thinking Jurgen Klopp here. Pinxton hadn't had a game for weeks, so on a perfect day, why on earth would you not want to play? They had a full side, including two substitutes, and the mentality of their manager is beyond my understanding.

The ground is pleasantly situated in a park with a river and lake plus lots of ducks to play with. Roped on one side, a brick-built stand on the other, with the teams using it as a dugout, but plenty of room for spectators to sit in the middle. On a raised bank behind the goal is the clubhouse with food and drink, but a tad on the expensive side. Benches outside from where you can watch the game, albeit distantly.

Both teams are recent arrivals on the football scene, Pinxton in 1994, Mayfield in 2001, and while the former are well established and top of the league, it's Mayfield's first season at this level and they are struggling. But the 0-4 score was very harsh on them.

Ashbourne's most famous football match isn't this one, but the annual Shrove Tuesday game which dates back to the 12th century (that's even before the Premier League was invented). It lasts two days, 8 hours a day, and is a referee's dream, no need to add any spurious stoppage time onto this one. It's traditionally played between two Derby villages, from where the word local derby comes from. It involves an unlimited number of players creating mayhem through the town. This year the Up'ards won 1-0, which suggests there wasn't a lot of goalmouth action over the two days. There are very few rules, but an important one is you're not allowed to kill anyone, so best for Joey Barton to give it a miss.

contributed on 16/212/23.

TT No.83: Steve Hardy - Saturday 16th December 2023; **Stourport Swifts U21's** v Fairfield Villa; Smedley Crooke Memorial Cup; Result: 2-2 (1-4 on pens); Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 23 H/C (officially 36).

The Smedley Crooke Memorial Charity Cup has been going since 1919 (when Rubery St Chads won it), and is named after Sir Smedley Crooke, a tory MP, who donated the cup in the first place.

Today's first round tie saw Stourport Swifts U21's, from the U21 division of the Midland League, entertain Fairfield Villa, who are in Division 2 of the same league.

My two readers will probably be choking on their spam sarnies about now. "Why are you going to such a rubbish venue", I hear them saying. Well, as I have said many times before, IMHO if you want to complete a league, then you should go to EVERY ground in it, Stourport Swifts U21s play all their games here at King Charles 1st School in Kidderminster, so they had to be 'ticked' didn't they?

As for the game, it was a cracker. Swifts took the lead on 8 minutes and despite a great deal of huffing and puffing, it stayed that way until half time. After the break Villa quickly equalised on 55 minutes, only for the homesters to take the lead again on 65 minutes. Villa, who were much the better team in my opinion, equalised 2 minutes later and looked like winning it. Despite plenty of chances for both sides though, neither side could manage a winner, so off to penalties we went. Villa dominated the pens, winning 4-1 and deservedly move on to round 2.

A bright sunny day made for a nice day out. The only drawback from my point of view (apart from the dreadful delays on the M6, again) was the fact that spectators were not allowed inside the cage. I only took a handful of pictures as a result because there are only so many pictures of a metal fence that one can take, aren't there?

contributed on 16/12/23.

TT No.82: Brian Buck - Sat 9th December 2023; **Biggleswade United** v Whitchurch Alport; Isuzu FA Vase 3rd Round; Result: 2-2 (WA won 4-3 on penalties); Attendance 103.

As Biggleswade United is one of the few grounds local to me which I can get there and back to by public transport, I decided to give it a go today. Underlyingly though I was desperate for a pint, having not participated for a few months, due to my need to drive to games and partly because I cannot stand up for too long when I get to them.

So it was that my travels to and from this match brought back memories of how things used to be for me not so long ago. So, it was then that on this very windy day my bus arrived early at Biggleswade bus station and from there it was about a 15 minutes' walk, mainly along a pleasant alleyway, before I complete the last part down a short lane, arriving at the ground in good time to have an unhurried pint, which was bliss!

The visitors brought plenty of fans with them and their presence enhanced the day. These days the visitors grace the Midland League, but when I visited them in 2015, they were in the North West Counties League.

Hosts United's ground is a homely venue. The old main stand is situated on the north side of it and is between the dugouts. The not so new these days, main stand, is opposite and although it does not offer much of an elevated view there is enough height to it to generate a decent view of proceedings. The other thing which makes a visit to this ground worthwhile is that you are made to feel most welcome when you come, more so if you are a 'regular', which I am. The only downer for me was the choice of the music played over the tannoy and the

loudness of it. In this respect they are comparable with what is offered at Newmarket Town, if you go there.

As for the game, the early stages were cagey. But on 30 minutes and with the strong wind at their backs, United took the lead from a header from a cross following a partially cleared corner. But Alport were level eight minutes later, following a header from an angled cross. After this the game started to overheat and after a yellow card each, Alport had a player sent off on 45 minutes following a wild tackle and also a player sin binned for arguing about it. But in the second half United couldn't make this advantage pay and with the wind now at their backs, ten men Alport took the lead on 72 minutes when their scorer neatly finished off a ball played up to him. Victory for them now seemed certain, but on 86 minutes United were offered a lifeline when following a foul in the box, they equalised from the spot. So on to penalties and here United threw it away. They led 3-2 after four shots each, but missed their next two, whilst Alport scored both of theirs. Overall, they probably deserved their win. Afterwards I had another leisurely pint before catching the bus home, with the driver kindly stopping right outside my house for me!

contributed on 12/12/23.

TT No.81: Steve Hardy - Saturday 9th December 2023; **Oldbury United v Kidderminster Harriers Reserves**; West Midlands Regional League - Division Two; Result: 1-2; Admission and Programme: Free; Attendance 13 H/C.

Older readers may remember a club called Oldbury United who folded in 2009. They had played at Southern league level for many years, before a ground dispute caused them to give up the ghost altogether. The team I saw yesterday were formed in 2017 and are now back in the West Midlands Regional League at Step 8. Most of the 13 spectators in attendance were followers of the old club and are obviously delighted to have 'their' club back playing football again.

The venue for yesterday's match was a 3G pitch in a cage at the City of Wolverhampton College campus in Bilston. Sadly, for the Oldbury fans, there was no standing in the cage for them, so they all had to stand outside the wire and squint through the gaps.

The match itself produced a huge shock result. Top of the table Oldbury were well beaten by 2nd from bottom Kiddy Stiffs in an encounter in which they just couldn't get their rhythm going. The first half finished goalless after Oldbury had a 27th minute penalty well saved by the Kiddy keeper. The second half saw Kiddy get some reward for their attacking display with goals from captain Charlie Bache and Oscar Harwood, with a single reply from Oldbury not being enough by a long chalk.

Overall, I thought Kiddy thoroughly deserved their win yesterday, and with Oldbury having played a good, few games more than the chasing pack, their spell at the top may not last much longer. Compare the crowd of 13 with the huge crowd of over 1000 I saw at the last match I watched at the old Oldbury United ground. Big local derby v Dudley Town on January 2nd in 1984, which ended 1-1.

contributed on 10/12/23.

TT No.80: Keith Aslan - Saturday 9th December 2023; **FAVERSHAM TOWN** v Vickers Crayford & Dartford Athletic; South East Counties Premier Division (nee Kent League); Kick Off: 14.58! Result: 2-0; Admission: £6 for the aged; Programme: £2; Attendance: 244 (228 home, 15 away & 1 neutral).

Been trying to do Hucknall ever since it opened, but home matches and running trains never seemed to coincide. Until today. With a home game and East Midlands railway actually offering a service it was all systems go. But life has a habit of kicking me in the crotch and the rain intervened. Started out and phoned the ground as I approached Ashford when I was told there would be an 11 o'clock pitch inspection. Should I risk it? Nah, and I went back to Thanet. Just as well; Hucknall was off.

Returning to the sacred isle I visited a Margate season ticket holder currently out of action having fallen over and broken his leg in two places. I spend most of my life falling over, but touch wood, so far, no breakages. He was even less mobile than Harry Maguire, and my chum was obviously a bit down at not being able to get to football, but my visit cheered him up. At least that's what I told myself. On leaving I opted for a ride along the coast to reacquaint myself with the Aquatherm Stadium, or Salters Lane to traditionalists, to see table toppers Faversham.

Leave Faversham station by the side entrance and it's a ten-minute walk to the ground. Looking at the place now you'd never believe the club's troubled history. In 2003 they had no team, no manager, and to all intents and purposes, no ground, with vandals having virtually destroyed it. They fought back and now boast a smart stadium with a seated stand running the length of the touchline, with the far side that used to contain the husk of the old stand, now housing a brand-new changing block. The clubhouse offers shelter from the elements and a shack sells a wide variety of comestibles. A wonderful experience for anyone who knew the club's travails of a couple of decades back.

Faversham are top of the league, a full twenty-eight points above their lowly opponents, and it showed on the pitch. Although VCD gave it a good go they never looked like they were going to get anything from this match. The home side opened the scoring on 12 minutes with a back header that looped over the keeper and would have been very impressive had it not been an own goal. The match kicked off two minutes early, unheard of around this way, but still didn't finish until five to five.

Train watch: The half hour journey back home was 18 minutes late. Either leafs on the line if you believe the announcements at Faversham, or crew delayed on an inbound service if you believe the guard. Really the delay was down to privatization.

contributed on 09/12/23.

TT No.79: Craig Dabbs - Saturday 2nd December 2023; **Stopsley United** v Lea Sports Pirton Shillington Gravenhurst; Bedfordshire County League Division Two

(South); Venue: Stockwood Park Academy; Result: 4-3; Admission: Free; Programme: Did not issue; Attendance: 9.

You win some and you lose some. I was sat in a car park this morning talking to the chairman of Beccles Caxton about the prospect of their game going ahead - it was - 2 outside with the accompaniment of freezing fog. Collectively we agreed the sensible option wasn't to travel as he wasn't confident, and it was over two hours' drive away. As it happened it went ahead.

With games off all over the place (and very scattergun at that), with no logic as to which ones survived and those that didn't, I noticed that Stopsley United had moved their game from the Athletics track to Stockwood Park Academy, around the corner. The decision was made, no risk taking, keep it simple, just head for Luton.

A 3G cage alongside a school next to the M1 was never going to be a classic. It really was any port in a storm, a new tick and that's all you can take from it. Thankfully there were seven goals in what was an entertaining game which made it more palatable. By the end though those last ten minutes were tough going as my feet and hands were so very cold. I was just glad to get the heater on in the car and get home.

contributed (via Brian Buck) on 03/12/23.

TT No.78: Keith Aslan - Saturday 2nd December 2023; **FELTHAM** v Stonewall; Middlesex County Premier Division; Kick Off: 13.46; Result: 1-2; Admission: Free; Programme: Free; Hot drinks: Free; Attendance: 22 (17 home, 1 away & 4 neutral)

While everywhere north of Hemel Hempstead was covered in snow and ice, down here in the South it was just cold, and apart from running the risk of frostbite, there was plenty of football to enjoy. Finding a new ground with a programme wasn't so easy, but Feltham came up with the goods. Incidentally does anybody know the difference between a pitch inspection and a precautionary pitch inspection?

Whilst the return journey was stress free and I was home in plenty of time for Strictly Come Dancing (a musically themed edition tonight), getting there wasn't as easy as it should have been. Lots of cancellations due to those lovely train drivers being on an overtime ban, and who can blame them, why would you want to work overtime on twelve hundred quid for a four-day week. But the train companies have got things sussed now and the cancellations were all advertised in advance, so no problems there. 22 minutes late into St. Pancras, delay at Ramsgate because it was full. 1st train to Feltham gone. Got thrown off the Victoria Line at Victoria, a train had died on the way to Brixton, blocking the line. 2nd train to Feltham gone. Needed the third one to run on time. It did.

The Springwest Acadmy is a 14-minute stroll from Feltham station. Plastic pitch adjacent to another plastic pitch which had a lower division Middlesex League match taking place, and a couple of grass ones nearby. A 12-page colour programme accompanied the match for which any form of payment was declined.

Pre. Covid the Middlesex County League was a treasure trove of programme issuers, now just Feltham, and I believe Larkspur Rovers, are the only clubs still producing the paper.

Ex-Isthmian club, Feltham have had a tumultuous few years; they lost their ground in 2004 due to vandalism, shared at Egham, Hampton & Richmond and Bedfont, and changed their name to Bedfont and Feltham. But it was always their dream to return to the leafy suburb of Feltham and two years ago they broke away and returned to their spiritual home. Playing wise it's a bit of a struggle, they're bottom of the league, but off the field they are second to none. Free paper, they insisted I get stuck into the teas and coffees before the match and at half time which were also gratis. A really lovely bunch of people.

Second Saturday in succession the start was delayed due to the referee having the wrong kick off time. Today's official was having his own 'dress down day', tracksuit bottoms, a black top that was certainly not FA issue, and a black bobble hat. What could be more fitting for rainbow laces week than Stonewall being the opposition. They turned up in a kit that looked like it had been designed by Jackson Pollock. Shouldn't think they would ever have a colour clash problem. A good match, played in excellent spirit up to the last ten minutes when it all got a bit naughty and Feltham had a player sent off. They deserved a point, but you don't always get what you deserve. Much kudos to Feltham who stayed out on the pitch at half time freezing their nuts off while Stonewall cowered in the changing rooms.

Feltham are a great club, and I wish them the success they deserve over the coming seasons.

contributed on 03/12/23.

TT No.77: Jon T Green - Saturday 25th November 2023; **LITTLEHAMPTON TOWN** v Sevenoaks Town; Isthmian Football League - South East Division; Venue: The Sportsfield; Result: 1-5; Admission: £10; Programme: £2; Attendance: 190

I was just sitting down to a rather wonderful Saturday morning fry-up when the news came through that the club had received funding for their new main stand. The press release went on to say that initial work would begin in March 2024 with final installation a few months later. No doubt this is progress but, to my mind at least, replacing a 100-year-old structure with a pre-fab is not entirely the way forward. I mulled over whether or not I was a dinosaur whilst finishing off my eggs and bacon, came to the conclusion that I was and then set off for the short walk back to the ground.

The Sportsfield is exactly what it says on the tin - the large site, somewhat incongruously set just off a roundabout, is home to cricket, tennis and croquet; the latter of which was being played (who knew it was a winter sport?) as I strolled around the ground. Since their appearance in the 2022 FA Vase Final, Town have been busily upgrading the ground to meet Isthmian League requirements. Two long covered terraces flank the current main stand which, with its bold lettering against a bright yellow background, looks particularly splendid in the bright sunshine. The roof and backboards are in need of repair but with the brick ends and wooden

floorboards still in decent condition the rush to replace it still seems a touch hasty. Both ends are flat standing, as is the far touchline, but here tough plastic sheeting has been put down - this area forms a part of the cricket outfield and so permanent hard standing is not an option. The floodlights are also oddly spaced with three in the regular corner positions but the fourth stands almost adjacent to the cricket pavilion; once again it's had to be moved because of the cricket outfield. A large clubhouse serves all of the Sportsfield's activities but there are additional food and drink facilities at pitch level if you don't fancy the climb up the metal stairs.

On paper this didn't look the most even of contests with the hosts failing to average a point a game and pitted against a Sevenoaks side sitting in the last of the play-off spots. This would normally be the time that I tell you that form went out of the window but today the league table didn't lie. With the early morning frost melted away the pitch provided a perfect playing surface, and it only took six minutes for the visitors to open their account. A long pass found winger Fumnaya Shomotun, who cut inside his full-back, before unleashing a shot beyond Lewis Boughton. Rather surprisingly the lead lasted a mere 120 seconds as left back Matt Aistle found himself in an advanced position and he calmly drew the 'keeper before finishing with a well-placed right foot shot. With barely fifteen minutes gone Sevenoaks were back in front; Shomotun this time the provider with Dominic Morgan-Griffiths providing the finish via a bouncing half-volley. The visitors bench seem to have a new buzz word as "sustain" is shouted at every opportunity - I take it to mean "keep the ball, boys" but it may equally be some sort of Kentish recycling scheme. Whatever it is, their team are calm, confident and playing some excellent football so it's no surprise when Dan Bennett rounds off a great team move in added time.

Any thoughts of a comeback are quickly expelled after the restart; Josh Short goes close for the home side but Sevenoaks show how it should be done as Matt Attenborough-Warren moves onto a precision through ball before setting up centre forward Rowan Liburd for a calm right footed strike. Liburd then adds his second and the visitors fifth as he powers in a back post header with twenty minutes left to play. In truth Littlehampton don't play badly but simply come up against a side brimming with confidence. Undoubtedly they will play worse and win but right now it is a sobering defeat. Leaving the main stand I take one last look back and dinosaur or not I consider this to be something of a Big Yellow Taxi moment - as Joni Mitchell famously sang "you don't know what you've got till it's gone".

contributed on 28/11/23.

TT No.76: Craig Dabbs - Saturday 25th November 2023; **Melbourne Dynamo** v Pinxton; Central Midlands Alliance Premier Division South; Venue: Melbourne Sports Park; Result: 1-0; Admission: Free; Programme: 20pp, £2; Attendance: 75.

When you mention Melbourne, most will think of the city in Australia. I'm not most, I will think of a small market town in Derbyshire. You may think of Melbourne City, but my thoughts are that of step seven side Melbourne Dynamo.

Dynamo have been going since 1950 and the Dynamo bit does have its routes in the Soviet Union with the club having played the touring FC Dynamo Moscow in a friendly and adopting part of the name.

Melbourne Sports Park is run by the local council and provides a home for not only Dynamo but the Rugby club, Cricket club and also it caters for Netball and Tennis as well as having a small ATP, it's been open since 2016. The site overlooks the small town, the nearby Donington Park circuit and East Midlands Airport - it's very much one for a clear day and this was just that although the trade-off was the cold. The ground is just a railed off pitch at present, but things will start to happen soon though as the club are ambitious and do want to progress to the next level when the opportunity allows.

Pinxton is a club ready for that next level and I'm a little surprised they haven't moved up as of yet. They are currently top of the table and very much in the box seat. Melbourne, sat in fifth, were in no mood to roll over and have their tummies tickled. Dynamo worked hard, they got the early goal, and they managed the game to its conclusion. It wasn't pretty nor a classic, but about a club putting a shift in to gain three points and frustrate the high-flying visitors.

contributed (via Brian Buck) on 26/11/23.

TT No.75: Keith Aslan - Sunday 26th November 2023; **CHATHAM** v AFC Wimbledon; Women's FA Cup; Kick Off: 13.30 (30 minutes late); Result: 5-4; Admission: £3 for old people; Programme: £2.50; Attendance: 131 (70 home, 61 away & 0 neutral)

45 years since I was last here, I know that because more through luck than judgement, I found the programme from my original visit. Can't remember much about the ground, but it certainly didn't look like this. Large, seated stand down one side, a smaller one opposite, but the piece de resistance is behind the goal with a brand-new covered bank of terracing, raised from ground level. You won't see many new builds like this at any level, and the view from it is quite stunning. Hot and cold drinks, clubhouse, food, and everything else you would expect was all present and correct. A bus every 20 minutes from the station to the ground, but if you attempt to walk up the mountainside to the ground your knees are better than mine.

I have to confess I'm a bit of a Wimbledon women's fan. This is because when the women's national league started up, they were the only London team in it. Clubs like Arsenal, Chelsea and Tottenham are all Johnny come latelies, and hard to believe now, but Wimbledon used to be one of the top women's teams in the country. And as a point of record, unlike the men's version, Wimbledon and AFC Wimbledon women are the same team, they merely changed their name in the close season. Same players, same officials, same ground.

A 39 minute late kick off yesterday, only half an hour today, but you can forgive the woman in black for this one as the delay this afternoon was due to her somehow managing to get locked in the lavatory. How we all laughed. That's what I call taking the piss! Sorry, it's the best I can come up with. Three burly blokes with high visibility overalls appeared from nowhere and by 12 minutes past one

they had completed a successful rescue mission and returned from whence they came full of stories to tell their mates down the pub. So why didn't the game kick off until half past one I hear you ask. Was the referee so traumatised by her incarceration she needed to lie down for a bit? Nope. Because of the few minutes late start, the players had to come out again and run round cones for a bit more, something they'd already been doing for 45 minutes. When they finally finished, they all had to go off the field to line up in the tunnel so as they could come back on together. After the ludicrous 'Respect' handshakes, hard to believe, but Wimbledon actually had another go at running round some cones. Whoever tells them to keep on doing this is a total lunatic.

Anybody who reckons they don't like women's football should have been here and they would have changed their opinion. Quite simply this was by far and away the best match I've seen all season. Goalmouth action, goals, and almost a fabulous fightback. The 'Dons' went one up early in the first half, but with 15 minutes to go they were 4-1 down. An all-out assault on the Chatham goal bought three goals with the equalizer coming in the 90th minute. But in the spurious minutes added on Chatham got a penalty, and Wimbledon's cup dreams were over for another year.

I realise fewer people buy programmes these days, but how else would you know that Lottie Sharps favourite food is Pasta Bolognese and her favourite Pizza topping is ham and cheese. It's details like this that make football the great game that it is.

contributed on 26/11/23.

TT No.74: Keith Aslan - Saturday 25th November 2023; **BISTERNE UNITED** v Cranborne; Dorset Senior League; Kick Off: 14.39 (only 39 minutes late); Result: 2-0; Admission: Free; Programme: Donation; Attendance: 28 (15 home, 7 away & 6 neutral)

What could be better than a train ride to Bournemouth. I'll never know as we all got thrown off the train for rail replacement bus action at the station formerly known as 'Southampton Airport'. When they built a car park here somebody had the bright idea of renaming it 'Southampton Parkway', which unsurprisingly confused people wanting to go to the airport. So, in a brilliant example of blue sky thinking, it was renamed again to "Southampton-Airport-Parkway" with the hyphens being a brilliant piece of rebranding. If you type the station into Rail Enquiries without them, it will tell you it doesn't exist. Today's Rail Replacement bus ride wasn't even a new tick for me as this part of the line is closed more often than it's open.

Bisterne play in the charming Bournemouth suburb of Ferndown. Half hourly bus service from outside the station takes you to within a 12-minute walk of the ground. Same bus if you want to go to Wimborne. Ferndown was buzzing today with a Christmas Market in the town centre (in November?) Took advantage of all the goodies on offer, mulled wine, mince pies, Christmas dins. But I refused to visit Santa Claus as he keeps missing me out on Christmas Eve. Decided this was the place to get all of my Christmas shopping done. Got change from a fiver, not having any friends really pays dividends this time of year.

Anybody with an advanced degree in Dorset geography will know Bisterne is a small village three miles to the south of Ringwood, and a long way from Ferndown. They had to vacate their village home this season as the cricket club wanted to carry out renovations to the ground. It's somewhat doubtful they will return but seem quite happy where they are and are talking about improving the facilities here. Even if the opportunity arises to return home, I got the impression they were unlikely to take it.

The ground is fully roped off, and the jewel in the crown is a small brick-built stand that should have a preservation order slapped on it. There is a leisure centre next door with a hot drinks machine that would have been very welcome had it been working. No floodlights, which came as a big surprise to the match referee.

Ten minutes to kick off and no referee. A phone call was met with the response that he thought it was a 3 o'clock kick off. He said he'd be there in 20 minutes, it turned out to be somewhat longer. He must have been disorientated looking for the floodlight pylons which he presumably sees at all the other grounds he officiates at this level. We eventually got going at 2.39 and luckily it was a very bright day and we just got the match in before total darkness descended. 2-0 to the homesters, could have been more but for a couple of Ronnie Rosenthal type misses and a fantastic double save from the Cranborne keeper, proving that morbid obesity is no hinderance to quality goalkeeping.

All in all, another joyful day out, but I could have done without the rail replacement bus.

contributed on 26/11/23.

TT No.73: Steve Hardy - Saturday 25th November 2023; **Markeaton** v Newhall United CMA; Central Midlands Alliance Division Two; Result: 2-3; Admission and Programme: Free; Attendance 9 H/C

A return to Derby for me today, and in particular to the Darley Fields on Old Chester Road. The fields are a vast expanse of grass which house at least 10 football pitches and possibly a rugby pitch way off in the distance.

Division Two of the CMA is mainly inhabited by Reserve sides, but there are a few first teams, looking to work their way up the league ladder, with Markeaton being one of them. Currently 3rd in the table, they must have fancied their chances today against the Stiffs of Newhall United, whose pre match talk was mainly 'don't panic'.

Markeaton started the game in full attacking mode and scored their opener after 21 minutes. Attack after attack followed until by complete surprise Newhall equalised on 27 minutes following a free kick from an acute angle which sailed past the Markeaton keeper and into the corner of the net.

The second half was completely dominated by Markeaton who just couldn't find the net. Amazingly, on 48 minutes, Newhall took the lead with a cracker of a shot from miles out, which left the Markeaton keeper clawing at thin air. Markeaton

launched attack after attack after that and were finally rewarded with an equaliser on 76 minutes. Pressing hard for a winner they left gaps at the back which Newhall took advantage of by winning a penalty on 82 minutes. Luckily for Marketon they put it wide of the goal so 2-2 with 8 minutes to go. It was anyone's game then and you had to applaud Newhall who got the winner in the 92nd minute following a spill from the Markeaton keeper.

Overall then, daylight robbery. That is the beauty of our game though and congratulations to Newhall for sticking to it.

contributed on 26/11/23.

TT No.72: Brian Buck - Saturday 18th November 2023; **Newmarket Town v Lakenheath**; Thurlow Nunn League Premier Division; Result: 5-0; Attendance: 320.

I've been lucky with my revisits on Saturdays this season. Most of them have been excellent games played out in a great atmosphere and this encounter was right up with the best of them.

Whenever I come here, I don't park in the club's car park, which is on what used to be their second pitch. Instead, I park along the road on the other side of the railway line which runs directly behind the main stand. There are two reasons for this, the first being that it is actually a slightly longer drive and secondly, it can get very muddy and as some people found to their cost today, you can get blocked in by other selfish motorists when there is a large crowd, as was the case here today.

On my arrival I headed off to the toilets where they have inserted mini goals in the stand-alone ones for the local piss artists to aim at. I assume that the women's ones have something similar in them! After taking my place inside the stand I was soon joined by a number of East Anglia's finest Groundhoppers, some of whom I hadn't seen for some time, and it was great to renew acquaintances with them. I also bumped into other friends I know well.

These days there is an air of excitement about the place, or at least there was after some of the worst pre-match music I have ever heard stopped. As we were reminded over the tannoy, the Jockeys are top of this league at present, although they won't be if their local rivals, Mildenhall town, win or draw one of their two games in hand over them. But the locals were up for this game and their presence helped to inspire their side to victory. Visitors Lakenheath are no mugs themselves and they tried very hard to get one over their near neighbours, but although they came close at times, they never had control of the game at any point.

Newmarket are a big side and after a slow start they gradually got on top. The match was effectively over by the 31st minute. Two minutes earlier a neat back heel from a shot going wide following a corner, saw them take the lead. Then for the second goal, despite being challenged by two defenders, the scorer was able to control a long bouncing ball before turning and firing home from 8 yards out as the said defenders melted away. A third goal arrived on the stroke of half time when the scorer finished from close range, latching on to a low cross which made

its way to him behind the visitors back line. On 57 minutes a direct free kick from about 30 yards out made it 4-0 and the last goal arrived on 84 minutes when a sub lifted the ball over the keeper from the edge of the area. Although Lakenheath never gave up, they were well beaten by a good side today. There seems to be something special about Saturday games at this time of the year which start in daylight and finish in the dark under floodlights. This was one of them.

contributed on 21/11/23.

TT No.71: Craig Dabbs -Saturday 18th November 2023; **Wakefield** v Retford United; Northern Counties East League Division One; Venue: Belle Vue; Result: 5-0; Admission: £6; Programme: 20pp, £2; Attendance: 579.

I missed out on visiting Belle Vue the first time around when Emley decamped there. That didn't work out and Wakefield looked like it would remain a city without a senior association side. Until now that is.

Wakefield AFC were set up in 2019 and played initially at Post Office Road home of Featherstone Rovers. I went there for a Sheffield & Hallamshire County Senior League game and was struck not only by the number of supporters they had but also by the amount of merchandising they were wearing.

This season there's more of them and the club shop has been doing a roaring trade. Clearly there was an appetite for the association code; sure it helps that Wakefield are top of the division and playing nice football but I do sense something here that this club could well kick on up the pyramid and in Belle Vue they certainly have the facilities.

Trinity has been playing (what was then) Northern Union Football here since 1875. It's currently undergoing major renovation with the new seated main stand almost finished. There's still enough of the old terracing about for now and evidence of an older structure if you know where to look - like the back of the stand at the one end.

Retford United are no mugs. They are having a decent season but today faced a solid Wakefield side who methodically dismantled them in much the same way as Chesterfield did to Barnet on my visit there last week. They were not hurried, absorbed any pressure and calmly went about their business. Quite simply they were a treat to watch.

contributed (via Brian Buck) on 19/11/23.

TT No.70: Keith Aslan - Saturday 18th November 2023; **MELBOURNE DYNAMO** v Cromford & Wirksworth Town; Central Midlands Premier Division South; Kick Off: 14.01; Result: 1-0; Admission: Free; Programme: £2; Attendance: 55 (46 home, 0 away & 9 neutral).

One way and another November hasn't been a particularly good month for me, and today's outing was almost finished before it started as trains were finally supposed to be running through Broadstairs this morning. But this wasn't happening due to

electricity supply failures down the line (you don't get them with Rail replacement buses). My train was cancelled, no guarantees the next one would run either, so I had to use the slow line to London, an enervating journey that had me looking up one-way flights to Switzerland long before I eventually reached Victoria. I could still just about make kick off if everything else ran on time. It did.

Arrived at the ground 15 minutes before the start with a fellow hopper having already bagged twenty pages of glossy goodness for me. On the subject of programmes, my travails at Madeley White Star seem to have captured the public's imagination, with only a little spat in the middle east keeping updates off News at Ten. Still not got it, but our chief negotiator is confident that it's all genuine and will turn up soon. Me, I'm not so sure, and if there's no sign of the programme next week, it will be time to ramp up the pressure. Charlotte doesn't understand the consequences of crossing groundhoppers. She will.

Melbourne share their facilities with the Rugby Club, the oval ball game going on adjacent to our match with a bigger crowd. Modern clubhouse, where I could have watched the lunchtime football if I'd got there earlier. As well as hot drinks, mega pork baps were on offer. Yum yum. Considering the recent rainfall the pitch was immaculate, and one to bear in mind in wet weather. Ground looked pristine, fully surrounded by a white rail. No cover though, which would have been handy in the second half when, surprise, surprise, the rains came.

Melbourne is a bus from Derby with the ground around a 12-minute walk from the bus stop. The buses don't fit going back, but in a sneaky move there is a bus after the match to East Midlands Airport (a new airport tick for me) from where a connecting bus will take you on to Loughborough and a much earlier arrival back in London. You can also go out via this route if you fancy to take in a bit of plane spotting on the way to the game.

Plenty to keep me occupied in this mid-table match, not all of it good, with an overabundance of friskiness in the second half which marred or enhanced the match depending on your viewpoint. I'm sure you must be fed up with me banging on about the length games drag on for, but that's not going to stop me. First half, everybody agreed, there was no stoppages of any description whatsoever. No injuries, no timewasting. Even if you mistakenly believe time should be added on for goals and substitutions, there weren't any of those either. So why did the referee add on the customary one minute. If there is now an unwritten rule that halves of football should go on for a minimum of 46 minutes, the sooner it is put in writing the better, so everybody knows what's going on.

For the first time in three weeks I had a programme to read on the train going home after a match. So, I know that Sam Simpsons favourite drink is Strawberry and Lime Cider. It sounds revolting.

contributed on 19/11/23.

TT No.69: Craig Dabbs - Saturday 11th November 2023; Chesterfield v Barnet; National League; Venue: Chesterfield Stadium; Result: 4-2; Admission: £20; Programme: 40pp, £3; Attendance: 9667

I've driven past Chesterfield Stadium several times now and although never particularly enthused to visit due to not liking modern new builds and preferring the more run down and crumbling stadia, I thought it needs doing and what better time than watching a first v second clash. So, I booked my ticket, which is reasonable for the National League, booked some parking, emailed the club about being let in early (which they did and were brilliant with me) and set off.

The club were originally formed in 1866 hence the title of the programme. They first entered the Football League in 1899 and remained there until 1909. Then in 1921 they became founder members of Division Three North which lasted until relegation in 2018. This saw ninety-seven years of continuous membership come to an end following two straight bottom of the table finishes.

During nearly all of that time the club spent playing home games at The Recreation Ground, better known as Saltergate. It was the club's home from 1871 until 2010 when they relocated to the northern end of the town in the Whittington Moor area. The new home cost £13 million to build, with a capacity of 10,504. Today was deemed a sell out because there was a set number of seats the club couldn't sell like those used in the East Stand used for segregation purposes.

The North and South stands at either end are almost identical with the North able to hold slightly more, 2,088 compared to the 2,064 in the South. The main stand is the West Stand holding 3,144 including the various banqueting and conference rooms. Finally, the East Stand where I was located, which is the known as family stand, holds 3208.

Back to my original point of not being enthused by the ground. Well, let's be honest (in my opinion) it isn't a classic. It's functional but there's way worse, Chester springs to mind. So actually, I quite enjoyed it and that's a bit of a statement from me as I don't normally enjoy the top level of non-league football, preferring smaller clubs and grounds instead.

The club were nothing short of brilliant to deal with, allowing me to do my thing without any question - dropping me a confirmation email on Thursday appointing the chief steward who escorted me whilst I went about taking pictures - he just let me get on with it. The pricing was reasonable as the club don't charge extortionate amounts for anything I saw bearing in mind the level, quite happy with it all.

The match was very good too. A good nil-nil at the break then saw Chesterfield impress by going 4-0 up against the team in second sending a clear signal to everyone in the league. This was slightly soured by the two quickfire consolation goals in injury time, a little complacency creeping in I suspect. There's no doubt that if they can keep up this momentum it will be a return to the promised land come May. But we all know what can happen in this wonderful game.

contributed (via Brian Buck) on 12/11/23.

TT No.68: Steve Hardy - Saturday 11th November 2023; **Sporting Coventry** v Coventry Colliery Reserves; Coventry Alliance Division Three; Result: 2-1; Admission and Programme: Free; Attendance: 13 H/C.

Sporting Coventry (and not Coventry Sporting who played Southern League football many years ago) are top of Division 3 of the Coventry Alliance having won all 8 of their games so far. Visitors Coventry Colliery Stiffs were lower mid table and I admit I was hoping for a bucket full of goals today.

Sporting play at North Leamington School in Blackdown and as they haven't had a home game called off all season, I wrongly assumed they were playing on the school's 3G pitch. In fact, they were on a grass pitch at the rear of the school which looked a bit 'heavy' to me and so it proved.

When we started, attention immediately fell on the very young-looking Referee who was, unfortunately, completely out of his depth. He didn't seem to want to use his whistle and based his decisions on whichever team shouted the loudest. Once the two teams cottoned on to this, they made his life hell, with the Colliery Manager even coming on to the pitch to give the Ref his opinion on what he should do.

Football-wise, the homesters took ages to get going. Colliery deservedly took the lead on 30 minutes with an absolute 'worldy' which the delighted scorer shouted he knew it was in as soon as it left his foot. Still no response from Sporting came, so it finished 0-1 at half time.

During the break the Colliery Manager told his team to stop wondering what mistake the Ref was going to make next, and to concentrate on their own game by tightening up at the back. It didn't work out like that though as Sporting dominated and eventually got the two goals they needed to make it nine unbeaten games in a row.

My man of the match went to the Colliery sub who didn't even get on to the pitch. How could he be the MOTM you ask? Simple, by his name alone. Serafim Prado. My Mother has a lot to answer for. Serafim Hardy would have made me the envy of all my school class mates, wouldn't it?

contributed on 12/11/23.

TT No.67: Keith Aslan - Saturday 11th November 2023; **MADELEY WHITE STAR** v Milton United; Staffs County League; Kick Off: 14.06; Result: 1-1; Admission: should have been £3 but free for hoppers; Programme: No show (you mean the one advertised on their *Facebook* page that the secretary told a hopper over the phone she was in the process of compiling on Thursday when he rang her. Don't know what happened to that one); Attendance: 22 (16 home, 0 away & 6neutral)

Most people go through life without ever having heard of, let alone visited, the Staffordshire village of Madeley. This was my second appearance there due to White Star having moved to a new ground this season. A definite upgrade on their previous location, with a wooden barrier along three sides, and more

improvements in the offing. The venue is to the south of the village close to the main railway line, so plenty of scope for a bout of train spotting for saddos such as myself. Bus from Crewe, but they don't fit in after the match. No problem for me as once again I was indebted to 'Stockport Taxis' for a lift from the station.

Good news on the programme front, I got my paperized edition of last week's Boro Rangers edition. But what happened to the programme here today? Their *Facebook* page was full of it. Charlotte Bailey, the secretary, confirmed over the phone two days before that there would be one, but on the day itself there was no sign of her or the paper. Stringent enquiries are being made as I write, and a programme will appear at some stage, but wherefrom or by whom, has yet to be established. Charlotte was playing hard to get when we tried to call her during the game. Call me old fashioned but I like a programme to be available at the actual match I am attending. The wonderful lady on the gate, who had nothing to do with the missing paper, was very sympathetic, and refused to charge the six hoppers admission as recompense for the programme-lessness of our visit. A great ambassador for the club, she was also doling out teas and coffees from a marquee at the entrance for a pound a go. A great little set up and all in all a visit is recommended providing a programme is not of concern.

The match could best be described as typical Staffordshire League, which is a euphemism for not very good. Second half was a big improvement on the first, and there was one stand out moment with the Milton equalizer which came via an own goal that almost broke the back of the net. How we all laughed.

Train and Rail replacement bus watch: It's a Saturday so no trains from Broadstairs. The bus ride should be the worst part of the journey, but today I was travelling on the Liz Truss of railway companies, Avanti. Train on time going up, no seat reservations, no coffees, no card reader and no Wi-Fi. None of those omissions particularly bothered me but some passengers/customers were suffering withdrawal symptoms when they couldn't use their internet thingy's. Exactly a half hour late back (which translated into an hour for me) as we were diverted via Northampton for no discernible reason, which is a regular occurrence. Northampton looks pretty grotty in the dark, but not as bad as in daylight. Why do I do it? I'll let you know when I get my programme.

contributed on 12/11/23.

TT No.66: Brian Buck - Saturday 4th November 2023; **Cambridge City** v Shepshed Dynamo; Pitching In Northern Premier League Midlands Division; Venue: played at St Ives Town FC; Result: 4-1; Attendance: 171.

I chose this match today, so I could meet up with my cousin, who I hadn't seen for about six years. He also does some ground hopping, when work doesn't get in his way. Also, for the second time this season, I was accompanied by my wife to a match, but this had more to do with meeting up with my cousin as well and she never actually watched the game, preferring to sit in the clubhouse and do the crossword instead. We got here early, parking at the ground, before walking to the delightful town centre, which is by the river, where we had something to eat and

then looked around a few shops, before returning to the ground in good time for kick off.

By now the early morning rain had unexpectedly returned and we got a bit wet. It was good to be reunited with my cousin as we watched the match together. On a day like this the game would have been off a few years ago, but they have a 3G pitch here these days plus two small stands either side of the main stand, which is on the opposite side to the clubhouse. Cambridge City are starting the season here, but the club officials I spoke to say that they are hoping to start playing at their new ground in January, with the main hurdle being that the new dressing rooms are not yet ready, and they are hoping that the league will allow them to use the portacabins already in situ for the adjacent 3G pitch until such time as they are ready instead.

As for the game, it was one which City deserved to win, mainly because of their second half efforts. In the first half they just shaded it though. In fact, in this period the only goal scored came from Shepshed and was slightly against the run of play. It consisted of a close range shot following a cross from the left. As the players and match officials came off at half time the last two to leave the pitch were the ref and one of the managers. The former was bluntly dismissing every point the latter complained to him about! I missed City's equaliser, which came on 52 minutes, as at this stage of the game I was looking for my notebook, which I had become separated from at the break. Eventually I found it on the floor, next to my wife, who I had visited at half time. Back to the match then and on 67 minutes City took the lead when the ball was swept in from a cross from the right. Now Shepshed started to fade quickly. On 74 minutes they conceded a spot kick after a player was bundled over and on 88 minutes the fourth goal went in following a raking narrow angled shot. Afterwards I bumped into Margaret, City's 88-year-old fan, who has been following City since the age of 14 and she still drives to games, which in my present condition, offers me hope for the future and this helped bring to a close an excellent day out amongst good friends.

contributed on 07/11/23.

TT No.65: Craig Dabbs - Saturday 4th November 2023; **Wombourne Allstars v Oldbury United**; West Midlands (Regional) League Division Two; Venue: Wombourne Leisure Centre; Result: 3-4; Admission: £4; Programme: 4p, Free; Attendance: 46

Another wet weekend. I wasn't taking any chances at all, so I settled for 3G fare in Staffordshire. Earlier in the season I got wind of Wombourne Allstars issuing programmes in the WMRL, and in the bottom division as well. As I've said before any club at that level making the effort to do something is worth my effort to go and see them and with the weather as it is today it was perfect timing.

Wombourne is a sizeable village not all that far Wolverhampton and Dudley. It's a place that's never had any club or ground of note. Wombourne Allstars have been on the scene since 2020 and have several youth teams within their ranks. They seem to have a purpose. As with so many clubs at this level coming and going very quickly, I sense that Wombourne needs a team and the Allstars are it. Talking with the club officials it appears the cage at the back of the leisure centre isn't a long-

term plan as they are trying to identify a site in the village which they can take on and develop the many teams within the club.

Today, well they lost, but from a neutral perspective it was a cracker of a game. Well, the second half was anyway as the first was quite forgettable. The second period saw both teams really fighting it out with two absolute screamers for Oldbury it took them from 3-1 down and quite possibly out to being level and pushing on for the win. Indeed, those two goals were as good as any I've seen by the way. After the referee blew up for full-time tensions did so too and the two sides brawled. I think the homesters took the defeat hard, with some discipline needed to resolve it.

contributed (via Brian Buck) on 05/11/23.

TT No.64: Keith Aslan - Saturday 4th November 2023; **BORO RANGERS** v Newcastle Benfield; Northern League Division 1; Kick Off: 15.01; Result: 2-0; Admission: £5 for old people; Programme: on-line evil; Attendance: 159 (142 home, 8 away & 9 neutral)

It was my birthday yesterday. I was going to have a party and I invited all of my friends, but unfortunately, he couldn't make it. It was the big six-nine and next year it's 'three score year and ten' and the end of my natural lifespan. But my fans need fear not, my masterpieces will be coming for a while yet as God owes me at least an extra six years to make up for getting my bus pass so long after everybody else.

If I don't do stuff with horrible on-line programmes, I'm going to miss out on quite a few grounds and today I was reassured by the company of a fellow hopper who magically transforms these things into paper. Boro Rangers play on the outskirts of Middlesbrough, or 'Captain Cook Country' as the local tourist board call it. One Traveller walked out to the ground, and it took over an hour. There is a bus stop seven minutes away, but be aware, the timetable that appears on 'Traveline' doesn't have any correlation with the times the buses actually run. Walking back through a desolate Middlesbrough town centre after the match in darkness and drizzle is one of life's more depressing experiences. I can see why Captain Cook travelled to the other side of the world to get away from the place.

Boro only moved in here a couple of months ago. Plastic with the surrounding fence painted black rather than the usual green. Other than that, it's a pretty standard 3G cage with the *Atcost* contribution containing two seated bits either side of a standing area. You won't get much of a view from any of the seats. There are arrows directing you to the 'clubhouse' which comprised of a wooden shack at the entrance with a young girl selling cans of beer. She wasn't shifting many today. There is also a food wagon, I snaffled the last burger at quarter past two.

The general consensus of opinion was the match was going to finish goalless, but a couple of Boro strikes late doors alleviated the need to come back. Ha! Ha! This wasn't the worst match I've ever seen, but not one of the best either.

Train watch: everything ran perfectly. Travelled back in what used to be known as 'The Quiet Carriage' but is now called 'the Quieter carriage'. A scintillating piece of rebranding by someone with too much time on their hands.

contributed on 05/11/23.

TT No.63: Jon T Green - Saturday 28th October 2023; **STUDLEY** v Lichfield City; Midland Football League - Premier Division; Venue: The Beehive Arena (Studley Sports Centre); Result: 0-1; Admission: £7; Programme: No but team sheets available at the turnstiles; Attendance: 88

In the 1700's the needle making industry was established in Studley and survived there until a large fire at the factory in 1977 saw the trade move to nearby Redditch. This all struck me as incredibly cool if only because I have never thought about it being a specific manufacturing process and secondly because it had been quietly taking place in the same Warwickshire village for over 200 years. Sadly, needles are now produced somewhere in the Sub-Continent which loses some of the romance, don't you think?

Football in the area hasn't been around quite as long with the club being formed as the works team of BKL Fittings in 1971 before being re-formed as Studley in 2002 following the collapse of the company. Three years ago, nearby Solihull Moors entered into an arrangement with the club to use their Sports Centre ground as a training facility and since that time the National League club have spent a considerable amount of money in upgrading the facility. The clubhouse and changing rooms are located some distance from the ground which is accessed via a paved walkway between two full sized grass pitches. Studley play their matches on an artificial surface which after another soggy weather week has at least guaranteed today's game going ahead. Cover is provided by a prefabricated stand which can accommodate 113 spectators in four rows of royal blue seats. The remainder of the ground is uncovered flat standing but at least the metal rail and adjacent small sized pitch dispel the feeling of being in a "cage".

Lichfield City arrive just three points behind the hosts and with the teams sitting respectively third and fourth in the league standings it looks like being a close encounter. City seemed to have taken the lead after just three minutes as Joe Haines' header from a corner is goal bound; sadly, for them Dan Smith decides to help the ball over the line and is flagged for offside. The visitor's generosity almost extends further as centre-back Jordan Clements presents Zac Guinan with a clear run on goal only for 'keeper James Beeson to snuff out the danger. Studley are playing a neat passing game culminating with Jamie Meadows firing over. They go equally close from a set piece as Max Martin heads wide from Hayden Purves' corner kick. It takes until the last five minutes of the half for Lichfield to threaten again; Smith skips away from his marker and sends a low centre into the box where Lewi Burnside arriving late at the far post forces Brendon Bunn into a diving block.

Meadows begins the second period with a fierce drive which looks to be blocked by a teammate before Purves once again calls Beeson into action. Dom Lewis finds his way into Mr. Dods' notebook for a late challenge on Bunn and Lichfield are then reduced to ten men as Smith is sin-binned for over stating the case for the

defence. The numerical advantage seems to spur on the home side but with City setting up a solid defensive formation their chances are limited to long range efforts. Guinan does manage a snapshot but once again Beeson keeps the score sheet blank.

73 minutes have been played when the deadlock is broken; Haines clips in a free kick and when the follow-up is lifted back into the penalty area captain Dan Lomas is on hand to turn beautifully and guide his low drive beyond Bunn. Smith then goes close to extending their advantage with a ferocious volley from outside of the box. The last chance of the game falls to Studley's John Mills but his long-distance effort goes harmlessly wide. It's victories like these which show the character of a team and despite being outplayed for a large part of the game Lichfield's strong defensive display will no doubt see them pushing for promotion at the end of the season.

contributed on 31/10/23.

TT No.62: Steve Hardy - Saturday 28th October 2023; **Allenton United v Baobab United**; Central Midlands Alliance Macron Store Nottingham Division One South; Result: 1-3; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance 13 H/C

Not the match I set off to watch, but in the end, I was lucky to even find this one. My plan on Saturday morning was to go to Mickleover in Derby nice and early, pick up a first ever programme from Mickleover Athletic, and then travel further up the A38 to see AFC Normanton play.

Before I set off though I found out that AFC Normanton was off, so a rethink was in order. Scanning the fixtures, I chose a revisit to the vast Moor Lane Rolls Royce complex in Derby to watch Derby Singh Brothers v Mayfield.

All went well at Mickleover where programmes were bought by 2.15pm so it was off to Moor Lane I went. Arriving at 2.30pm I then went to both sites looking for a game and couldn't find any sign of one. The Stadium site was being used for a big cycling event with large men in lycra racing on several specially taped off tracks. Defo no footballers there, so back to the other site where I was delighted to find two teams warming up. Hoorah! On closer inspection though it turned out this was Allenton United v Baobab United. Top v Third at start of play so I settled down to watch this one. Only problem here was the referee hadn't turned up. Both teams tried to find a stand in from their ranks, but nobody came forward, and by 3.20pm it looked like a postponement was on the cards. Then from out of nowhere a figure emerged from the car park to take charge. Turns out the Baobab lads had phoned a friend of theirs and he had volunteered. Well done him!

Unbeaten Allenton played their usual brand of short passing movement from the off, but it was Baobab who took the lead on 13 minutes with their superb forward running through to round the keeper and score. Offside shouted the home bench and team! Ref shrugs his shoulders as he hadn't seen it and it was huge surprise when the home Manager, who was running the line, turned their appeals down and gave the goal. I was stood right behind him, and the forward was marginally

offside, as VAR would have proved had it been installed, but kudos to the lino for being ultra fair.

Heads went down after that, Baobab deserving their 3-1 in the end. That win takes them to the top of the league, with Allenton down to second. However, Allenton have played three games fewer than Baobab and are just a point behind.

I see Derby Singh Brothers won 8-0 too. Heaven only knows where the match was played though!

contributed on 29/10/23.

TT No.61: Keith Aslan - Saturday 28th October 2023; **BLAENAVON BLUES** v Ynysygerwn; Dragon Signs Welsh Trophy; Kick Off: 14.01; Result: 2-2 (4-3 penalties); Admission: £4 for old people; Programme: £1; Attendance: 68 (53 home, 13 away & 2 neutral)

Another trip to the valleys. Another first-hand experience of Wales's 20mph speed limit. All I can say is they're going to need the Millenium Stadium to fit everybody in who should be booked for a speed awareness course.

The X24 provides a 15-minute service from Newport and will drop you off seven minutes from the ground. All next week's dinner money gone on the £8.80p bus fare. The driver was a great ambassador for 'Stagecoach' telling me I could ride around all day and even go as far as Hereford on my ticket. If I actually wanted to go to Hereford this would be an absolute bargain. Not quite so Blaenavon.

Never got to see what action there was in Blaenavon. Bus skirted round it, and although the terminus is in the 'High Street', it's not a High Street as we know it, there's nothing there. Wanted to see the town centre but a combination of dodgy knees and steep hills put the kybosh on that one. Instead, I visited the old ironworks very close to the ground, a world industrial heritage site. I like a bit of history and left grateful that I never had to work in the place.

Arrived at the ground to see men with pitchforks forking the pitch trying to get rid of the puddles. It worked, sort of, and it was game on. Like most grounds in the valleys, the scenery was top notch, with a non-Atcost stand and picnic tables outside the clubhouse where you could watch the match on a nice day. Today wasn't nice. Hot drinks and burgers available from within, and what better prelude to the match than watching Chelsea's latest disaster unfold on a big screen.

The first half drizzle gave way to ark building rain in the second, and the pitch which was somewhat muddy already, became a ploughed field. Both teams put in a good shift considering the conditions and Blaenavon wrapped it up with a second goal on the hour. The Ynysygerwn captain unwrapped it with a couple of goals in the last six minutes. Two all and straight to pens. Just as well, the pitch wouldn't have lasted out for another half hour's extra time. I know people who walk out on principal rather than watch a penalty shoot-out. I don't have any principals but I'm old school and believe a game of football should be decided by playing a game of football. I can take penalties or leave them, and I left these. I wasn't going to get home at least an hour late because I was delayed watching a fairground 'beat the

goalie' competition. For the record Blaenavon won the shootout 4-3 but if anything exciting happened then I'm not the one to ask about it, I was already on a bus aquaplaning my way back to Newport.

Train watch: 8 minutes late getting into Newport, 22 minutes late back into Paddington. Par for the course.

contributed on 29/10/23.

TT No.60: Jon T Green - Saturday 21st October 2023; **NANTWICH TOWN** v Prescot Cables; Northern Premier League - West Division; Venue: Water Lode Result: 1-1; Admission: £12 on the day/£11 in advance; Programme: online only; Attendance: 461

I do like a good club nickname, none of this United or Blues unimaginative nonsense but some properly weird and obscure moniker. Imagine my delight when I arrived at Nantwich's Water Lode ground to be greeted by reference to the "Dabbers" - I immediately identified a dabber as some sort of bird although this turned out to be a picture relating to the ground's sponsor. Dredging the memory banks (such as they are) I recalled that a wide tipped pen used for marking bingo cards was called a dabber, but this just seemed too unlikely. Finding that there was an on-site cafe (doesn't every ground need one of these?) I settled down to a Full English Breakfast and a pot of tea. Still none the wiser to the origin of the name, I did what any sane individual would do and reached for my phone - it turns out Nantwich was historically a centre for the production of leather goods and that a dabber was someone involving in the process of curing the leather or applying glue during the shoe making process. Who says you don't learn something watching football?

Water Lode is an appropriate name today with the nearby River Weaver having burst its banks causing the rather distressing sight of flood water being pumped out from the basements of nearby properties. The club moved to their current ground in 2007 and although it feels "out of town" it's actually an easy 15-minute walk to the centre. A large 300-seater main stand dominates the scene but with some of the green and white seats having been replaced by black ones (which mark out the director's area), the NTFC motif has rather been lost. Of note are two long lines of seats at the front which act as subs benches, there being no actual dug outs. To the left is a disabled section and to the right the main turnstile block, food outlet and a splendid wooden hut selling half time draw tickets. Both ends of the ground are wide flat standing areas and along the far touchline is a covered terrace; five steps of new looking concrete beneath a metal roof. Behind here are a series of further artificial pitches, an electronic scoreboard in the corner completes the picture.

Town might be sitting mid-table but, with three wins out of four on home soil (or should that be home 3G?), they are clearly no pushover. A win against league leaders Kidsgrove Athletic last weekend is a warning to Prescot who arrive from Merseyside in second place. That good form continues in the early part of the

game as after just seven minutes they take the lead; captain Troy Bourne delivers a perfectly whipped left wing centre that rangy centre forward Bryon Harrison converts with a powerful header. The artificial surface, although having drained perfectly after Friday's downpour, is one covered in black plastic granules which disconcertingly fly up after every pass and shot. Bourne is involved again a few moments later as he intercepts a ball out of defence before setting up Kai Evans whose low shot is saved by the legs of Mitch Allen. Having weathered the early storm Cables are beginning to work their way back into the game; Francis Smith goes close from a free kick before the impressive Jack Goodwin clips the top of the bar with a curling shot that leaves home 'keeper Scott Moloney well beaten. It's therefore no surprise when Prescott draw level; 36 minutes have been played as Smith sends over a high centre, full back Nathan Koehler jumps highest and heads in from close range. Donaldson then goes close to giving the visitors the lead in first half added time with an angled shot which Moloney does well to deal with.

The second period is a cagey affair; John Murphy gets in a header for Prescott and Harrison tries a spectacular overhead shot from the edge of the area, but the two sides are largely cancelling each other out. Cables' Kyle Sambor is involved in ongoing banter with a group of fans following an altercation with a home defender. "What do you normally do on a Saturday lad?" one wag calls out. Sambor cups his ear and smiles back - if they are trying to put him off it isn't working. With a few minutes left the visitors almost grab a winner; Sam O'Halleron breaks quickly and feeds a lovely pass into Murphy. The centre-forward looks odds on to score but Moloney advances quickly from his line and saves at the striker's feet. There is just time for Stevie Hewitt to try a long-range effort for Town which Allen grabs at the second attempt. In the end it's a fair result with both sides looking happy with a point apiece; Town keep up their good home record and as news comes in that Kidsgrove have been beaten, Prescott move to within two points of the leaders.

TT No.59: *Craig Dabbs* - Saturday 21st October 2023; Meridian Valley Park v Forest Hill Park; Southern Counties East League Division One Cup Group B; Venue: Meridian Sports & Social Club; Result: 2-2; Admission: £8; Programme: 12pp, free; Attendance: 20

After a week's lay off, I was keen to get going again but Storm Babet was wreaking havoc all over the place with a number of games called off. Fortunately plan A survived and despite some very meaty showers on the way down, I arrived in Charlton to a pitch that was absolutely fine, actually perfect, seemingly South London had been spared the worst.

Meridian Valley Park were formed in 1995, born out of a five a side team which entered the Dartford & District League playing in Crayford. They moved through into the Kent County League and then into the Kent Invicta League, which was a short-lived venture, before the league was re-modelled into the SCEL. Valley Park was added to the name after a merger with said club in 2013, two years after moving into the Invicta League.

The Sports & Social Club has been going since 1921 by employees of Siemens. The ground was opened in 1933 with the large clubhouse following three years later.

Today the grounds surrounding the clubhouse host various teams with the main pitch for Meridian VP with Bridon Ropes sharing in the same Division and a 3G pitch which is well used and was in action today for the Kent County League Division One clash between Bridon Ropes Reserves and Bromleians which also finished 2-2 and five more watching as well.

The ground is functional, fully enclosed, lights, fully railed, hard standing all around and a seated stand on the halfway line. It meets the grading requirements and is all they need, the same goes for sharers Bridon Ropes.

The match started with a surprise as the visitors came out of the blocks quickly, but a breakaway goal also quickly followed which immediately took the wind out of Forest Hill Park's sails. It suddenly became much more even with little really happening in what was an uneventful half. The second was much better although it spilled over a few times as tempers flared. Then in injury time it looked like Forest Hill Park had snatched the winner only for the home team who are having a horrible season to go straight back at them and snatch the equaliser.

contributed (via Brian Buck) on 22/10/23.

contributed on 23/10/23.

TT No.58: Keith Aslan - Saturday 21st October 2023; **EVERETT ROVERS** v Slough Town Juniors; Anagram Records Trophy; Kick Off: 15.00; Result: 6-3; Admission & Programme: £3; Attendance: 19 (10 home, 2 away & 7 neutral)

What could be better than an afternoon in Watford? Quite a few things, with the icing on the manure being a 3g cage. But today's outing greatly exceeded my expectations.

On the concourse of despair at Euston was a notice 'Due to adverse weather conditions passengers are advised not to travel on Avanti'. Surely good advice whatever the weather. In 2014 the government announced plans to extend Crossrail to Watford. The idea was shelved two years later due to, as one politician put it, 'poor overall value for money to the taxpayer'. Unlike HS2, 100 plus billion quid to knock 15 minutes off the journey time between London and Birmingham. The 'taxpayer' really hit the jackpot with that one. Plenty of trains for the twenty-minute journey to Watford Junction. Buses from outside the station and a 13-minute walk to the ground, alternatively Watford North station is 24 minutes away. Harry Potter World is just a mile up the road which I could have visited. Not being a total saddo I gave it a miss.

New kids on the Herts County League block, Everett is a fine set up incorporating a comfortable clubhouse with a big screen providing the pre match entertainment. Hot drinks available from within and a refreshment hatch outside with a menu displaying a mouth-watering array of food. Underneath was a notice which read 'hot food not available on Saturdays'. I'd have thought that would have been the one day you needed it. Usual 3g set up with one vital addition, a tarpaulin covered part of the ground. Most welcome enabling the spectators to remain dry on a very

wet afternoon. Much kudos to the young girl on the gate who remained at her post until 20 minutes after kick off and got absolutely drenched.

The Anagram Records Trophy has been going for yonks and is my favourite competition giving clubs such as these two the only opportunity of meeting in a competitive fixture. The visitors from the Middlesex County League were Slough Towns U21 team, with a couple of grown-ups thrown in to add some substance. John Betjeman wrote a famous poem in which he urged the Luftwaffe to bomb Slough. A bit harsh, but you can see where he's coming from. Plenty of goals with Everett always going to score the bulk of them. Good to join up with some hoppers I hadn't seen in a long time. Always nice to meet with other people of my age that have still got a pulse. One Slough supporter was wearing shorts and a Hawaiian shirt with no jacket. Obviously doesn't have the BBC weather app.

At half time the news came through that Bobby Charlton had died. That leaves Geoff Hurst as the last man standing from England's World Cup victory. I remember it as though it was yesterday, although ironically things that actually did happen yesterday are all a bit of a blur.

Maybe it was the company, or just my perky mood, but I really enjoyed myself today. Even Watford looked nicer than I remember it.

contributed on 22/10/23.

TT No.57: Jon T Green - Saturday 14th October 2023; **HULLBRIDGE SPORTS** v Frenford; Essex Senior League; Venue: Lower Road; Result: 3-1; Admission: £7; Programme: £1; Attendance: 64

If you are in any doubt about the cost of running a non-league club, even at Step 5 level, then have a chat with Gareth Thwaites, the Commercial and Operations Manager, at Lower Road. "We had new LED floodlights installed last week" he says pointing to the eight pylons "they cost £16,000 but luckily, we got help with a grant. They haven't even been switched on yet"; with a crowded midweek schedule coming up, that's something which will be rectified before the end of the month. The club own a big site with nine pitches which range from 5-a-side facilities to full adult size. "We want a 4G" explains Gareth "they cost a million pounds and whilst the FA will give us £600,000 where are we going to find the rest?" It's clearly a rhetorical question as without a generous benefactor that sort of money is just not available. "At the end of the season we look at our accounts and maybe we've made a pound or maybe we've lost a pound, but we simply don't have the income". With the club having operated at a higher level for the past few seasons, the ground is a well-appointed one and with a new drainage system having been installed they are well placed to cope with our increasingly wet winters. Seated accommodation for over 200 is provide by two pre-fabricated stands adjacent to the turnstile block. The clubhouse, well stocked cafe and changing rooms are also on this side of the ground. Behind the near goal is a flat standing covered stand of the scaffold and corrugated roof variety running the entire width of the by-line. Hard standing continues around to the far side and from here you can see that the rail has been re-aligned with the dug outs now a few yards further away from the touchline. A white manually operated scoreboard

sits on the half-way line and is a superb addition to the ground, call me old fashioned but give me this any day over the electronic equivalent.

With a new team having been assembled in the close season things are beginning to look good for Hullbridge who are now seven games unbeaten and eyeing up a place in the top five. Frenford on the other hand are struggling at the wrong end of the table and their afternoon gets off to a bad start as they concede after just four minutes. The visitors only half clear a corner and when the ball falls to Jason Banton he creates a yard of space before firing a stinging right footer through a crowded penalty area and beyond the dive of Matt Knight. With less than ten minutes played, Sports' captain Sam Owusu picks up a groin strain and is replaced by Bryn Thorpe: centre-half Jay Leader takes the armband. Frenford are struggling to find a foothold and the best they manage is when Nathan Coombes and Billy Kathy combine to win a corner. The visitors fall further behind and, once again, they are guilty of failing to clear their lines; this time Jon Evans is the grateful recipient scoring from inside the box. Hullbridge are playing a controlled brand of football, short sharp passes and comfortably maintaining possession as they look to play out from the back. To the contrary the visitors look hurried, although full back Coombes makes a great run from left back before trying a cross shot which drifts wide. With a couple of minutes left of the opening half, Frenford reduce the arrears when a long through ball finds home 'keeper Rob Budd in no man's land and Roy Stephens has the easiest of tasks to roll the ball into the unguarded net. Any doubt about the outcome of the match disappears soon after the re-start as Emmanuel Okunja moves smoothly onto a through ball from Solomon Ofori before dummieing his way past Knight for the simplest of finishes. With the game won, the tempo noticeable drops although only a great save from Knight prevent Evans' free kick from increasing Hullbridge's lead. At the other end George Edwards' mazy dribble and shot don't go far wide but by that stage Frenford are a beaten side. In a crowded football area Hullbridge are just one of many teams vying for support and players; it's a tough environment but with a friendly committed back-room team and a good team on the park it looks as though they are a club with a bright future.

contributed on 16/10/23.

TT No.56: Steve Hardy - Saturday 14th October 2023; **Kawala** v MOTD; Birmingham & District League Senior Cup - 1st Round; Result: 7-1; Admission and Programme: Free; Attendance: 5 H/C

Today's match provided the perfect tonic for anyone feeling jaded with football in general. Kawala are a brand-new side this season and this was only their 5th ever match, so you can see from the result that they have hit the ground running.

They are based at Woodfield Academy which is a school in Redditch, and they play on yet another 4G pitch in a cage. Spectators are allowed down one side of the pitch, but I was allowed access to all four sides to take photos. Their team are all East Africans, and I was told their name means 'mindset'. That explains why their badge is a football with half being a brain and the other half a football.

Visitors are MOTD, which you will be shocked to hear really does stand for Match of the Day. They play in a division above Kawala, but you would never have believed it today.

The match itself was excellent. MOTD actually took the lead with a rare breakaway on 27 minutes, and it took Kawala until the 40th minute to sort themselves out and get a deserved equaliser.

The second half was as one sided as it looks as Kawala scored three times between the 60th and 64th minute with the first of those being a deflected OG. The MOTD lads gave up at that point and saw one player sin binned twice. Three more goals followed, and it was no more than Kawala deserved.

Their play is a joy to watch. Close passing in defence and midfield before a long ball is sent to whoever is free in attack to score at ease. The people running the club are really friendly too, making this my most enjoyable day out this season.

contributed on 15/10/23.

TT No.55: Keith Aslan - Saturday 14th October 2023; **FC ST. HELENS** v South Liverpool; North West Counties League Division One North; Kick Off: 15.02; Result: 1-1; Admission: £3 for the aged; Programme: £2; Official attendance: 181 (147 home, 33 away & 1 neutral).

When I left home in the morning I didn't know when I was ever going to see my country dacha again as I would be attempting a journey with the world's worst train company. Something went terribly right on 'Avanti' today with all the trains I was on doing exactly what they were supposed to. For the first time in ages, after a trip to the magical kingdom called 'The North of England', I arrived back home at precisely the time I would have expected to.

Stopped off at my favourite Wigan trattoria for dins. The whole town was rammed with Warrior's supporters making for the Super League Final. It didn't kick off until six, I wonder how they'll pass the time? Wigan v Peterborough in the football was postponed due to International call ups. There's a sentence I bet you never thought you'd see. 12 minutes down the line is St. Helens. My kinda town with three football clubs, all programme issuers. The ground is a 25-minute walk from the station. And it is a walk, the buses don't fit in.

Of the St. Helens footballing triumverate this is the most recent addition, less than 10 years old, FC have come a long way in a short time. The ground is everything a ground at this level should be. Neat and tidy, fully surrounded by an aesthetically pleasing white fence. The obligatory 'Atcost' stand, with further cover behind the goal and a shack selling a wide range of football fayre. The clubhouse was showing the weekend's big match, Notts County v Mansfield. 4-1 to the visitors, and in view of their nickname the presenter deserves some kind of award for the line 'And after the break we'll be at the stag party'.

Whoever compiles the North West Counties fixtures looks to have spent too much time on the firewater. Next Saturday St. Helens will have completed exactly half of their games, not leaving them with very much to do for the remaining six

months of the season. They might as well take their holidays in February with only one scheduled fixture. By contrast my local team, Ramsgate, has played just three league games. St. Helens are ten points clear at the top but mid-table South Liverpool gave them a real match. Plenty of goalmouth action at both ends, the match could have gone either way. It didn't, with the draw being a fair result.

I'm sure everybody will be relieved to know I have received my paperized Shenfield programme from last week. A fabulous effort, full colour with stacks of reading. Why would anybody go to so much trouble just to leave it languishing on a computer where no one will look at it?

contributed on 15/10/23.

TT No.54: Brian Buck - Friday 6th October 2023; **Potters Bar Town** v Berkhamsted; Isuzu FA Trophy 3rd Qualifying Round; Result: 4-1; Attendance: 217.

In a game brought forward to tonight in the days leading up to the match, it was good to be back here for the first time in getting on for five years. Since then, the ground has been improved with the addition of two new stands, one with seats in it alongside the existing one and the other behind the bottom goal which has some crash barriers in it. The flats on the far side of the ground are still there. I always keep my eye on them during night games here, just in case I spot something I shouldn't see! Not tonight (again) though! I thought that the chap sitting next to me was a ref's assessor, but he was actually collecting data to pass on to the betting firm he works for.

The hosts started the season not too well and have recently been recruiting new players. In fact, four of them were making their debuts tonight. One of them might have been the defender responsible for Berko taking the lead on two minutes as under no pressure whatsoever, he seemed to mistake a Berko player for a teammate and headed the ball to him in the area, leaving him to turn and hit it past his bemused keeper. The goal obviously gave the visitors immediate confidence, but the hosts gradually got into the game as their opponents' challenge quickly faded. On 33 minutes Bar equalised when their scorer shot home from just inside the corner of the area. On 45(+3) minutes he scored again after the keeper seemed to lose control of the ball and may have pushed it over the line, but he made sure it went in. I thought that this goal might get disallowed after I saw the lino raise his flag, but if he did, it was quickly withdrawn, and the goal was awarded. Two minutes later the striker completed his hat-trick, this time from the spot following a foul. In the second half Berko played much better for a while, but Bar were still the better side, with their subs making a difference. But the goal the visitors were hoping to get to kick start their comeback looked less likely to materialise and even more after the hosts claimed their fourth goal on 75 minutes after a shot ricocheted, probably off the keeper to the scorer who made no mistake from close range. Thus ended a decent but rather more physical game than some I've seen recently. Nothing seriously malicious, just two sides getting stuck in.

contributed on 10/10/23.

TT No.53: Jon T Green - Saturday 30th September 2023; **STRATFORD TOWN** v Basford United; FA Trophy - Third Qualifying Round; Venue: Knights Lane (The Arden Garages Stadium); Result: 1-0; Admission: £12; Programme: £2; Attendance: 357

There's a lot going on at Stratford Town's Knights Lane ground and, to be honest, when you are used to getting your football fix at Steps 5 and below it's all a bit overwhelming. As an out-of-town venue (so far out that it's in the nearby village of Tiddington) and a relative new build, the ground was opened in 2007; I did fear spending the afternoon at an identikit pre-fab stadium but these fears were soon allayed as I pushed through the turnstiles. What the main stand lacks in capacity it more than makes up for in originality. The majority of the royal blue and yellow seats seemed to be reserved for directors, media and hospitality guests with perhaps the section nearest the well-stocked Tuck Shop being for regular fans. The stand is brick built and an electronic scoreboard hangs from the roof. It's this that perhaps is the most impressive as it continues away from the seating area to form a covered canopy close to the turnstile block; viewing from here might not be easy but on a wet day it will provide some much-needed shelter. To the left is a small area of open seating, only three wide, but seemingly popular if only because of its proximity to one of the ground's many eating and drinking facilities. Behind the near goal is flat standing before you reach the far side which contains three seated areas. At each end are large, uncovered sections sandwiching a covered stand which sits over the halfway line. The far end consists of three separate stands of narrow terracing. The brick walls are a nice touch, as is the single row of artificial grass which has been placed on the top step - maybe you have to wipe your feet on a muddy day? The cover continues around the corner and towards the large bar area. Getting something to eat and drink is not going to be a problem here. As is befitting of a town that unsurprisingly doesn't fail to dine out on its most famous son, there is "Bardy Army" and "Bard's Bar" - all nicely done but heaven knows what Shakespeare would have thought of being characterised as a cartoon hot dog...

For a match between two Step Three teams this was a disappointing encounter which maybe, with the exception of the FA Vase, reflects the demise of interest in English cup football. The afternoon started strangely with the home side changing from their normal orange shirts into navy blue so as to avoid a clash with Basford who turned up in their away kit of red. Town dominated from the start with their high tempo pressing of the ball giving the visitors precious little time to get a foot hold in the match. Stratford certainly liked to get the ball forward quickly and whilst it was, to a degree effective, you got the feeling that the locals were not entirely happy with the style of play. Centre forward Callum Ebanks saw his shot pushed onto an upright by Basford's 'keeper Kieran Preston after nearly half an hour but that chance aside there was precious little in the way of goalmouth action. The deadlock was finally broken a few minutes later when a corner from the right was met by a bullet header from full back Dan Vann. It was a well-executed goal and one which would turn out to be the winner. Matt Bowman on

the wing looked a clever, dangerous player for the visitors but with the home defence well marshalled by their muscular captain Paul McCone even he saw too little of the ball in an attacking sense. The second half continued in much the same vain with Vann almost adding a second; his well-directed header was only kept out by an acrobatic save from Preston. With time running out United finally upped their game but their build up was so painfully laboured that Stratford defended with ease. With three minutes of additional time already played, home goalkeeper Liam O'Brien was finally called into action as he dived full length to save a fine low drive from Jack Andrews. At the final whistle the man on the PA somewhat tongue in cheek told the rapidly departing crowd "the draw for the First Round Proper is on Monday and we're now only seven games from Wembley". Got to admire his optimism, haven't you?

contributed on 09/10/23.

TT No.52: Steve Hardy - Saturday 7th October 2023; **Cannock Dynamos** v Stafford Rangers U19s; Staffordshire Challenge Cup 1st Round; Result: 0-0 (5-4 on pens); Admission and Programme: Free; Attendance 30 h/c.

Feeling a tad under the weather today, I didn't fancy travelling hundreds of miles for a 0-0 draw, especially as I could see one in my own back yard. Thus, I made a short bus journey to Penkridge Leisure Centre (or Wolgarston High School) as it was in my youth. The 'home' team were Cannock Dynamos, now of the Staffs County League, who I thought at first were last season's Cannock United. After a few torrid seasons though, the United have apparently given up the ghost, although a couple of their players are now with Dynamos I was told.

Visitors for this county cup tie were the U21 side of Stafford Rangers who play in the U21 division of the Midland League. They brought a good, few supporters too who helped raise the attendance to a very healthy 30.

The venue is yet another 3G pitch in a cage, but spectators are allowed down one side, so I was able to take a few matchday photographs (honestly, there's not a lot to see here!)

As for the match, at first, I had no idea who was going to win this, but as the game wore on it became obvious it would end 0-0. It wasn't for a lack of effort though as it was end-to-end from both sides throughout. Nobody could finish though, so straight to penalties it was with Dynamo sneaking it 5-4.

So, Cannock is still the biggest town in England with a senior club, or any club at all for that matter.

contributed on 08/10/23.

TT No.51: Keith Aslan - Saturday 7th October 2023; **SHENFIELD** v Catholic; Essex Olympian Premier Division; Kick Off: 14.32; Result: 3-2; Admission: Free; Programme: an online abhorrence; Attendance: 41 (20 home, 20 away & 1 neutral)

On the plus side this was an easy stress-free journey which got me home in plenty of time to see 'Strictly'. But that was a trade-off for watching a game on a plastic pitch in a school, which is never going to feature very highly in 'England's most

scenic grounds'. But worst of all was that epitome of evil, an online programme. Someone who went last week managed to paperize it and has kindly agreed to do the same for me, but 'Issuu', who are responsible for this nonsense, make it as difficult as they can. A degree in computer science is required. As I was aware of the situation before I left home re. the online programme, and still chose to go, I can't really complain. But I'm going to.

The attraction here was how easy it is to get to. Crossrail, which like HS2 went way over budget, was completed because it's in London, and means there are fast trains every few minutes between Shenfield and Stratford. While the good folk of Manchester may be a bit disappointed at the termination of HS2, I don't think they have thought about the advantages that Crossrail brings them. It will make getting around London a lot easier when they come down for their holidays. Also, two thirds of the journey from Broadstairs to Stratford is on HS1, another wonderful engineering project for London and the South East. The ground is around a half hour walk from Shenfield station through a private housing estate, think Beverley Hills, and it's interesting to see how the other half live. Any provisions should be taken on board at Shenfield, there's nothing after you leave the town.

The ground is as soulless as a Tory Party Conference, plastic pitch in a school surrounded by, no surprises here, a green mesh fence. There are spectator facilities along one side, and a good view is also to be had on the raised land outside the cage, where benches and picnic tables abound. Some of these are in the shade, a most welcome respite from the hot sun, a somewhat strange occurrence in the middle of October! The teams remained on the pitch at half time, with the changing rooms miles away, but unusually the home and away ones were in opposite directions at either end of the school.

I've been lucky with my games lately and we had another good one this afternoon. Catholic went ahead through a penalty, Shenfield equalized via the same source, and the home side were 2-1 ahead at the break. An equalizer in the second half and the match was heading for a draw before Shenfield got an 88th minute winner with a shot from an impossible angle. Well, it wasn't actually impossible or they wouldn't have scored, but it was very tight. Catholic seemed to have as many supporters as Shenfield, and this would have been a good opportunity to repent for my sins, but I haven't really done any sins that are worth repenting.

With the teams staying out at half time I was privy to the Catholic half time team talk. I could learn something here about what tactics the manager was going to employ to turn things around. He began 'You're playing like a bunch of c***s, losing to this s**t, you're f*****g useless. Presumably motivational speaking isn't his strong point.

Another enjoyable afternoon which will be made all the more so once I have the paper that should have accompanied it. I suppose with programmes a rarity in the Essex Olympian it's a choice of on-line or nothing. Still frustrating though.

contributed on 08/10/23.

TT No.50: Jon T Green - Saturday 30th September 2023; **MIDHURST & EASEBOURNE** v Eastbourne United; Southern Combination Football League - Premier Division; Venue: The Rotherfield; Result: 5-0; Admission: £7; Programme: online only; Attendance: 87

Set in the rolling green hills of the South Downs, The Rotherfield is one of those idyllic settings on an early Autumn day when the leaves are just changing colour and the last of the house martins are still busily circling overhead.

Entering through the car park, a tricky little turn up a steep incline, the first thing you notice is how far the pitch is from the club house. So far in fact that the club have arranged a long row of metal barriers to stop players and officials from wandering off into the nearby woods. The main stand, with its bold message "Welcome to the Rotherfield" emblazoned across the front, is scheduled for replacement but for now continues as the primary source of cover. Its sloping metal roof and metal frame sit over four rows of dark brown benches of which 10 at either end are reserved for the two teams' directors. Perspex dug outs are arranged on each side but thoughtfully have been positioned away from the touch line so as to not interfere with the sight lines. A small pre-fabricated terraced stand is located between the corner flag and goal but this was unused other than as a home for the PA system. The rest of the ground is undeveloped but does provide hard standing except behind the lower end goal. Blue mesh surrounds the pitch, which has a profound slope, and with blue goal nets in evidence as well there is no mistaking the home colours.

The visitors from Eastbourne United arrived unbeaten and left two hours later after a very bad day at the office. In fact, the sort of day where your PC runs updates for three hours, you spill coffee on the keyboard and then have your annual appraisal with a demanding boss. Midhurst made their intentions clear from as early as the fourth minute when Harry Giles forced James Broadbent into a fine save. From the resulting flag kick the ball was only partially cleared and when it fell to centre half Lewis Hyde his shot through a crowded penalty area found the bottom corner. The home side went further ahead as Callum Dowdell out paced his full back and, cutting in from the by-line, opened up his body to angle a cross shot beyond Broadbent. A third might have been added firstly through Giles who lobbed narrowly wide, and then, after some defensive uncertainty, Harry Tremlett who dragged his shot off target. Eastbourne seemed to have steadied the ship as Callum Barlow's header was spectacularly turned away by Ricardo Mendonca but any thoughts of a comeback were squashed in the closing minutes of the half. There seemed no imminent danger as a high ball was brought down by Lewis Russell but the rangy centre-forward turned his marker before curling his strike into the far corner. The same man added a fourth with a deflected shot off the sprawling Sam Cole - a review at Football League level would surely have noted this as an own goal but fortunately for Russell we are not yet subject to such tomfoolery at Step Five.

With the game dead, the second period threatened to be something of an anti-climax and so it proved especially after Lewis Hamilton made it five nil with a smart finish ten minutes after the re-start. Mention must be made to the sporting nature of the game and to United's two midfielders Bailo Camera and George

Oloude; the former who showed exceptional touch and vision and who was at the centre of every positive attacking move and the latter who simply ran and ran with seemingly boundless energy. Eastbourne will play worse and win but it was a day when everything just simply clicked for the hosts and earned them a thoroughly deserved victory to move within a point of United.

contributed on 04/10/23.

TT No.49: Brian Buck - Saturday 30th September 2023; **Kings Sutton** v Longford Park; Banbury District & Lord Jersey FA Lord Jersey Cup 2nd Round; Result: 1-1 (Kings Sutton won 4-2 on penalties); Attendance: 15 approx.

I've always wanted to watch a game here, mainly because this village, with its 2,000 plus inhabitants, features in a good quiz question, which is to name the English county with the fewest railway stations. The answer is Northamptonshire, and its stations are Wellingborough, Kettering, Corby, Northampton, Long Buckby and Kings Sutton, the last of which catches some people out because it is situated between the Oxfordshire strongholds of Oxford and Banbury.

The club has been around for over 100 years and used to play somewhere in the village in days long ago. I first came across them in the early days of this century when they played at Charlton Road, in the Oxfordshire Senior League, but in switching leagues their address is Astrop Road these days, but I was assured that the actual venue remains the same. This pleasant ground is out of the village and is not surrounded by any housing. There are no real spectator facilities, except for toilets and a few benches under the overhang to the dressing rooms behind one goal, from where you can see most of the pitch. The only other 'furniture' here are the permanent dugouts. There was one old small one and two more modern ones, although part of the roof on one of these was broken.

As for the game, I missed the opening goal, which was scored after about 30 seconds, by Longford Park, because I was still maneuvering myself and my garden chair into position, but it was a close-range effort. On 22 minutes the game was stopped to allow some dog poo to be removed from the pitch, with an impressive looking implement you can seemingly buy to do things like this. Then a minute later we had a very surreal moment. Whilst sitting in my garden chair the ball came my way from down the wing. I stuck out a foot and effectively managed to trap the ball. This impressed the away officials and subs on the other side of the pitch, and they gave me a round of applause and a cheer. So, I stood up and bowed to them, for which they gave me another cheer! A minute before half time Kings Sutton equalised when from a deep free kick, the ball was headed in at the far post from close range. The visitors tried to insist that this was offside, but the goal stood, and I didn't see their lino stick up his flag to support this claim. As a whole the game was generally even. The football on show wasn't that exciting, but it was played without serious friction and was what you would expect from village football. Being a cup match and because the sides were level on 90 minutes, it went to spot kicks at the end, where the hosts prevailed. Man of the match? Me of course!

contributed on 03/10/23.

TT No.48: *Craig Dabbs* - Saturday 30th September 2023; **Stopsley United** v Stotfold Junior; Bedfordshire County League Division Two South; Venue: Stockwood Park Athletics Centre; Result: 6-2; Admission: Free; Programme: did not issue; Attendance: 5

At the start of the season, I had a message from Stopsley United Football Club telling me that they had moved into the Athletics track at Stockwood Park. From a personal perspective this was great news as it was a fairly local ground that doesn't normally stage men's football. The truth was I had seen Luton Town Ladies here, but I was keen on getting it ticked for a men's game at my first opportunity.

The last time I saw Stopsley United was on the now defunct Bedfordshire County League Hop. They were playing matches at Luton Sixth Form College, and this was back in 2019.

Stockwood Park Athletics Centre is one of the better grounds in the league by virtue of its enclosed nature and the fact it has just over two hundred seats although they are uncovered. For the record there is another tiny, benched area on the same side as the bleachers but further down in the corner. If you sit down, you are some way from the action but the view is good. However, no one seems to mind if you ignore the signage not to encroach onto the track and go and watch pitch side.

The track was first opened in 1965 and refurbished in 2010. It's home to Luton United AC first and foremost although there is also a gym on site as well. The track sits in one corner of the much larger green space that is Stockwood Park on the edge of Luton and if you are a plane enthusiast then there is no shortage of those as it sits under the flightpath to London Luton.

The match started slowly, cagey somewhat but livened up no end after Stopsley took control of proceedings. Stotfold Junior never gave up really until the fifth goal went in, and it was at this point that they realised it was a bridge too far.

contributed (via Brian Buck) on 01//10/23

TT No.47: *Steve Hardy* - Saturday 30th September 2023; **Woodlands WMC** v Shilton; Coventry Alliance Division Two; Result: 5-0; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 2 H/C

Woodlands WMC used to play at Bedworth United's ground but have now decamped to Nuneaton and the Nuneaton Academy School. The school has one 3G pitch in a cage and a grass pitch away in the distance which may or may not belong to them. A very early season table shows both clubs in the middle, but visitors Shilton would have seen this match as a chance to move up a bit.

The game started very brightly with Shilton the better side for the first 15 minutes or so, but that was as good as it got for them. WMC scored their first on 24 minutes, followed by a second on 30 minutes (or did they?). A shot was gathered on the line by the Shilton keeper and WMC turned away celebrating as they

thought the ball had been over the line. The Referee said he hadn't seen it and relied on the Shilton linesman who, not surprisingly, said it hadn't. From my view behind the goal, I thought it was well over the line, and so did the WMC Manager who went off to remonstrate with the Referee. Luckily for him the Shilton Manager told him not to do anything stupid which was good advice well taken.

It didn't make any difference though as WMC soon scored a second and then a 3rd on 44 minutes. More controversy ensued after this 3rd goal as a shot went in via a post and the Shilton linesman again said it hadn't gone in. Luckily the Ref had seen it this time and the goal stood. 3-0 at the break then.

The half time Shilton team talk consisted of the Manager telling his team it was no good blaming the Ref as they had been terrible and needed to buck their ideas up.

They obviously didn't heed his warning though as WMC scored a 4th after just 3 minutes of the second half and a 5th near the end for a well-deserved win.

Once again Sarah Satnav got her knickers in a twist with all sorts of directions which I ignored. I am wondering if it might be time for her to retire.

contributed on 01/10/23

TT No.46: Jon T Green - Saturday 23rd September 2023; **FOLLAND SPORTS v** Ringwood Town; Wessex Football League - Division One; Venue: King's Avenue (The Arrow Arena); Result: 4-5; Admission: £6; Programme: online only; Attendance: 44

With twenty minutes of the opening half played full back Charlie Hinton moved smoothly onto a through ball from Freeman Nyakumbi and with nonchalant ease rolled his shot beyond Alfie Rogers to put the home side three up. Never one to be short of an opinion I confidently announced "that's game over then". Wrong, wrong, wrong.

After last season's Friday night visit here had been rudely curtailed by an afternoon of torrential rain, it was on a sunny (if slightly chilly) morning, that I returned to King's Avenue. The ground now seems to have been re-styled; The Arrow Arena, which perhaps has more to do with the bright red aircraft proudly on display rather than some spurious sponsorship deal. It's a multi sports facility with cricket, additional football pitches and a beautifully maintained bowls club all served by a large club house and function room. As is befitting for the works side of an aeronautics company, the team was founded as Folland Aircraft back in the 1930's. There has been a slew of name changes since then with GE Hamble being the most recent until they reverted to their current title which had last been used back in 1948. The white painted turnstile block enters you by the corner flag with a large conifer hedge behind the goal to your left and all of the covered areas along the near touchline. There is a well-stocked tea bar here before you reach a small, covered stand containing two rows of terracing and, somewhat strangely, just four pale blue seats. Further along is the main stand, a long low corrugated metal structure with two rows of wooden benches for the populace and two smaller sections of red bucket seats reserved specifically for "home and away directors and press". Feeling that I didn't qualify on either account, I went and leant against the white rail which encloses the pitch.

The visitors from Ringwood Town actually made a decent start to the game although sadly for them that good beginning only lasted four minutes. A lax defensive pass was intercepted by centre forward Ryan Long who beat Rogers with a well struck 20-yarder. Long, who was something of a Matt Hancock look-a-like, had the ball in the net again shortly afterwards as Ben Taylor's shot bounced awkwardly off the bumpy pitch and was spilled by Rogers. Luckily for the 'keeper, the linesman, who was involved in a running commentary with the crowd, raised his flag for offside. Long wasn't to be denied a second and, after battling to gain possession on the left wing, he held off the challenge of a defender to score at the near post. With Hinton adding the third there seemed no way back for Ringwood and, even when they did create a rare opportunity, Ben Bradwell's clever lob drifted agonisingly wide. It was therefore a bit of a surprise when in stoppage time centre half Imani Harris converted from a corner. It was even more of a surprise when, less than a minute later, Bradwell headed in from Lyndon Taylor's corner. Not to be outdone Folland promptly went up the other end and extended their lead; Rogers might have done better with the high cross and, when the ball came loose, Freeman Nyakumbi took his time to score beyond the covering defenders.

After such a frenetic first 45 I was expecting a much quieter second half but once again I was totally wrong. Folland's Bryce Coates-Reid went on a marauding run ending with a curling shot which dipped narrowly over before Ringwood pulled one back. The home side half cleared a free kick and when the ball fell to Joshua Ridland he hit an unstoppable drive beyond Edas Juskelis. Within a couple of minutes, the scores were level as a long throw-in was scrambled home by Ethan Fishlock. The away side were now dominant and only a superb one handed save from Juskelis prevented Timo Gleed from giving them the lead. Juskelis was however powerless to stop Town from going ahead midway through the half as a long free kick found Gleed too strong for his marker and the striker, with a yard of space, made no mistake with a clinical finish. To say that Folland's "heads had gone" is something of an understatement and although Fabio Manual went close to an equaliser on the break it was Ringwood who controlled the finishing stages. Rounding off a torrid afternoon, Sports' captain Gedeon Matonga talked himself into a sin-binning for dissent and then earned a red card from referee Mr Prior for continuing to argue the point.

Setting the sat nav for home I was pleased to see I would be back by 9pm. Six hours later following horrendous traffic, a vehicle fire and a long road closure I finally made it - seems like it was just a day when I got everything wrong...

contributed on 26/09/23.

TT No.45: Brian Buck - Saturday 23rd September 2023; **Weeting Saxon v Docking Rangers Reserves**; North West Norfolk League Division 2; Result: 4-2; Attendance: 30 approx.

If you care to use public transport then the recreation ground in the pleasant village of Weeting can be found about a mile and a quarter's walk north from Brandon railway station, which is on the Ely to Norwich line. But after confirming the game with the enthusiastic secretary earlier in the day, I elected to drive to

the game and I arrived here about half an hour before kick-off, to find the place buzzing, even though there are no spectator facilities on site, merely changing rooms, although, there is a pub just a few yards way.

The club are currently on a high, having won the league cup last season and reaching the semi-final of the Norfolk Primary Cup. They also have a thriving youth section and in particular the girls are doing well. Saxons were top of the league, having a 100% record after three games with enthusiasm high to make it four wins today. I watched the game, sitting in my garden chair in the shade on the far side of the pitch, which I generally had to myself throughout the whole match, which was lovely.

So, on a long narrow pitch, it didn't take them long to get going and they opened the scoring on 7 minutes, through their number 10 who scored with a 20 yarder, which curled away from the keeper as it entered the net. Thereafter everything he did in this half seemed to go wrong and he could be frequently heard apologising. His lack of mobility was a problem for him as well. Luckily his partner up front was more like a greyhound in comparison and made up for his deficiency. Then on 26 minutes the hosts had a setback when the rotund referee, looking like a member of the Mafia in his sunglasses, awarded the visitors a spot kick for a barge off the ball, which was converted. By the end of the half Weeting were the better side, but not by much.

On 49 minutes Weeting were given a spot kick for handball, but number 10 took it and as I suspected, his shot was saved. But soon I was made to eat my words as on 56 minutes, he put his side back into the lead with a fine shot from the edge of the area. Furthermore, he completed his hattrick on 69 minutes from about 8 yards out. He was then subbed six minutes later. On 87 minutes his partner, still full of energy, made 50 yard run up the right wing, easily out pacing his marker, before squaring the ball to a teammate, who easily scored from close range. Then on 90 minutes Docking scored with a shot from the edge of the area. The ref then played 9 minutes of added on time, with roughly equated to the amount of time he had spent talking to the players during the half, some of which came after he changed his mind when he gave a 'soft' free kick to Weeting, before being told that it was obviously in the area, which he hadn't realised! To get around this he moved the position of the free kick to just outside the area. At the end of the game the Weeting number 10 came and spoke to me. It turned out that he was their secretary, who I spoke to earlier in the day! Overall, I really enjoyed myself here. The match was played without friction in front of happy, but not overpowering, enthusiastic locals and even one Docking player thanked me for coming. This was my kind of football, and I thoroughly enjoyed it.

contributed on 26/09/23.

TT No.44: Steve Hardy - Saturday 23rd September 2023; **FC Sunnyhill** v **Burton Hornets**; Central Midlands Alliance Macron Store Nottingham Division South; Result: 1-4; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 5 H/C.

This week's fix was to another of the former Midland Regional Alliance clubs who opted to join the CML when the two leagues merged. FC Sunnyhill are based to the south of Derby in an area called.... wait for it...Sunny Hill!

The ground is very basic with just a pitch marked out in the middle of Caxton Park which is behind the Sunny Hill Community Centre. The Community Centre was open all afternoon catering firstly for a Mothers and Toddlers' group, and then for the 5 of us watching the footie, and very welcome it was too.

Visitors today were Burton Hornets who were the club I visited a few weeks ago. On that occasion they tried hard but to no avail, so I was keen to see whether they had improved at all.

When they scored twice in the first 6 minutes it looked as if they had, but a goal conceded two minutes later put Sunnyhill right back in the game. Even the sin binning of one of their players made no difference and just before half time they looked to have got their deserved reward when they won a penalty. It was put away with aplomb and everyone was shocked to see the referee disallow the goal and give Hornets a free kick from the same spot. Uproar from the home bench but the Ref wouldn't tell anyone why he had disallowed the goal.

After half time it was a more even contest with Burton scoring two more on the break to record their deserved first win of the season.

A quick dash home meant I was in time for the first episode of Strictly too, so what's not to love about today (apart from events at Bloomfield Park, of course).

contributed on 24/09/23.

TT No.43: Keith Aslan - Saturday 23rd September 2023; **ABERCARN UNITED** v Risca; Ardal South East; Kick Off: 14.33; Result 1-1; Admission: £4 for old and young alike; Programme: £1; Attendance: 109 (74 home, 34 away & 1 neutral

Due to a previous engagement, I was unable to attend the Welsh Hop this weekend which must have taken some of the magic out of it, but as a small consolation to my fans I decided to venture into principality anyway so they wouldn't be too far away from me.

And what better than a full-blooded local derby with the towns/villages of Abercarn and Risca just three miles apart deep in the valleys. Frequent buses from outside Newport Gorsaf, or station as we call it in England. Get off at the 'Swan' before you come in to Abercarn and the ground is an eight-minute walk away. I would imagine it's a bit of a slog from the town centre. Being in a foreign country my bus pass (that I got six years after everybody else) cuts no ice and the return fare was a ludicrous £7.80p. That's the way to encourage people onto buses, eh? The new 20 mile an hour speed limit in Wales seems to have gone off without a hitch with everybody just ignoring it. The bus passed all the matrix speed indicators at between 25 and 29 miles an hour and if buses ever did keep to the new limits the timetables would all have to be reconfigured.

Entrants to the Ardal League this season Abercarn have been busy, with a brand-new offering from *Atcost* on the halfway line. A wooden shack in one corner sells teas and coffees on a good day. Today wasn't, no hot water. Tightly enclosed, railed on three sides with the fourth out of bounds, the scenery is what makes this a wonderful venue, with afforested mountains surrounding the ground making a truly inspiring back drop to the match. There appears to be the beginnings of a small housing estate being built behind the goal. If the club have any ambitions of getting floodlights, they don't want to hang about with the planning application before people start moving in to the houses and moaning about a football club on their doorstep which they failed to notice when buying the property.

A corker of a game with the honours eventually shared thanks to Abercarn's 98th! minute equalizer. The Ref and his assistants were all miked up, a bit over the top for this level, and one of the linesmen was even older than me, but with considerably more mobility. The changing rooms are a huge distance from the rest of the ground and while the officials and Risca stayed out on the pitch throughout, Abercarn insisted on going backwards and forwards. After their pre. match cone dodging exercises, off they went, coming back 2 minutes before kick-off. Instead of starting a game of football they began running round cones again (why?) before gathering together and tipping large quantities of water down their throats, presumably to replace the fluids lost on the long walk from the dressing rooms. A homo-erotic cuddle concluded their pre match preparations. They returned to the changing rooms again at half time (what do they do in there?) keeping everybody waiting to start the second half.

Top quality day out, with the football matching the scenery. And special thanks go to all of the drivers who made a special effort to run the trains on time before their mass awayday next Saturday.

contributed on 24/09/23.

TT No.42: *Brian Buck* - Saturday 16th September 2023; **Tring Athletic v Sawbridgeworth Town**; Spartan South Midlands League Premier Division; Result: 4-0; Attendance: 78.

After a good night out the previous evening it all went downhill today. I was intending to watch Wendover play Stoke Mandeville in the Aylesbury & District League. *FA Full Time* stated that the game was being played at RAF Halton, a venue I hadn't previously been to. I tried to confirm the game with both clubs before I left home, but as I got no response, I took a chance and went for it. But on my arrival, there was nothing going on, so after failing to get a response from both clubs again when I rang them from pitch side, I went off to see the soldiers at the 'visitors centre' who were without their sub-machine guns! They told me where to go, nicely, but to cut a long story short, I still couldn't find the pitch. By now I would have missed over 15 minutes of this game, which was played, somewhere else and I needed time to get to my back up game. So, I abandoned that idea and headed off to Tring instead.

Here it was heaving with people and cars. There was something going on in the nearby Pendley Manor and more importantly, Tring Rugby club were at home as

well. They play on a pitch right behind the goal at a 90-degree angle. I got myself in the car park right on kick off time but struggled to find somewhere to park legally. In the end I parked illegally, one car's width from the turnstile. By now I had missed five minutes of the game and worse still, a goal. I put down a fiver on the gate, only to be told that it was 'card' only admission by the gateman. By this stage I'd had enough and fearing what my next move might be, I think that he sensed my displeasure and he let me in anyway. I then clambered up the stairs in this quaint homemade stand, which has been here seemingly ever since my first visit here, back in 1979.

From here you get a wonderful view, not only of proceedings, but also of the beautiful countryside the ground is set in and also, relevant today, a portion of the rugby match going on at the same time, which was being watched seemingly by a much larger crowd than for the football and who were making a lot more noise. Part of this was because the football wasn't that exciting.

Sawbo were very poor and despite their win today, Tring didn't look that much better. They got their second goal on 36 minutes after the scorer nudged a defender off the ball before shooting home through the keeper with a shot he could have done better to stop. The third goal arrived on 62 minutes and was scored from 8 yards out. I missed the fourth goal, because it coincided with a noisy try scoring moment in the rugby match and my eyes were drawn to watching that instead. Afterwards, I got stuck in a mini traffic jam trying to get away, which after the day I had, couldn't come quick enough. By the way, as I write, my two 'friends' from the previous match have yet to respond to the emails I sent them when I got home!

contributed on 19/09/23.

TT No.41: Brian Buck - Friday 15th September 2023; **Hertford Heath** v Bush Hill Rangers; Herts Senior County League Premier Division; Venue: played at St Margaretsbury; Result: 2-1; Attendance: 80 approx.

Because Hertford Heath's recreation ground in their village doesn't reach Step 7 requirements and from what I was told tonight, probably never will, this season they are groundsharing at nearby St Margaretsbury. Good news for groundhoppers is that they are issuing programmes this season which were (together with other merchandise) available on the gate. They are keen to play more Friday night matches, because they are better attended, and their landlords are keen to cash in on increased bar takings.

So it was that a lively, bordering on rowdy at times, crowd assembled for this encounter, although things never got out of hand either on or off the pitch. The visitors were the better side in the early exchanges and so when Heath opened the scoring on 18 minutes, it was against the run of play. The goal came from a 25 yards out direct free kick which went in off the crossbar. Ten minutes later they doubled their lead from the spot following a, what I call, an involuntary foul. Then on 42 minutes the experienced ref took a bit of a chance in not booking a visiting player for a bad foul. Just before the break Heath were awarded a second spot

kick, given for what I call a stupid foul, but this time the same taker blasted his shot over the bar.

After the break though the yellow card was brandished frequently and, in his haste, he accidentally dropped it while he was booking one player. The second half wasn't quite so exciting by comparison. Although Heath kept trying to move the ball forward, they were generally happy to hold with what they had, thus leaving Rangers to see more of the ball. So, they deserved their goal, which arrived on 81 minutes. It came from a short square pass, which was hit home cleanly with power with a first time shot from about 15 yards out, to end a decent night's football.

contributed on 19/09/23.

TT No.40: *Jon T Green* - Saturday 16th September 2023; **DOLGELLAU ATHLETIC** v Llanfair United; Ardal North East League; Venue: Cae Marian; Result: 1-2; Admission: £4; Programme: £1; Attendance: 80

It's a busy morning at Cae Marian; on the adjacent pitches the rugby union club are getting ready for their first match of the season whilst the cricket square is being prepared for one final hoorah. At the football ground vice chairman Glyn Roberts is putting the final touches to his pre-match preparations. Leaning against the pitch rail he explains some of the pitfalls of running a club in this part of the country "we're in the Snowdonia National Park so everything we do has to be approved by them. We wanted to put in a perimeter fence to make the ground more secure" he continues "and whilst we did get permission, they insisted on it being a particular shade of green. Not a problem for us but when you also have to get permission from the local council and the trustees (who legally own the pitch) it just means that things move very slowly. We're on a flood plain here so the fence had to be lifted to allow for water to flow through. We installed a hut for our public address system and even that had to be raised". Glyn scrolls through his phone and shows me pictures of last March when the ground was underwater. "It can rain on a Friday and by Saturday morning we are totally flooded" he explains "the drainage is pretty good, and it does all drain away quite quickly but postponements are a problem. We want to buy a machine to help aerate the pitch to help with that but it all costs money...". I ask about the smart grandstand which provides the only shelter at the ground. "It was originally a covered terrace" Glyn says "but to meet Tier 2 grading requirements we converted it to seating. The steps needed re-aligning because they weren't wide enough to take the seats." I ask if there is a clubhouse, "unfortunately not" he replies "the rugby club have one, but we have our post-match food at a pub in town. There is a burger van which opens during the game so you can get a hot drink and something to eat. It's a source of extra revenue for us."

I let Glyn return to his duties and take a walk around the ground, the pitch is railed off on all four sides (save for a couple of small areas in the far corners) with hard standing along the car park end and at both sides of the grandstand. The yellow seats in the stand contrast vividly with the dark green metal work and provide a much-needed splash of colour on what is becoming an increasingly grey

day. A stone wall and a couple of fine mature trees add to what is already a very picturesque location.

Today is reserved for the Welsh Cup so, although these two teams only met a fortnight ago when they shared four goals, they face each again in a re-arranged fixture. Neither side has started the season particularly well and sit at the wrong end of the table. In his programme notes manager Rob Evans says that “we mustn’t make a habit of conceding late goals”, they turn out to be sadly prophetic words...The home side start well enough with full back Harri Davies sliding a perfect pass through to Paul Lewis. The striker can’t get it out of his feet though and only succeeds in hitting the side netting. It’s a scenario which will play out all afternoon. With just eight minutes on the clock the visitors go ahead, Karl Seliarts takes a corner from the right and when the ball comes back to him, he absolutely smashes it into the bottom corner. It takes Dolgellau a few minutes to regain their composure but when Ioan Roberts hurtles down the wing ‘keeper Lee Andrew is forced into using his feet to keep out a fierce strike from Gerwyn Williams. Williams then tries his luck again and there follows a big shout for a penalty which referee Mr. Colin Dukes waves away. The official is having a good game and shows a ribald sense of humour “I’ll referee, you can do it when you retire” he tells one home player after awarding a free kick. The scores are level mid-way through the half and it’s one of those goals which Llanfair’s Rhys Stephens will want to forget; the centre half finds himself under pressure and instead of “putting it in to row Z” he turns inside and plays a blind pass. Williams seizes on the loose ball and drills his shot beyond Andrew. Dolgellau are on top now but most of the chances are falling to Lewis. The big man is working incredibly hard and showing some nice touches but in front of goal he sadly couldn’t hit a cow’s arse with a banjo as the saying goes.

With half time having been reached with no further score Llanfair start the second period looking the livelier. It’s increasingly a game of few chances and not until the 70th minute do we get any real excitement; Kyle Capner works his way down the left wing, beats his man and finds Sam Jones. The striker’s shot is blocked and when the rebound falls to Tielo Gittins-Turner he can’t convert the opportunity. United go even closer a few moments later as following a free kick, rather controversially awarded for a deliberate back pass, Capner sees his shot from just six yards deflected onto the outside of the post. The match looks destined for a fair draw but with the ninety minutes up Llanfair find a winner; there seems to be no immediate danger as Capner receives the ball on the edge of the area, but he creates a yard of space and, despite Tyler Andrews getting a hand to the ball, he can’t stop it from clipping the base of the post and going in. It’s perhaps an unjust victory in a closely contested game but as I am sure manager Evans reminded his team afterwards “we mustn’t make a habit of conceding late goals” ...

contributed on 18/09/23.

TT No.39: Steve Hardy - Saturday September 16th 2023; **Hopwood Swifts** v Sutton United; Birmingham & District League - Division 4; Result: 1-0; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance 5 h/c

What a day! Just what my anxiety problems don't need. My plan was to go to the wonderfully named Rubery to watch Hopwood Swifts at their new 3G ground somewhere near B45 9WA.

With Sarah Satnav in hospital having her tonsils out, I was given a courtesy car by my garage and set off at 1.00pm for a 2.30pm start. That was as good as it got though. Once again, the M6 was standing traffic all the way down to the M5 turn off, thanks to a broken-down car transporter in lane 2. It took an hour to drive what should have taken 15 minutes, but mercifully I finally made it on to M5 and was able to put my foot down for a while. What I hadn't noticed, however, was that the courtesy car didn't have a Satnav and I couldn't remember which junction I needed to turn off the M5 onto.

I pulled into a service station to ring home and ask my long-suffering partner to give me the final directions which she did, and I finally reached to postcode location ten minutes after kick-off. Even then my suffering wasn't over as the ground was clearly nowhere near the postcode. Driving aimlessly around the area, I eventually heard some obvious sounds of football players shouting and was able to follow them into the ground.

So, was it worth it? Most definitely it was. The game was an end-to-end encounter with both teams attacking at every opportunity. As the game went on, and with still no goals scored, I reckoned a 0-0 draw would have been the fairest result. Hopwood finally broke the deadlock right near the end though substitute Jerome Minto-Crosdale to leave Sutton C shattered.

All that remained then was a satnav-less trip home which went by with no issues, and I was back in 25 minutes.

contributed on 18/09/23.

TT No.38: Keith Aslan - Saturday 16th September 2023; **NOTTS OLYMPIC** v Buyglass.co Reindeer (really); Notts Senior Division 2; Kick Off: 15.02; Result: 3-7; Admission: Free; Programme: £2; Attendance: 51 (34 home, 0 away & 17 neutral.)

Notts Olympic have a long and illustrious history, early entrants in the FA Cup, they were founded in 1882, and have been going ever since apart from a brief stoppage for the first world war between 1914 and 2023. This was their first home game for 109 years, and they and the league weren't going to let this milestone pass without due recognition. Football's coming home - except it isn't, as they don't actually play in Notts, their ground is in Derbyshire.

The gallows Inn playing fields are in Ilkeston, and although the place acquired a station in 2018, it's in the wrong place for this one. Easy to do though, with buses from either Nottingham or Long Eaton. I chose the Nottingham option, with 'The Two' offering a frequent service to outside the ground. Its 'My5' you want from Long Eaton. Took time out to wander around Nottingham, one of my favourite places, and it was apparently 'Christian Day' in the city. I had a leaflet stuffed into my hand accompanied by the words 'God loves you'. Not that much he doesn't, or he'd never have allowed railway privatization to happen.

Outside the changing rooms a table was set up offering hot and cold drinks and sweeties, while next to that was Notts League supremo Rob Hornby selling programmes and badges. Like myself, Rob is one of football's nice guys and it's always a pleasure to chat with him. The match was played on a pitch without any markings. There were obviously some at some stage last season, but the white stuff had long since been washed away. Cones were laid along the sides of the pitch to indicate the playing dimensions, but with no visible halfway line or penalty areas it was up to the referee to imagine where they might have been. Talk about 'jumpers for goalposts'. If Notts are intending to make this their permanent home, I think a phone call to the council might be a good move.

There are some public toilets at the entrance to the ground, always a welcome sight at my age, but there is a notice saying they will be closing permanently at the end of the month so not much time left if you want to take in some bladder action. The Gallows Inn across the road, after which the ground is named, doesn't look much from the outside, or the inside come to that, but it served the cheapest pint I've had all year, and the barmaid smiled at me, so all good.

The programme was a thing of beauty, a collaboration between Rob and the club. Lots of history (I like history) and old photographs, a cracking read. I particularly enjoyed Rob Hornby's brief piece on himself. He's had a much harder life than I have. In case you are wondering at the opposition's strange name, it comes from their two sponsors, Buygalss.co. and the Reindeer pub.

The programme brought out the Travellers with three separate Ground hop organizers present, and more importantly, legendary Scottish hopper Doctor John. Now would have been a good time to have my heart attack. Chris Berazai was heartbroken that I won't be going on next week's Welsh Groundhop. Well, he was either heartbroken or indifferent, difficult to tell.

Plenty to enjoy in this match providing quality isn't your main criteria. Reindeer were much the better side, 2-1 up at the break, it became 4-1 soon after. Then a big surprise as Notts unexpectedly pulled a couple back to make it 4-3. The comeback was short lived, and it became 6-3 soon after. Then Notts hit the post twice so who knows what would have happened if they'd gone in. They didn't and Reindeer got a 7th in the last minute. With a four-goal difference the referee bought common sense into play and decided 90 minutes was enough, and he ended the match spot on time. A wonderful experience for players and spectators alike, I can't remember the last time I saw a 45-minute second half, well done Mr. Referee. With the teams not going off at half time the match finished at 4.44. A glorious throwback to the good old days of proper football. Mention must also be made of Reindeer's Shae O'Rourke. A teenager, no more than 5 foot 7, he has the longest throw I've ever seen (and I was bought up watching Ian Hutchinson). He consistently launched the ball well beyond the far post, and his throw ins were considerably more dangerous than corners.

Train watch: For the first time in a month the High-speed line to London was open. 11 minutes late into Nottingham, 13 minutes late coming back to St. Pancras which transformed into an hour later back home. Or, as it turned out, an hour and ten

minutes as that train was delayed as well. Four trains taken, three couldn't make it to within 10 minutes of the timetable. I suppose these days I should be grateful there were any trains at all.

contributed on 17/09/23.

TT No.37: Brian Buck - Saturday 9th September 2023; **Malvern Town** v Mousehole; Isuzo FA Trophy 1st Qualifying Round; Result: 2-4; Attendance: 298 (looked a lot less to me!).

Gratefully relying on my chauffeur once more, this was my third appearance here over the years, with the other two games coming in the club's West Midland (Regional) League Premier Division days. My first visit was on Saturday 16th May 1981, when they lost 2-0 to Halesowen Town, in the days when I didn't have a car and more bizarrely my second visit came on Friday 26th April 1985, a 1-1 draw with Rushall Olympic, in the days when I did have a car, but it's hard to believe that I drove to this game as I was at Curzon Ashton next day.

Today, it was a long cross-country drive to get to the ground, but at least we shaved off some miles. My driver was booked in to meet a local friend in a pub in Malvern Link before the start and it was while we were in here, we learned that the kick off for our game had been put back by half an hour as apparently Mousehole had been delayed by an accident on their 250 miles long journey to the match, although they still arrived at the ground 45 minutes before kick off!

The hosts play at the HDanywhere Community Stadium, which seemed a bit strange as they were clearly playing somewhere! I could still remember parts of the set-up from my previous visits here in the 1980's, notably the main (only) stand which must have been built by the same people who designed the main stand at Luton Town, as viewing from it was poor. Otherwise, it had been tarted up a bit and with the provision of a 3G pitch, it looked quite smart.

On the field of play the first half belonged to the visitors, who deservedly took the lead on 30 minutes when a loose ball was successfully dispatched home. Just before then though, Malvern missed a good chance to take the lead. Mousehole doubled their lead on 48 minutes when the ball was clipped over the keeper from the edge of the area. This seemed to signal game over, but on 53 minutes the hosts pulled a goal back from the spot after the ref, who was seemingly giving free kicks and yellow cards for almost anything, decided that sufficient contact had been made here. Suddenly Malvern came alive and on 60 minutes they equalised when a rebound from a blocked shot was forced home. But then on 81 minutes disaster struck the hosts, when from a cross into the box saw a defender get enough of a touch on it to divert the ball past his own keeper and then, in added on time the offside trap was beaten to allow the fourth goal to come. Overall, a deserved win for the visitors with just a tinge of sympathy for the hosts, whom I have still not seen win at home! At the end I and the person I was sitting next to in the second half, belatedly discovered that we had something in common, as although we had never met before, in our time we have both been regular contributors to the *Football Traveller* magazine!

contributed on 13/09/23.

TT No.36: Craig Dabbs - Saturday 9th September 2023; **Louth Town** v Brigg Town; Northern Counties East League Division One; Venue: Marshlands; Result: 2-2l Admission: £5; Programme: 20pp, £1.50; Attendance: 114.

It seemed to take ages to get to Saltfleetby which is seven miles outside Louth in the direction of the Netherlands, because it did. Lincolnshire isn't a county full of fast roads and so some two and a half hours after setting off we arrived at the newish home of Louth Town.

The club were formed after the decision of the previous club Louth United not to carry on playing football. The new entity took on the former Park Avenue home despite it having already been sold and managed to stay there until 2016 when they were blocked by the landlord. With that they dropped into the Lincolnshire League and moved in the direction of mainland Europe to Saltfleetby, a small village close to the North Sea coast.

Although the Park Avenue ground was burned down you can still easily work out where the ground once stood on the site now used as a new housing development. Interestingly, one of the pylons remain as it also carries various communication antenna, the floodlight bulbs also remain in situ.

The new ground is very much still a work in progress. Its footprint is a little tight with no access to spectators on the dugout side. There is a further pitch at the far end and a very smart clubhouse which is connected to the village hall at the Main Road end. This end provided the only cover on the ground from the hangover off the clubhouse until yesterday that is when the new 50 seat kit stand arrived.

One point of note today was despite arriving at 1330 for a 1500 kick off, just six programmes remained and were sold out shortly after I walked through. I'm told they print just 20, so if like me it's important then to get there early to avoid disappointment.

contributed (via Brian Buck) on 10/09/23.

TT No.35: Keith Aslan - Saturday 9th September 2023; **BRADENHAM & MATTISHALL** v Loddon United; Anglian Combination Division 1; Kick Off: 14.31; Result 1-5; Admission and programme: a paltry £2; Attendance: 30 (23 home, 3 away & 4 neutral).

Three weeks without trains, so what do those evil monsters at Railtrack do to celebrate their return - they shut the high-speed line to London. So, today's outing was top and tailed with a slow, enervating ride along the Kent coast. It does make me cross.

All previous plans were scrapped when My Friend in the North begged me to accompany him to Bradenham. He didn't quite phrase it like that, but I'm sure those were his sentiments. Anyway, that's how I found myself standing on a roundabout on the outskirts of Kings Lynn waiting for the 'Stockport Express'.

Bradenham is impossible to do by public transport, the last time the place saw any buses they were being driven by horses. Difficult to find on a map, it's best described as 'in the middle of Norfolk' and 18 miles west of Norwich, the nearest place anybody will have heard of. Apart from the football club there's nothing there but it does have a mobile post office that sets up in the village hall on a Tuesday between 10.30 and 11.30!

Bradenham & Mattishall is a perfect example of why I do what I do with very friendly locals. The pitch is railed on three sides and surrounded by a thick hedge, the fourth side contains the changing rooms and the clubhouse which provided welcome respite from the intense heat. A proper village club. And in these inflationary times, £2 for a couple of hours football and a programme is a great deal. It's a pity a few more locals don't come out to support them, there isn't anything else to do in the village.

Last season Bradenham Wanderers amalgamated with Mattishall and inventively renamed themselves as Bradenham & Mattishall. Not a ravishing success playing-wise, relegation last season with a torrid start to this one, and on this afternoon they were never close to getting their first win of the season.

The weather was scorchio and one of the few games I've been to where the temperature was higher than the attendance. So, we had the obligatory drinks break, something footballers had managed to forego for over 100 years without suffering any ill effects. There was a symmetry to the two stoppages, both lasted around 3 minutes 20 seconds. How is it possible to spin out taking a drink of water for so long? Well, it does if you include an impromptu team talk. Both teams came off the pitch and had a little chat either side of the dugouts. I was standing in the middle listening to them, and it was all a load of timewasting rubbish. The referee, who must have gone back to school this week at the end of his summer holidays, had a very good game, but with the temperature well into the thirties and the score 5-1, how on earth did he think it was a good idea to add six minutes onto the end of the match. Is there a rule I don't know about that says halves of football must go on for longer than 45 minutes.

In spite of the worst efforts of the railways, days out don't come much better than this.

contributed on 10/09/23.

TT No.34: Jon T Green - Friday 1st September 2023; **APPLEBY FRODINGHAM** v Brigg Town Development; Lincolnshire Football League; Venue: Brumby Hall; Result: 4-1; Admission: £3; Programme: No; Attendance: 150

Now I'm not normally geographically challenged (although those poor unfortunates who I once drove to Crystal Palace might beg to differ) but I could have sworn that Appleby Frodingham should be a pretty twee little village in Somerset. So, imagine my surprise when it turned out to be in Scunthorpe. Not that I am in any way maligning the town but sweeping views of the Quantocks were rather replaced by a close up of the steel plant. Looking on the bright side I did find a superb greasy spoon cafe a mere stone's throw from the works entrance where for the princely

sum of £7, I had a monster breakfast with all the trimmings and a cuppa thrown in for good measure - you simply can't beat that.

Frod (as the club sensibly call themselves) play at a very well-appointed venue a little over a mile from the town centre. Leaving the main road, you head past 'The Pods' (Eden Project style domed buildings housing a sports centre) and onward towards the sprawling Central Park, an attractive area with fountains and a number of grass pitches. The social club, of which more later, is known as Appleby Frodingham Works Athletic Club but the football ground goes under the name of Brumby Hall. Situated beside a bowling green and an immaculate cricket club Frod's home is a cut above many of the venues in the Lincolnshire League. This is undoubtedly due to almost two decades of football played in the Northern Counties East and Central Midlands leagues. Seated accommodation is provided by the Dick Drury Stand - a fairly typical pre-fabricated affair containing 34 faded red seats. Beneath the overhang of the social club roof is a fine wide terrace and, although situated immediately behind the dug outs, the view from here is still very good. Changing rooms and a few wooden benches are located at the rear. Of note is the fine brick wall with the letters AFFC woven into it with the same motif decorating wrought iron gates set between the two benches. A white rail surrounds three sides of the playing surface, there being no room for spectators at the cricket ground end. The far side is a narrow standing area in front of a mature privet hedge; there is nothing especially remarkable here save for a small wooden sentry box style "stand". It's obviously not a stand, as at a push it's barely two persons wide, but the small shelf hidden inside was made use of by some fans as a place to stand their pre-match pints.

You can't read too much into the league table at this stage of the season with Frod having won their solitary fixture whilst Brigg have been beaten in three of their four matches. In front of a healthy Friday night crowd, it was the home side who were immediately into their stride with captain Clay Bryant seeing his ferocious drive crash into the defensive wall. Dayle Hutson then found room down the left flank, his cross reaching Lewes Graham who created a yard of space but under pressure pulled his shot wide. For Brigg - their hugely impressive centre forward Kurt Gollings was ploughing something of a loan furrow up front, but he did create a half chance before lifting his effort over the bar. With a little over half an hour played Frod had a string of chances in quick succession; Hutson saw his drive deflected away for a corner, Ben Johnson tried from 20 yards and then Matthew Steeper drew a great save from Gareth Johnson. It's as close as they came, the break was reached with the match still goalless.

At half time I discover the delights of the tea hut and return to my viewing point with a delicious cheese toastie (yes, I do know that I had a fry up earlier in the day, but it was turning into a chilly evening, and I needed something warm!). With the toastie demolished and play back under way Brigg enjoyed their best spell of the night; naturally Gollings was the man involved and his near post effort was smartly dealt with by Josh Thompson. I was just beginning to think that Town might hang on for an unlikely point when Frod scored; Steeper sent in a teasing centre and Tom Garner clinically finished. Twenty minutes remained when they added a second; a cross from the left was only helped on by a Brigg defender and

Bryant beat Johnson at his near post. The visitors were now seriously wobbling, and Graham added a third, nipping into score as Johnson was left exposed by his defence. Things might have got worse for Brigg but their 'keeper pulled off a great penalty save from Hutson after the same player had been brought down. Hutson then struck the post but, in a lightening break, the ball was moved downfield and Gollings converted the easiest of chances; it was just reward for a selfless performance. Frod did end the evening on a high though as substitute Nath Watson out sprinted a tiring defence and hammered a shot beyond the unfortunate Johnson. At the final whistle a Brigg supporter said to his mate "that's a fair result, they were miles better", and it's difficult to argue with that assessment.

On the way out I headed up the metal stairs to the sports club. To say that it's not your normal run of the mill venue is something of an understatement; a large function room overlooking the pitch, a long well stocked bar, comfortable leather chairs and a huge snooker room. There may have been more, but I'd heard a rumour that there was a good local chippy and I was keen to investigate...

contributed on 06/09/23.

TT No.33: Brian Buck - Saturday 2nd September 2023; **Milton Keynes City** v Newport Pagnell Athletic Reserves; North Bucks & District League Intermediate Division; Result: 3-2; Attendance: 20 approx.

Today I ventured into Milton Keynes, a city famous for its football teams coming and going and for changing their names and sometimes their playing venues. I'd seen a 'Milton Keynes City' team play a home game before, at the old Wolverton Town ground, the last occasion being on 12 July 2001, against Northampton Town, in front of a crowd of about 700. This side was formerly known as Mercedes Benz. But at the end of the 2002/3 season, they left the Spartan South Midlands League and folded. However, at the same time there was already a separate club, called Milton Keynes City Youth in existence. They were formed in 1986 and have kept going. Three years ago, they entered a side in the North Bucks League, but I only recently noticed this because they now play at a venue I hadn't visited before until today.

On *Full-Time* this is stated as being at Derwent Drive, Bletchley, but only the club's youth teams play here. The correct address is, thanks to the visitors *Twitter* account, Tattenhoe Lane, Bletchley, which backs onto the other site. So, if you went to Derwent Drive you could easily be led to believe that the game was off.

Anyway, I rolled up here about half an hour before kick-off and it soon became obvious that I was at the right place, as the clubs' logo was visible all over the clubhouse, which also contains a bar. Outside in the car park there was also a mobile food van, but although it was open, I didn't see anyone buying stuff from it. In fact, the absence of people was part of the problem today. The club is all geared up to move forwards, but the locals don't seem to have bought into it yet. So, with a few exceptions, the crowd was mainly made up of members of the players' families, and their bemused very young children.

The game was played out down a gentle dip, a short walk from the dressing rooms and so I had a slightly elevated view of proceedings. In the first half the visitors were generally by far the better side, although the home keeper did pull off some brilliant stops. However, he couldn't prevent Pagnell from opening the scoring on 10 minutes following a blocked shot. But City started the second half well and on 50 minutes they equalised with a shot from the edge of the area. But on 69 minutes Pagnell retook the lead with an angled shot which although the keeper got a hand to it, may have been already over the line, when another player made sure. But thinking that they had the game won now, they were shocked when City equalised on 81 minutes when from a deep ball in the ball was stabbed home from 6 yards out and even further shocked when the hosts grabbed the winner on 90(+2) minutes when the scorer ran on to place the ball home from the edge of the area. Obviously, they had been conserving their energy!

contributed on 05/09/23.

TT No.32: Craig Dabbs - Saturday 2nd September 2023; **Holt United** v Sprowston; Anglian Combination Mummery Cup First Round; Venue: Holt Sports Centre; Result: 0-1; Admission: £2; Programme: 20pp, free; Attendance: 57

The Anglian Combination isn't short when it comes to hidden gems and the Holt Sports Centre is certainly one of them.

Opened in 1986, it isn't what you imagine when you see the words "Sports Centre". The main building contains the clubhouse and changing rooms along with a tea bar, all very standard, no Olympic size pool in here at all. All the activities are based outside on the Kelling Road Playing Field with the Bowls club situated at the side.

Holt United are blessed with a partially railed pitch (down either side), a decent sized brick covered standing area and lights which is more than you would expect at nominal step 8. But it doesn't stop there as the reserve pitch also has its own more modest cover too.

Based on that I had to ask the question regarding the club and their ambition playing in the Eastern Counties League. The answer was they are quite happy as they are for now, but they did go on to say the site was too small for the club's needs now as Holt United has many junior sides as well as the development team who were also at home today.

The Mummery Cup is the senior knock out cup within the league and today's game saw top of Division One Holt take on Premier side Sprowston. It made for an entertaining match but overall, there was little to choose between the sides and for all the world it looked like it would end 0-0 and penalties before the Boars snuck one away mid-way through the second half to progress.

contributed (via Brian Buck) on 03/09/23.

TT No.31: Craig Dabbs - Monday 28th August 2023; **Abbey Hey** v Ashville; North West Counties League First Division South; Venue: The Abbey Stadium; Result: 2-2; Admission: £6; Programme: 32pp, £2; Attendance: 165

My day started with a trip to the National Speedway Stadium for Belle Vue 61 Leicester 29. It would've been crazy to go straight home afterwards considering The Abbey Stadium is only 1.5 miles away and I hadn't been there before. Thankfully, the Speedway was done and dusted by 13.30.

The ground is situated amongst some houses in the Gorton area of Manchester. It's been the club's home since 1984 and is a modest set up with the one stand containing bench seating on each flank with covered standing in the middle. The clubhouse opposite sits upstairs above the changing rooms and tea bar below. Like I said, it's a modest but perfectly acceptable set-up for step 6 with bags of space for when they need to develop further.

Abbey Hey are going well in the league at the moment, sitting in second place in the table. Today's game didn't disappoint against some strong opposition. It was Ashville who took an early lead before losing a man to a red card which meant a real 'backs to the wall' effort to stay in front. Eventually they succumbed to an own goal scored just before half time.

The second half was shaping up to be a rout but another red card and penalty, this time in Ashville's favour, balanced it all out again with both teams now down to ten men. The hosts drew level once again scoring ten minutes later and really put Ashville under extreme pressure but couldn't find a winner as the game ended 2-2, giving both sides a share of the points.

contributed (via Brian Buck) on 03/09/23.

TT No.30: Keith Aslan - Saturday 2nd September 2023; **HYTHE TOWN** v Hanworth Villa; FA Cup 1st Round Qualifying; Kick Off: 15.02; Result: 0-2; Admission: £7 for old people; Programme: £2; Attendance: 319 (284 home, 32 away & 3 neutral).

Trains, none of those about today, but what does it matter as ground sharing means there are four teams within a 20-minute bus ride of my country dacha. And would you believe it, for what must be the only Saturday in history, all four are away. So, I decided to get some value out of my old folks' bus pass, which I got six years after everybody else, and take a trip across the Kentish Weald for a revisit to Hythe.

It must be over 40 years since my last visit to Reachfields Stadium, an attempt to locate the programme has so far proved unsuccessful but finding it will continue to be my pet project for the coming weeks. What alterations have there been in four decade's I hear you ask. No idea I reply. Can't remember a thing about it. Certainly, it would have looked very different to today's fine stadium. Cover on three sides, seats along one touchline, but due to the players entering through the middle, one half required a walk round the entire ground to access them. An Atcost free stadium with the clubhouse situated above the changing rooms, a good

workout for my dodgy knees climbing up to it. Top quality grub was available, a good set up all round.

Sandling is the nearest railhead, it took me around 45 minutes to walk it when I last made the journey, somewhat longer now I fancy. For the unathletic groundhopper (is there any other type?) there are plenty of buses from Folkstone to within 5 minutes of the ground. For me it was a stress-free day. Just two long (very long) bus rides in each direction. All in all, 'Stagecoach East Kent' had my company for five hours today, but sitting on the top deck of a bus watching the world go by is not an unpleasant way to pass the time. Arrive in Hythe and the station for the narrow-gauge railway is just round the corner from the ground. After spending so long on 'Avanti' trains the ride down to Dungeness was the antidote, no strikes here. Got a brochure on the history of the line, and during the war it was a vital part of our coastal defences, carrying equipment along the shore and it even had its own gun mounted carriage. Presumably when Hitler was deciding where to invade, he gave this part of the world a miss as the narrow-gauge railway would prove to be an impenetrable obstacle!

One thing you won't have to worry about on a visit to Hythe is a programme. Kent legend Andy Short is the editor and it's a matter of personal pride for him to issue for every game. Famous throughout the county, he is also secretary of the South East Counties League and a groundhopper. If you've ever been to a match in this part of the world, even if you hadn't seen him, you'd probably have heard his dulcet tones that make Brian Blessed sound like Ted Lowe.

Hythe's cup run was short and not very sweet. Totally outclassed in the first half, they could consider themselves fortunate to only be one goal down at the break. A more even second half, but a second goal ten minutes from time sealed it for the away side. Also, a shout out for the Hanworth Villa physio. Worth the admission money alone.

Trains through Broadstairs for the first Saturday in twenty-one days next weekend. And on Friday a brand-new series of Mrs. Browns Boys starts. These are exciting times to be alive.

contributed on 02/09/23.

TT No.29: Steve Hardy - Saturday 2nd September 2023; **Bustleholme** v Birmingham Irish; Birmingham & District League Division Two; Result: 3-2; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 17 H/C.

Hurray! Back to the delights of the Birmingham & District League again. I counted six new grounds for me to visit this season and today was the first of them. My choice was between Arden Forest and Bustleholme and the first mistake I made today was to choose Bustleholme. They play at the George Salter Academy in West Bromwich which is on the other side of the M5 to the Hawthorns, where the Baggies were in action as well.

I had failed to spot that fact, so spent seemingly hours on the M5 and M6 crawling the 13 miles to Bustleholme. KO was 2.30, which I managed to miss spectacularly, but I needn't have worried as the Ref didn't arrive until 2.45pm, and so KO was put back to 3.00pm.

Bustleholme are a mystery team to me. They have what I thought was a first team in the WMRL, but the folks I spoke to today reckoned the B&DL side was the first team? Today's team were formed purely to enter the B&DL so perhaps they have two first teams.

Anyway, back to the match. It was played in one of two 4G pitches in a cage behind the Academy with a grass pitch away in the distance. This was the first league game for both clubs, and it turned out to be a cracker, only spoiled for me by the tardy Ref who seemed to think we had all come to watch him. Bustleholme scored after just 5 minutes and despite cut and thrust by both sides, it stayed that way until the break. After HT it was obvious to me that Bustleholme wouldn't be able to contain the lively and aggressive Irish forward line much longer, so they needed to score more goals than they conceded (as Kevin Keegan used to say). This they managed as the second half ended 3-2 with a home win in the end.

The journey home took a mere 25 minutes as I discovered a completely different route to take, ignoring Sarah Satnav who insisted I went the way I had come. It's good to be back.

contributed on 04/09/23.

TT No.28: Jon T Green - Friday 25th August 2023; **SHERWOOD COLLIERY** v Melton Town; FA Vase First Qualifying Round; Venue: Debdale Park; Result: 3-2; Admission: £6; Programme: £2; Attendance: 150

Now I realise that this may not be factually correct but I like to imagine that the trees around Debdale Park once formed a part of Sherwood Forest and that, just before kick-off, Robin Hood will come riding up on his trusty steed - in fairness he would probably get an Uber nowadays but that rather spoils the illusion.

What we do know for sure is that there are a lot of trees at Sherwood. The hillside rises up behind the far touchline in a rich mixture of beech, white poplar and a host of others. There are walks up through the forest to where the old mine workings used to be. As with all "colliery" teams coal is now a thing of the past but at least the area has been beautified. From the car park, which was absolutely rammed for this game, you can either enter the sporting complex via the cricket pitch or through the club house itself. Either way you'll make your way up a slight slope past the score box and in through the only entrance. Immediately to your left is the manually operated scoreboard (useful because the match attendance is posted here) and towards the halfway line the Mick Clarey Stand, a covered terrace built in two parts. The original is painted white with the newer part being as yet untreated breezeblock. The concrete steps are edged in brick which is a nice touch. Behind the stand is a grass bank from the top of which you get an unrestricted view of the pitch. The rugby league team play at this upper level on what is an immaculate surface. Either end of the ground is flat standing behind a

white metallic rail. The far side encompasses the dugouts situated between two identical 52-seater stands. Each comprises three rows of wooden seats upon concrete supports.

It's been a good start to the season for both of these United Counties Premier League teams; Sherwood remain unbeaten after four games whilst Melton only having tasted defeat once. The home manager's programme notes say that this is their ninth game in 27 days and their third cup tie in a week. It's a situation he understandably describes as crazy. Perhaps all of those games have got to the team as well because within eight minutes they fall behind; a corner from Greg Mills is powered into the net by captain Sam Beaver. Melton are well on top and only the outstretched fingers of 'keeper Dale Sheppard prevent an audacious chip from Mitchell Woakes from doubling their lead. It's therefore a bit of a surprise when 'Wood draw level; their striking partnership of Craig Westcarr and Marley Grant combine and when the latter is fouled in the box the former slides home the spot kick. Town are unperturbed by the setback and with ten minutes remaining in the half a second penalty is awarded; this time it's given for handball against a home defender. Once again, the kicker makes no mistake as Greg Mills restores Melton's lead.

A tactical change at half time with Colliery reverting to 4-4-2 seems to make all the difference as Town's dominance turns into an increasing rearguard action. Westcarr is proving a real handful for the visitors, and he moves smoothly onto a clever through ball, rounds 'keeper Josh Barns only to see Beaver clear the danger off the line. Another equaliser is coming and it's the speedy Marley Grant who gets it; a right-wing cross is nodded down by Ewan Robson and Grant reacts quickest to smash the ball past Barns. Melton haven't quite grasped that Westcarr has the measure of their defensive formation and with less than a quarter of an hour remaining the centre forward is set free once more. Barns sprints from his line, narrows the angle but can do nothing as the striker perfectly drills his shot in off the far post. It's a great finish and one which sums up a very good evening for the striker. At the final whistle the club's Under 9's dash bare chested onto the pitch twirling their shirts around their heads. The Sherwood players look both slightly awkward and non-plussed by what's happening. It's a feeling that I share as I head back to the car park only to find that I have been unceremoniously blocked in.....

contributed on 30/08/23.

TT No.27: Brian Buck - Saturday 26th August 2023; **Ashby Ivanhoe** v Lincoln United; United Counties League Premier Division North; Result: 1-2; Attendance: 160.

Once again, I was gratefully chauffeured today, this time from door to door. I was due to be dropped off on the way at a Leicestershire Senior League ground that I hadn't previously, but despite being told at 9am that the game was on, two hours later it was the only game in this league to be called off today, with the visitors unable to raise a side.

We arrived in the delightful town of Ashby-de-la-Zouch in good time, but on our arrival, it was raining. In our search for the pub, we needed to tick off though, we

didn't get too wet as we were able to park almost opposite it. We spent just enough time in it to sink a pint, but afterwards, such are the vagaries of our weather, not only had it stopped raining, but the pavements were now dry! Strong beer maybe!

We arrived at the ground in plenty of time before kick-off and immediately saw someone I knew, namely my friend the UCL Chairman, Alan Poulain, who has done such good work in taking the league forward since the unfortunate passing of his predecessor, John Weeks, who was also a great friend, and we spent the game together. We sat in the main stand here, which coincidentally was used for the first time on 30 January 2016, the day of my previous visit here, when the hosts beat Radford 4-1 in an East Midlands Counties League match (att- 136). Apart from the addition of some covered seating behind one goal the ground has changed little since then. It is currently officially a two-sided ground, soon to be extended by a side, once some paving slabs are put down on the far side, although some people stood on that side today.

As for the game it was a physical one, but the initially smiling ref stood up to all the many challenges he faced very well. In the first half he booked two players from both sides and sent off a home player for a naughty tackle. The half saw plenty of action, but no goals and few chances created by either side. Then on 52 minutes and with ten men, the hosts took the lead, with the goal being scored by one of the scorers on the day of my previous visit here, after he finished off a shot which rebounded off the post to him. Lincoln were level ten minutes later when the ball was bundled in from close range. Ashby had been coping quite well being down to ten men, but on 75 minutes they lost another player sent off, this time for having an argument with a women spectator, using foul and abusive language towards her and telling her to "get back in the kitchen!" On 84 minutes Lincoln secured the win which was to take them to the top of the table when the ball was nodded home, at the second attempt, following a corner. Then after the match was over and the players were leaving the pitch Ashby had a third man red carded by the ref as another player protested too strongly over his handling of the game. What a day!

contributed on 29/08/23.

TT No.26: Craig Dabbs - Saturday 26th August 2023; **Pollok** v Largs Thistle; West of Scotland League Premier Division; Venue: Newlandsfield Park; Result: 4-2; Admission: £9; Programme: 44pp, £1; Attendance: 442

When it comes to driving, I really don't mind it, after all it does come with the hobby. However, I have my limits, and this pushed the envelope on what I'm prepared to do - probably slightly over, in truth. My day started out at 04:15 and came to its conclusion at 00:20 this morning. It was brutal, but was it worth it? Very much so, is the answer.

I drove past Hampden Park, Scotland's National Stadium on the way in and shortly after I was parked up in a side street and made my way into Newlandsfield Park via the players' entrance to arguably one of the best non-league grounds in Scotland.

Newlandsfield Park has character by the bucket full. It opened in 1928 and has a large, covered terrace that can easily accommodate 900 under it on the far side to where you come in. The structure completely dominates the ground which is uncovered on its other three sides however it's not flat hardstanding that you see, it's swathes of terracing. The ground once had 15,000 in it and unlike some grounds you go to with large record attendances you can imagine 15,000 in there, it would be crammed no doubt about it, but you can see it. These days it has a safety limit imposed on it of 974, I can only imagine this is because the terracing probably needs crush barriers and lots of yellow paint in these modern times (to pass health and safety requirements).

The match itself didn't live up to the grand stage it was being played on in the first half at all; however, the two teams came out firing on all cylinders in the second only for Pollok to go down to ten men after a straight red following a very robust tackle. Another red was shown in the match, it came a few seconds after the Pollok manager was shown a yellow after a disagreement with the referee. Pollok weren't phased by the one-man disadvantage on the pitch and generally marshalled proceedings quite well, but Largs never really threw the towel in and got the late consolation in a game that was of a high standard.

I can see Pollok kicking on up the pyramid. They make no secret of their desire for Lowland League Football and with crowds regularly over the 400 mark they do better than some Scottish League sides. The framework is there both on and off the pitch so that in the fulness of time there could easily be another Glasgow side in the Scottish Football League.

contributed (via Brian Buck) on 27/08/23.

TT No.25: Steve Hardy - Saturday 26th August 2023; **Burton Hornets** v Stapenhill Reserves; Central Midlands Alliance League - Macron Store Nottingham Division South; Result: 1-6; Admission and Programme: Attendance 34 H/C.

The Central Midlands Alliance is a result of the old Central Midlands League merging with the Midland Regional Alliance this summer. Most of the MRA clubs were happy to join, and they have been joined by several brand-new clubs as well, with Burton Hornets being one of them. In fact, the Hornets are already a long-standing junior club, who have now decided to add a Senior side to their ranks.

Their home is a pitch in the Washlands Sports Club on Meadow Road in Burton, a ground I last visited in 2015 to watch Washlands CC. Getting on to Meadow Road is a nightmare, as the entrance is a minute gap in the middle of a bridge on Wetmore Road. I drove up and down Wetmore Road several times before spotting somebody turning right into what appeared at first glance to be a brick wall. That was the entrance!

It is early days yet, but the Hornets gave their all but to little effect. Visitors Stapenhill stiffes were really good and easily led 4-1 at the break. Game won they took their feet off the pedal in the second half but still managed to score two late goals for a deserved 6-1 win.

A herd of groundhoppers were in attendance, having travelled from near and far. Conversations ranged from which pitch Holly Lane '92 used to the awful news (to me anyway) that programmes are no longer compulsory in the Gwent County League. That means I will probably never get that elusive programme from FC Tredegar that I have been trying to get for 4 years now!

Lovely sunny day only spoiled by the batteries on both my phone and camera giving up, so no photos could be taken after half time.

contributed on 27/08/23.

TT No.24: Steve Hardy - Saturday 19th August 2023; **Ellington** v Morpeth; Northern Alliance - League Cup 1st round; Result: 1-3; Admission and Programme: Free; Attendance: 27.

Back on holiday in Northumberland and a chance to visit another Northern Alliance league club.

Ellington is a small village near to the East coast, close to visitors Morpeth. If there was a step 9 in non-league football, this is where Ellington would be playing. Morpeth were an independent club until recently, but I learned that they have now come under the wing of Morpeth Town FC and are also now playing their home games at Craik Park.

Facilities wise there is not much to mention. There is the inevitable plastic pitch in a cage in front of the large club house/dressing room block, but my match was played on a grass pitch which had partial wooden fencing on 3 sides but nothing else. Sadly, the tea hut on the corner of the clubhouse didn't open either, so no chance to sample 'Shell's' snacks'.

The match itself was a cracker. Morpeth bossed the game from start to finish, but it was Ellington who took the league on 16 minutes with a super breakaway goal. Morpeth were soon level though on 31 minutes and deservedly took the lead a minute later, to lead 2-1 at the break.

Half time entertainment had been laid on for us punters too, as all 30 players and staff had a huge brawl all through the half time interval. I thought the young ref handled the situation really well by letting tempers cool down a bit before sending two players and the home Manager off before issuing umpteen yellow cards as well.

Not surprisingly, the second half was a bit of a damp squib with Morpeth sealing their win with about 10 minutes left.

All in all, another great day out in the beautiful Northumberland countryside. More next year please!

contributed on 25/08/23.

TT No.23: Brian Buck - Saturday 19th August 2023; **Peterborough Rangers** v Stamford Lions; GSE Hire Fleet Peterborough & District League Division 2; Venue:

played at Peterborough Rugby Club, Second Drove; Result: 5-0; Attendance 20 approx.

After not feeling well enough to go to my first-choice game today, I stayed more local and instead went to this match, which was about an hour's drive from home. I could have gone by train though and as one other hopper in attendance did and he told me that it was about a half-an-hour's walk from the station, in an easterly direction.

On my arrival the car park was almost full, partly because there was some youth team training taking place on one of the other pitches as well. Both my colleague and I were hoping that our game was going to take place on the rugby pitch, which has floodlights and a 150-seater stand and which has partially been cut out of sloping land, but it was instead played out on a pitch next to it, which by comparison felt like it was on a raised plateau. From here you could get good views of Peterborough Cathedral and also, the Peterborough to Ely (and beyond) railway line, although you would need some binoculars to read the train numbers.

Hospitality wise, I believe that the rugby club bar was open, but I didn't pursue this. I was more worried about what to wear. Although it was about 24 degrees, it felt quite chilly as there was a strong wind blowing on this exposed ground. I wouldn't recommend coming here in mid-winter, when it is really cold. This was the first game on this newly prepared pitch, by the rugby club, and it looked in pristine condition. A few minutes before kick-off the players dragged them up to the playing area, as did the ref, who despite his youthful looks was, I was told, roughly the same age as myself, but he was still much fitter than me, so I am loathed to criticise him. But he did struggle to keep up with play, seemingly needing the use of a sat nav whenever he strayed too far out of the centre circle. At one point he gave a throw in, but when the player took a corner instead, he didn't object. But to his credit he didn't show a card all afternoon, preferring the 'final warning' system instead, although he didn't tolerate any personal abuse. Also, he refused a request for a water break, telling the player concerned that there was only ten minutes to go before half time. As for 'apparent' injured players lying on the floor, he just left them there, only taking an interest if they didn't get up for a while, so invariably they just had to get up and carry on.

The match saw Rangers gradually get control to deservedly win comfortably, but until they opened the scoring on 35 minutes, Lions were still in with a roar, being possibly the better side up until this point. Then just before the break the hosts added a second goal. The second half started with a Lions player sitting on the floor, waiting for the game to restart. He soon got up when it did! Now the players of both sides just went through the motions, so much so that when the third goal arrived on 80 minutes the malaise had affected me, and I was busy trainspotting. But the goal then inspired Rangers to score twice more in the next five minutes and just before the ref blew the final whistle on 89 minutes!

contributed on 22/08/23.

TT No.22: Craig Dabbs - Saturday 19th August 2023; **South Park (Reigate) v Leatherhead**; FA Challenge Cup Preliminary Round; Venue: Whitehall Lane; Result: 1-1; Admission: £10; Programme: 24pp, £2; Attendance: 279.

There were some very narrow lanes to negotiate between Horley and South Park which is a small area on the south-western side of Reigate.

There were no big names attending this one to report of. Although Leatherhead do have a good pedigree in this competition, South Park are still developing as a club after spending most of their existence at a local level.

The club has, however, made big strides recently though. The ex-Crawley & District League side moved through the Combined Counties League into the Isthmian League in 2014 and in 2022 they made the decision to add Reigate to their name to better reflect where they play and to engage the local community. It has worked with a 67% increase through the gate. The recent addition of a 3G pitch is starting to reap financial benefits further helping the club.

The ground isn't exciting at all. There are two kit stands behind the goal and the shallowest of overhangs off the clubhouse with a single step of terracing underneath it with scope to extend further.

Leatherhead were the better side early on but (a bit like the earlier game), South Park came into it and took control only for sheer hard work and determination from the visitors to secure a replay on Tuesday night.

contributed (via Brian Buck) on 20/08/23.

TT No.21: Craig Dabbs - Saturday 19th August 2023; **Horley Town v AFC Croydon Athletic**; FA Challenge Cup Preliminary Round; Venue: The New Defence; Result: 0-1; Admission: £8; Programme: 20pp, £1.50; Attendance: 420.

Not my first choice today but I was talked into 'doing a double' and I'm glad I did. First up was The New Defence in Horley. Horley Town have been here since 2003 after moving from The Defence. The unusual name stems from Major A.L.N. Jennings who gave the club 10.7 acres of land, and it was held in trust for the people of Horley from 1947 in memory of those that died in defence of the country.

The New Defence is set behind the town's sports centre and is a decent venue with a lovely, elevated clubhouse that offered good views if you wanted to stay indoors, great in January but when the weather behaves itself like today the best place is outside and pitch side.

The game kicked off at 12.30 owing to it being shown by the BBC. It was obvious why it was chosen to be televised with AFC Croydon Athletic being taken over by footballer Wilfried Zaha and rapper Michael Owuo Jr. or as many (not including me) know him as Stormzy. Both local lads, they have decided to put something back into a local club and AFC Croydon Athletic are the lucky recipients. Zaha was nowhere to be seen but Michael rolled into the car park shortly before kick-off

in his bright yellow Lamborghini along with four young lads. To be fair to him rather than hide upstairs he stood with everyone else, and the attendance was clearly swelled by his presence.

The match was very enjoyable. The visitors looked for most of the game the better side, but that one goal advantage proved to be hard work to hold on to as Horley did come to the party in the second half. The Rams did see it over the line eventually; I do say eventually because the referee found around ten minutes to add on making the drive to the next match a little tight.

contributed (via Brian Buck) on 20/08/23.

TT No.20: Keith Aslan - Saturday 19th August 2023; **SUTTON UNITED** v OJM Black Country; Midland League Division 1; Kick Off: 15.00; Result: 1-4; Admission: £3 for the elderly; Programme: £1, excellent value; Attendance: 69 (63 home, 4 away & 2 neutral)

There are more places in England called Sutton than anything else. Not a lot of people know that, probably because I just made it up. But unarguably it's the most popular moniker for football teams and today I was visiting my ninth ground to see a 'Sutton' play.

Sutton United play in the Royal Borough of Sutton Coldfield, a pleasant town and a total contrast to Birmingham which the train leaves 20 minutes earlier. Around an 18-minute walk from the station, it's a brand-new ground, they only moved in last November. A nice set up, comfy clubhouse with food and big screen. *Atcost* stand, floodlights and an artificial surface with a twist. Only two sides have a green mesh fence, and the far touchline is protected with a dinky wooden picket fence, an aesthetically pleasing alternative. It's not just the playing surface that's plastic, you can leave your money at home, the whole place is cashless, and even the programme has to be paid for with a card.

Like many clubs, Sutton were formed in 1947 with players just demobbed from the army. Black Country are more recent arrivals into the midland football firmament, first operating in 1996. In 2020 they prefixed their name with OJM after amalgamating with a Sunday league club of that name.

Sutton United are the most consistent club in football. Last Saturday they played Heather St. John's. 3-0 down at half time, they pulled one back early in the second, before losing 4-1. Today's game saw them 3-0 down at half time, pulling one back early in the second, before losing 4-1. Games these days drag on forever, and today was no exception. In the 94th minute a player was sent off for a spiteful foul with the recipient requiring lengthy treatment, and so we had added time being added on to added time. Come on ref. it's 4-1, what's happened to the common-sense approach to officiating?

A thoroughly enjoyable day out, something to remember during the next three weeks without any trains.

contributed on 20/08/23.

TT No.19: Brian Buck - Saturday 12th August 2023; **Winterton Rangers v Consett**; Pitching In Northern Premier League East Division; Result: 1-2; Attendance: 205.

Once again, I accepted the kind offer of a lift today to return to a ground that I had distant memories of, which was perhaps understandable, bearing in mind that I was last here on 7 April 1984, when I saw the hosts lose 2-0 to Alfreton Town in a Northern Counties East league Premier Division match (att- 50 approx).

After the match concluded I was taken into the boardroom by a local groundhopping acquaintance, who showed me a picture of what the ground looked like in those days, probably taken from the top of the nearby church tower. He also told me that Ian Botham once played a few games for the club whilst on loan from Scunthorpe United, around the time of my previous visit, so it's just possible that I may have unknowingly seen him play.

Anyway, our journey here was a smooth one and to get here my driver elected to go through the delights of Gainsborough and Scunthorpe with the sleepy-looking Winterton being 5 miles north-east further on. The route was leafier and prettier than I was expecting and both towns we passed through offered something for Michael Portillo to have a look at on one of his rail journeys. The pre-match pub we needed was so close to the ground that we decided to park outside it and walk from there.

On our arrival there were already some Consett fans ticking it off as well. We chose the quiet bar, and I was given permission to eat my sandwiches here by the jovial barmaid, which soon frustrated the manageress of the restaurant part of the pub, who told me that I shouldn't be doing this. Not my problem, love! We then walked through the churchyard and the entrance to the ground was opposite us.

Soon after I had found a seat and just as well that I did, as right on kick off time and for about five minutes, an almighty black cloud above dropped its load on us. From my seat and as I surveyed the ground it was nice and has now been turned into a ground I would come to regularly if I lived locally. Having joined the Northern Counties East League in the 1982/3 season they finally won promotion into the Northern Premier League at the end of last season.

As for the match the well-supported Consett took the lead on 4 minutes with a shot from the edge of the area. Then Rangers fought back, equalising on 34 minutes when the scorer was allowed to lift the ball over the advancing keeper after being played in and generally, they finished the half well. But there was always a suspicion that the more experienced looking Consett side had plenty left in the locker and so it proved in the second half. On 57 minutes the definitive goal arrived when from about 15 yards out the scorer made space for himself and shot home. On 83 minutes they then spurned the chance to increase their lead from the spot following a 'small' push, but the resultant kick was saved. Then the game became a bit physical, followed by a few bookings and Rangers were unable to get a second equaliser, thus bringing to a close another decent day out.

contributed on 15/08/23.

TT No.18: Jon T Green - Saturday 12th August 2023; **TRING CORINTHIANS** v Milton Keynes College; South Midlands Football League - Division Two; Venue: Icknield Way; Result: 1-1; Admission: £3; Programme: No; Attendance: 36.

Things are a little tight at Icknield Way and, whilst I am sure that someone out there in Hopperworld will know to the contrary, it's certainly the snuggest view that I have ever had at a match. Now don't get me wrong because in no way is this a bad place to watch a game, in fact very much to the contrary. Set on the outskirts of town with long views to the rising Chiltern Hills and surrounded by fields of wheat and oil seed rape, it's an idyllic rural setting. Entering the car park your first view is the back of the colourfully spray-painted changing room block. Whilst not a fan of general graffiti scrawl, this piece of artwork really does brighten up what would otherwise be a plain brick wall. To the left is the clubhouse which also houses the referee's room. Walking between the two buildings you begin to realise just how little space there is. Behind the near corner flag is a covered metal stand - two piles of white and green plastic chairs are stacked up but not actually used for the game. A row of sandbags helps protect the concrete base as there is a gentle, but pronounced, slope towards this end of the ground. From here to the dugouts the pitch has been roped off but it's a tight squeeze in front of a large mature hedge. Spectators are also allowed to view from the entire far touchline behind which runs a public footpath across the fields. The top end of the ground is "out of bounds" with two step ladder type stiles being a vital aid to ball retrieval.

As it was a pleasantly warm afternoon, I popped along to a hostelry by the canal for a quick pre-match drink. I won't cause embarrassment by publicly naming them, other than to say it's on a Junction of the Grand Union Canal, although rumour has it that it's going to be renamed the Dick Turpin Arms as £4 for a draught coke is certainly highway robbery. Back at the ground, where admission is a pound cheaper than my drink, the visitors from Milton Keynes spring an early surprise as they take the lead after just 12 minutes. Connor Boyce's left wing corner bounces through a crowded penalty area before Mason Couling applies the killer touch with a smart low finish. Corries are the dominant team with Jeremy Audic forcing 'keeper Kelan Plumbridge into a sprawling save. Audic is then roughly fouled by the combative Matt Haworth and from the resulting free kick centre half Sam Allison sees Plumbridge pull off another fine stop. Jamie Ryan then replaces Audic who just cannot shrug off his back injury. The change certainly does not affect Corries and they go within a whisker of drawing level; captain Danny O'Donnell steals the ball from Haworth, Plumbridge parries and Dom Owen, following up, strikes the bar. Matt Cave pounces on the rebound but his effort is headed off the line. There is an inevitability about the equaliser but when it does arrive on 37 minutes there is an element of fortuity about it; Jay Wilson wins a battle on the right and rolls his shot beyond the advancing Plumbridge. Once again the MK defence cover their 'keeper but this time as the ball is hammered away it ricochets back off Owen and flies into the net.

At half time the players remain on the pitch, and I am treated to a close up of Corries management duo dissecting the first 45 minutes. It's considered intelligent

stuff and their players are clearly listening to them. They leave the team with the message that “we need a fast start, and three points are there for the taking”. The second period begins exactly as instructed with Tring camped in their opponents’ half. Dan Ball tries a curler which Plumbridge turns over, the tireless running of O’Donnell creates another chance before Ball cleverly lobs the ‘keeper only for Haworth to scramble the chance away. MK continue to play some neat passing football but with three at the back they are often exposed to “one on one” situations. Nevertheless, they do stem the flow and even spend some time in the opposition half. With ten minutes remaining a squally shower soaks the ground producing one of the most vivid and low arching rainbows that I have ever seen. Sadly, no one from Tring makes a wish as despite the best combined efforts of Owen and Ball they still can’t find a winner. Considering their possession, the home side will consider this points dropped but defeat would have been very harsh on MK’s Kelan Plumbridge who had a particularly impressive afternoon between the sticks.

As the final whistle blows, I go in search of the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow; then maybe I can afford another pint.....

contributed on 14/08/23.

TT No.17: Craig Dabbs - Saturday 12th August 2023; **Runcorn Town** v Ashton Athletic; North West Counties League First Division North; Venue: Pavilions; Result: 1-0; Admission: £6; Programme: 44pp, £2; Attendance: 139.

It's a good job I knew where I was going because the entrance to Pavilions isn't obvious at all - it has that sort of temporary steel fencing across it that you see at building sites with a gap made in it just wide enough for the car.

Driving down the lane set out in front of you is the large and vandalised former Pavilions club and to the left an overgrown field that if you didn't know is the former home of General Chemicals FC and Pavilions FC, both now long gone. Once parked up it was a case of walking past the old club, down the side of the bowls club which looks to be in operation still and to the bottom of the site where you find Pavilions, the unsponsored name of the ground belonging to Runcorn Town.

Runcorn Town were originally called Mond Rangers and it's them and General Chemicals that I remember in the West Cheshire League many moons ago. Mond were long standing members of that league, changing their name to Runcorn Town in 2005 whilst still members and probably to better reflect the area they were playing in rather than the clubs links to the chemical industry that dominates the backdrop in these parts. The club started out in 1967 as CKD, a works team from the Castner Kellner plants D section, then Mond in 1970 which was a company name connected with ICI, to give you clarity as to what Mond was. Anyway, Town moved into the North West Counties League in 2010 and have spent the vast majority in the top flight until relegation in 2022 and a subsequent near miss of further relegation at the end of last season finishing second from bottom.

The ground has bags of character, aside from its industrial backdrop and the occasional bits of "fluff" floating over in the wind. It has a smart main seated stand

and four other areas of cover that are all home made from bits of steel and garden decking for terracing, quite wonderful. The far end is out of bounds, it's quite narrow down there and the pathway has crumbled but there's still plenty of room for the support they get.

The theme for the day was late - I wasn't, but the programmes were, arriving just fifteen minutes before kick-off and those that know me will realise that isn't good for my health! The other thing that was late was the match getting a goal. Fortunately, unlike programmes this doesn't bother me in the slightest, but it took until the 87th minute before we saw one and it was completely against the run of play with Runcorn having a very difficult half to navigate which they did, just.

contributed (via Brian Buck) on 13/08/23.

TT No.17: Keith Aslan - Saturday 12th August 2023; **AVONMOUTH** v Sharpness; Gloucester County League; Kick Off: 15.00; Result: 3-1; Admission: Nothing; Programme: £2; Attendance: 138 (108 home, 18 away & 12 neutral).

Let's hear it for the Gloucester County League, one of the very few where programme issuing is still compulsory with a table of fines for non-compliance. Well done boys.

You won't be surprised to know that the station for this one is Avonmouth, a half hourly service from Bristol Temple Meads, followed by a straightforward 15-minute walk. The train down from London was rammed, and eventually arrived 20 minutes late due to time wasted getting passengers (wash my mouth out, I mean customers) on and off. At Chippenham we left a load of customers behind as it was just impossible to find a space to board the train. How they must have laughed! I assume the service before was cancelled, along with quite a few trains today (but not mine) due to those poor downtrodden train drivers taking industrial action. I really feel for them trying to eke out a living on twelve hundred quid a week.

This was Avonmouth's debut in the Gloucester Senior League. Ground improvements have been going on apace and the last eighteen months have seen the ground fully railed, floodlights erected, hard standing, dressing rooms and club house extended. *Atcost* will soon be adding the finishing touches. Although next to the M5, a thick wodge of trees and a noise barrier means you hardly notice it, and the ground has a rustic feel. Picnic tables abound, and currently shelter is to be found outside the clubhouse until the stand arrives. Inside the walls are adorned with old photographs, teas and coffees were provided gratis and cheese and onion rolls, my favourite, were the stomach fillers. A big screen didn't have the football on, but as a bonus was showing some cooking programme with Ainsley Harriot. And you can never have too much Ainsley Harriot.

A full colour programme with a team photograph on the cover in which they weren't wearing football kit but shirt and ties. Not seen that before. The history of the club informed me that their most famous old boy was Roy Bentley, captain of Chelsea's first ever League Championship winning team, but as this was before the Premier League was invented it probably doesn't count!

What of the new 'let's see how long we can keep a match going for no reason' rule. The referee spent most of the game tapping his watch at every break in play. No idea what that did, but the game lasted no longer than is usual these days, 3 minutes added on to the first half, six minutes onto the second. There was negligible wasting, but whether that had anything to do with the new rules is a moot point. Wouldn't you think that if a referee adds on nine minutes to a match without any timewasting players will kop onto to the fact that time is going to be added whether they waste time or not, so they might as well continue doing it. 9 substitutions in the second half spoilt the game more than anything else.

Avonmouth, who were unbeaten last season, got their first win at their newly elevated level in a match that was an entertaining encounter for the most part. It would have been more so if it had only lasted 90 minutes.

No sign of my 'Traveller' yet which should have arrived on Wednesday. It's not just the railways that are falling into the abyss.

contributed on 13/08/23.

TT No.16: Jon T Green - Saturday 5th August 2023; **BILSTON TOWN** v Stapenhill; Midland Football League - Division One; Venue: Queen Street; Result: 1-2; Admission: £7; Programme: £2; Attendance: 110

It was a grey day in the Black Country. The sort of day where the very buildings seem to ooze water and the deluge threatens to turn streets into mini rivers. A local festival was taking place and a lone female singer (who was extremely talented) played to an audience of security guards. Dressed all in black they stood about in ones and twos desperately trying to avoid the downpour and getting ready to marshal crowds which were never going to appear. In the covered shopping precinct two lads dressed as giant kangaroos bounced around on pogo sticks but they hopped away when I asked them about the validity of the Jonny Bairstow Test dismissal - a guilty conscience no doubt. In a local supermarket I spotted a jar of Vegemite (the Australian equivalent of Marmite and made, somewhat, famous by Men at Work's 80's hit Down Under) - maybe Bilston is planning a twinning with Brisbane... On a nearby railway bridge there are carved stone inscriptions recalling the days when this was a steel making town employing more than two and a half thousand people in the furnaces. Sadly, today nothing remains but reference to the industry still lives on in the nickname of the football club.

The Steelmen have been playing at their Queen Street home since 1919 and although considerable modernisations have been made over the years it's a place that retains a wonderful sense of history. No more so than in the imposing main wooden grandstand which miraculously has survived two fires in its hundred plus year existence. Today I am lucky enough to be shown around by Lady Chair Denise Frankham "by rights it still shouldn't be in use" she explains "and one day we'll need to replace it. The structure will be brought up to date, but the look and feel will remain the same. I'm not having an off-the-shelf stand at my club". Denise leads on down the players tunnel and then into the home dressing room with its sloping roof and rows of neatly hung match-ready orange shirts. "I'm working on getting the club shop open" she says, indicating piles of old photos which will soon

adorn the walls. I ask her about the rather odd-looking square metal structures attached to the white-washed wall on the far side of the ground. "They've been here for years" she replies "I think they first appeared when the main road was built. They act as a good way of keeping the ball in the ground; we're not getting anything back which clears them".

Outside the rain has eased to a light drizzle so I take a walk around the rest of the ground; both ends have neat, covered stands - to the right is a breeze block and metal construction, opened in 2014, and named in honour of Lord and Lady Dennis Turner. It sits on a gently sloping terrace with some of the original crush barriers still in place at the front. At the opposite end is a black metal flat roofed cover with a smart bench from the Bilston Historical Society inside. The remainder of the ground is flat hard standing. A new pitch side fence has been installed, black supports neatly offset alternate orange and white panels. The effect, especially on an overcast day, is really pleasing on the eye and help brings a classy look of continuity to the venue.

On the pitch this is going to be a tough opener; visitors Stapenhill finished one place above Town last season with both clubs falling just short of a play-off place. The opening exchanges see the home side in the ascendancy: Sam Yankson muscles his way forward but his low centre just eludes the lunging Ethan Pearce. Full back Josh Simcox and Pearce are combining well on the right and it's the former who tees up Jake Short to test 'keeper Paul Hollis with a low drive. Yankson again sets up Pearce and this time the winger does make contact but can only drag his shot wide. Stapenhill are showing some flashes of danger with Samuel Birks curling in a shot which Kai Lloyd drops to his left to save. However, it's still a surprise when they take the lead after half an hour; a long ball is pumped forward and, with Lloyd committed to a race he is never going to win, Birks casually side-steps him before rolling his shot into an empty net. The visitors' striker George Teeney (who is anything but) is "putting himself about" much to the annoyance of the home fans. When Teeney wrestles Angelo Franco to the floor he is lucky to escape a caution. One man in particular is apoplectic about the decision which Teeney does nothing to defuse by pulling up his shirt and rubbing his belly. Fortunately, half time is reached before matters deteriorate further.

The second half begins with a flurry of activity and of course Teeney is involved. The striker uses his considerable bulk to hold off his marker and then deftly lays off a pass to Connor Richens. From the right Richens sends in a perfect centre which gives Ryan King the easiest of tap-ins. "Not bad for a fat boy" cries a visiting fan. It's a statement which is hard to argue with. Richens then undoes some of his good work by tripping the speedy Pearce in the box. Short duly converts from the spot. With only seven minutes played it's well and truly game back on. Pearce, who is now operating on the left flank, swings over a high centre which from Easa Sawyers can't guide his header on target. Brandon McConnell, on as sub, then sees his close range shot deflected wide when he looks odds on to score. It won't be the last time that McConnell is involved in the afternoon's proceedings. Short is having a barnstorming time in midfield and following his surging run forward he receives the ball back on the edge of the box. His shot and another are only half cleared before McConnell strikes the base of the post with Hollis well beaten. With less than ten minutes remaining Town hit the woodwork again; this time Eathan Clarke

is the unlucky man as his effort rebounds off the crossbar. McConnell is once more on hand but again fails to apply the finishing touch with the goal at his mercy. It's to prove the last chance of an absorbing, hard fought game.

With the club having secured a further 35-year lease they hope to tarmac the car park and within a couple of years install a 4G pitch. To quote a well-known advert "The future's bright, the future's orange".

contributed on 08/08/23.

TT No.15: Brian Buck - Saturday 5th August 2023; **Lydd Town** v Camberley Town; Emirates FA Cup Extra Preliminary Round; Result: 1-0; Attendance: 131.

With there being nothing new for me to visit within my reduced range today, I once more accepted the kind offer of my friend to go to Lydd Town, a ground I previously visited on 1 March 2003, when I saw Lydd Town beat Betteshanger Welfare 3-2 in a Kent County League Les Leckie Senior Cup 2nd Round match (att-40 approx). On our way and close to the ground we stopped off at the Red Lion, Snargate, a pub in a time warp and the Smugglers Inn, New Romney, known as the Smugglers Out when he's not there!

It had been a very wet journey en route and as we neared the ground, we had fears that the game might be called off, as were many today, particularly in Essex. But on our arrival, we could soon see that the pitch was fine, and we were further reassured when the car park attendant told us that the pitch is built on shingle and in fact nearby Dungeness houses Britain's only desert. We didn't see that, but through the mirk in the distance we could see Dungeness nuclear power station. This is an awkward place to get to. When I came here by public transport in 2003, I bussed it from Rye, but I see from his match report that another hopper elected to take the 80-minute bus ride option from Folkestone instead.

Once inside the ground and with the swirling rain still falling, I headed to one of the two 50-seater stands they have here, but despite sitting in the back row, the rain still found me from time to time, although it generally stopped in the second half and the sun even came out for a few minutes at one point. I sat next to a gentleman, who as he only watches FA Cup matches, has a very undemanding season. Despite this being Lydd's first ever FA Cup tie, this was not the greatest of games. The rain may have dampened some of the local's enthusiasm, but only the mascot's, about 20 of them, accompanied by their mixed interested guardians, showed genuine excitement, but there again, in this remote part of Kent, apart from presence of nature lovers, there is little to excite anyone here, except perhaps the occasional passing seagull!

In the first half Lydd dominated possession against a poor Camberley side but didn't do much with it. In the second half although the visitors, whom I expected more from, played a bit better, they didn't look like scoring, except perhaps on 60 minutes, when Lydd had a player booked in a last man challenge. He could have been shown red, as the visiting manager believed, too strongly perhaps and he too was yellow carded. Then on 71 minutes Lydd scored the only goal of the game when the scorer got to the ball before the keeper and put it past him into an

empty net. Right at the end Camberley threw men forward in search of an equaliser but it wouldn't come, thus giving the homesters a fairly comfortable win. I enjoyed my revisit to this ground, which despite its remoteness, offers a lot of character, even on this often very wet day.

contributed on 08/08/23.

TT No.14: Craig Dabbs - Saturday 5th August 2023; **Sutton United** v Smethwick Rangers; Midland League Division One; Venue: Coleshill Road Stadium; Result: 7-0; Admission: £6; Programme: 20pp, 50p; Attendance: 111.

Monsoon season otherwise known as summer was in full effect today and this wasn't my first choice. Although my Plan A game did survive the weather, I did not want to take any chances so opted to visit a club that I've wanted to for ages. As they have never issued programmes I've waited and waited and now they are at step 6 they are doing so.

Sutton United, not to be confused with the London based club, are based in the Royal Town of Sutton Coldfield and very close to the senior club in these parts, Sutton Coldfield Town who are based at the other side of the railway line where a belt of trees can be seen behind one goal.

The club has very recently moved here from their previous base in Hollyfield Road. It's still a work in progress with the overflow car park needing to be finished and some of the groundwork around the site. It isn't one of the best grounds below step 3 as claimed in the programme, but it is a new 3G facility that isn't bolted on to either a school or a leisure centre. It's a stand-alone venue being a four-sided ground without the cage, complete with a stand and a smart clubhouse behind it. It will provide a decent facility for the club for years to come and with all their other teams they have retained Hollyfield Road too. The ground is compact and fine for the level, though will certainly be a challenge to develop should the club continue to climb as they have done so from Division Two.

The match itself suggests a one-sided game. It wasn't at all as Smethwick could've got three or four of their own - they hit the bar and generally it was a case of not their day. Meanwhile Sutton were clinical up front, potent in front of goal and if they continue in this vein then I'm sure they will have the ground graders back in before the end of the season.

contributed (via Brian Buck) on 06/08/23.

TT No.13: Steve Hardy - Saturday 5th August 2023; **Dudley Kingswinford** v Walsall Wood Prims West Midlands Regional League - Division Two; Result: 2-4; Admission including programme: £4; Attendance: 45 H/C.

What's that I hear you say? £4 admission at a step 8 game! Outrageous! That said, with a crowd of about 45 today they will probably have raised £180 and be able to pay the three officials without dipping into club funds.

This was the debut in the WMRL for both sides. DK play at the Dudley Kingswinford Rugby ground and those of us who were hoping the match would be played on the main rugby pitch with its large stand and floodlights were disappointed to find it was actually on a grass pitch at the rear of the complex which had absolutely no facilities at all. It poured down with rain all afternoon, but that didn't stop the herd of hoppers who had descended from far and wide. Conversations ranged from a new pitch at Inkberrow to programme issuers from the Lincolnshire league over the years.

I thought the match itself was pretty good for the level. One hopper who was experiencing step 8 for the first time though, was unimpressed with the standard. Welcome to my world my friend. You wait to you get down to division 6 of the Birmingham & District League.

As for the game itself, DK took the lead to much cheering and whooping from their players on 19 minutes, with the Prims equalising on 36 mins for a 1-1 half time score. That was as good as it got for DK though as the visitors took control to score three more goals on 53, 55 and 77 minutes, before DK won a penalty and scored with the last kick of the game.

Just 16 miles from home for me but with that journey going straight through the middle of Wolverhampton, it took me over an hour to get there. A perfect way to start my 57th year of watching non-league football.

contributed on 06/08/23.

TT No.12: Keith Aslan - Saturday 5th August 2023; **LOUTH** v Armthorpe Welfare; Northern Counties East Division One; Kick Off: 14.59; Result: 1-1; Admission £3 for bus pass holders; Programme: £1.50p; Attendance: 68 (54 home, 8 away & 6 neutral).

If you don't have access to a car you won't be doing this one. Saltfleetby is a straggling hamlet six miles east of Louth and hasn't seen any public transport since the railway shut in the sixties. One of the Louth officials was still bemoaning the line closure which he used to regularly travel on. Given what his age must now be, he's worn a lot better than I have. Thanks to an automotively endowed chum I got a ride from Barnetby, a lift for which I was extremely grateful.

Much has been done to bring the ground up to North East Counties specifications, with a lot still to do. Fully railed but standing only permitted on two sides. Louth are still awaiting their 'Atcost' delivery, and although their first floodlit game is scheduled for next month, it doesn't look to me like it's going to happen quite so soon. There is a large covered area outside the clubhouse which kept the spectators sheltered from the rather pluvial (copyright Len) conditions. Picnic tables were dotted around outside. Hot, very hot, pies and sausage rolls were on the menu in the welcoming clubhouse, but the only downer of the afternoon was the big screen was showing MUTV and pre-match we were 'treated' to live coverage of Man U's friendly against a bunch of foreigners nobody had heard of. At 3 o'clock the TV was upgraded to *Sky Sports* and live coverage of Grimsby v Wimbledon. I shared the last leg of my train journey with tons of Wimbledon supporters and was

expecting the same going back. In the event very few Wombles were on the return train. I expect most of them missed it as their match still had a long time to run when my game finished, and that wasn't until six minutes to five.

Louth decamped out to Saltfleetby when they lost their town ground six years ago, and after some time in the Lincolnshire League, this season they are back in the North East Counties where they belong. They are nicknamed 'The White Wolves' but nobody knows why. With so many non-issuers these days you'd have thought the club would have made more of their excellent programme. But it was hidden away in a room behind the bar and unless you asked for a copy you would be going without. As I doubt most regulars even knew there was one it's a bit of a Catch-22 situation. At the end of the game they belatedly brought unsold copies out onto the bar and there were at least ten left over. If the man on the turnstile had offered them to spectators on entry, he'd have shifted the lot, no problem. All very strange.

In keeping with the rest of the day the match itself was an absolute cracker. Armthorpe went one up in the second half before the Louth equalizer a few minutes later. The homesters came close to getting a winner on a number of occasions but it was not to be.

Train watch: Six trains, all high speed, all on time, none overcrowded. If this was somebodies first experience of train travel, they would think England had one of the best railways in the world. Try travelling every week and that opinion would soon change.

contributed on 06/08/23.

TT No.11: *Brian Buck* - Saturday 29th July 2023; **Hucknall Town** v Wisbech Town; United Counties League Premier Division North; Kick-off: 5pm; Result: 1-1; Attendance: 688.

And so on to our second game of the day, where we arrived about half an hour before kick-off and straightaway, as we drove into the complex, you could see that there were going to be problems here. Judging by previous visitors' comments we were led to believe that there was plenty of parking available, but there wasn't, and we had to park in a nearby factory estate, which was unstewarded. On a normal day this wouldn't have been a problem, but today, and just five minutes before kick-off, some garbled message was relayed to the crowd that the car park was going to be locked during the first half. My chauffeur didn't hear this and had to suffer the embarrassment of hearing his car registration number read out at half time, to give him one last chance to move his car, which he reparked some distance from the ground thus missing part of the second half.

I had last seen him just after we entered the ground, when he went off to get me a cup of tea. He failed because they had run out at about kick off time. Also, it cost £8 to get in, which is the adult price. I think that at all four games today, they discriminated against OAP's as at 'normal' games you can get a concession. I understand all the reasons for doing this, but I think that they are morally wrong.

688 spectators multiplied by £8 comes to about £5,500. Isn't that not enough profit to make at this level in one day?

As for the rest of the visit, it went without too much fuss. It was difficult to get a seat in the three-row stand, but I managed it. The new ground is a work in progress, but apparently hasn't altered much since they moved into it last season. When I last visited the club on 12 October 1985, at their old Watnall Road ground, across the road, they were known as Hucknall Colliery Welfare and they beat Eastwood Town 3-0 in a Notts Senior Cup 1st Round match (att- 360 approx).

Today's match wasn't that exciting, but the quality was better than the first game, as was the gamesmanship employed, which I tire of. Wisbech took the lead on 21 minutes, from the spot after a player was taken out as he ran into the box. The hosts equalised on 75 minutes when the scorer hit home a cross with a first time shot from about six yards out. Overall, although the quality of both games wasn't great, there was some value in the day, meeting old friends, and sharing the experience of being part of larger than usual crowds.

contributed on 04/08/23.

TT No.10: Brian Buck - Saturday 29th July 2023; **Gedling Miners Welfare** v Blackstones; United Counties League Division 1; Kick off: 2pm; Result: 0-1; Attendance: 364.

Today I was fortunate enough to be kindly driven door to door for the middle two games of the UCL Hop. For various reasons neither my 'chauffeur', nor I were up to doing all four matches these days and it was a late decision to come to these games. I well remember once doing five matches in a day on a very windy day on a Central Midlands League Hop. But those days are now gone for me, and I left the days organising it all to my friend.

He had planned the day well and before our first game started, we ticked off a pub near the ground. It was only after I got home that I recalled visiting this pub once before. Anyway, after our slurp we soon rolled into the car park of Gedling Miners Welfare, which came as a bit of a surprise to me, as I had left everything down to my chauffeur and I thought that we were going to Hucknall first of all!

Anyway, despite arriving here just about twenty minutes before kick-off, we found just about the last parking space in the main car park, which probably annoyed the people wanting to use the adjacent health and fitness centre. I don't think that this was here when I made my only other visit to this ground, on August Bank Holiday Monday 2003, to see the hosts lose 1-0 to Dinnington Town in a Samsan Sports Central Midlands League Computer Products Supreme Division match (att - 35 approx), before going on to watch two other games that day. The ground today was only partially as I remembered it then. In those days it was neat and tidy, but now it is much improved, having been upgraded so it could stage this Step 6 match.

I was able to sit in one of the one row set of seats either side of the dugouts and managed to get an uninterrupted view of proceedings. It's a tight view for

spectators, which was not a problem today, but if they end up playing at a higher level and have to enlarge their capacity, then the only way I see them doing this, is for them to reduce the size of their large pitch and build on to it.

As for the game, it was unspectacular. Groundhoppers had already endured a nil-nil draw in the first game of the day and this one seemed to be heading the same way. At one point in the first half the visiting manager shouted out, "What do we have to do to get a bit of quality out of you?" "Resign!" someone, possibly me, said quietly! Anyway, by the end, I think that many people were hoping that the game would remain goalless. Seeing two consecutive nil-nil draws is something you can tell your kids about in years to come, but in the 90th minute, amidst some groans, possibly from home fans this didn't happen because a poor clearance from their keeper found its way to a Blackstones' player, who rolled it into and unguarded net.

contributed on 04/08/23.

TT No.9: Jon T Green - Saturday 29th July 2023; **HOLKER OLD BOYS** v St. Helens Town; North West Counties Football League - First Division North; Venue: Rakesmoor Lane; Result: 0-1; Admission: £5; Programme: online only; Attendance: 111.

A year ago the season had started on rock hard pitches devoid of fresh grass and baked dry by weeks of scorching weather. Fast forward twelve months and the surface at Rakesmoor Lane is looking lush and verdant. A veil of grey hangs over the Lakeland Hills stretching in a line away to the North; Scafell Pike is not far but with lines of heavy cloud marching across the horizon England's highest peak is staying out of sight today.

Holker Old Boys play just a short drive from Barrow-in-Furness town centre but surrounded by fields and a golf course their ground feels more rural than perhaps it actually is. Unusually the main stand is situated in one corner at the top end of the park; there is a considerable slope here so the view from the back of the three rows of dark green seats is much better than might initially be imagined. The flat standing at this end gradually tapers towards the corner flag before continuing along the far side. To either side of the dug outs (a new white plastic one for the home side and a weather-beaten hardboard one for the visitors) are two stiles set back into the outer fencing. These give access to the adjacent field (inhabited by a large flock of sheep) and are used to aid ball retrieval - one assumes that the sheep themselves are too busy eating to throw the ball back...The lower end of the ground is backed by training pitches; looking over the wall you can see how the land continues to drop with the far set of goal posts some way below the first team pitch. On the turnstile side of the ground sits the changing room and club house complex with, to its right, a low flat roofed cover above a few wooden "pub style" benches. A new glass fronted raised viewing area has been built in front of the clubhouse and although only a couple of feet high it does provide a surprisingly enhanced position from which to watch the game.

It's a jacket and jeans day for me, but clearly, I am just a soft Southerner as most of the crowd seem to consider this to be shorts weather as the teams enter the

pitch to a noisy welcome from the young Holker ultras behind the goal. Falsetto they may be, but you can't beat their enthusiasm as they keep singing for the entire afternoon. Old Boys are playing down the slope in the first half and with a strong wind at their backs they have the better of the opening chances. Centre forward Brandon Collins splits the Saints back line but when he is forced wide by 'keeper Joe Mason he sets up both Jamie Hodgson and Callum Baynes before the danger is cleared. Collins is proving hard to handle and he goes close to finding Frankie Ellis with a tantalising centre. The visitors do create a chance of their own as Harris Saunders sees his downward header scrambled away following a corner. Hodgson then goes close with a lob which drops just over before Collins shows some excellent skill taking down a cross on his chest, swivelling and striking a rising shot which clips the top of the bar. After 35 minutes comes the defining moment of the afternoon and it's one which Holker's goalkeeper will want to forget. Left back Liam Bott clips a pass forward; Jay Barker races from his goal but the ball seems to hold up on the wind and he performs a perfect air shot before holding his head in his hands as Tom Scarborough has the simplest of finishes into an empty net.

The second half begins with Old Boys looking the stronger and it's not long before a William McGladdery free kick brings about loud appeals for a hand ball in the box. Summing up their afternoon the referee rightly awards a corner kick. If Collins came close in the first period then he was about to come even nearer to scoring in the second; captain Josh Woodend shows some neat footwork to beat two men before flicking the ball onto Collins. The striker opened up his body beautifully and curled his shot beyond the outstretched dive of Mason only to see it squarely smack the far post. Baynes, dashing forward, wasn't able to hit the target from the rebound. It was now one way traffic with St. Helens seemingly content to hack the ball the length of the field and make Holker rebuild from the back. Woodend saw his close-range header clawed away by the impressive Mason before, in added time, the home side created one more opportunity. A deep left-wing centre was headed back across goal by Farryl Foster and as the ball fell invitingly to Hodgson it seemed inevitable that he would score. The crowd, anticipating the equaliser, had already begun to raise their arms when Mason fell to his right and somehow smothered the shot. It was a magnificent save and neatly summed up a contrasting afternoon for the two men between the sticks.

contributed on 31/07/23.

TT No.8: Craig Dabbs - Sat 22nd July 2023; **Bishop Auckland v Whitby Town**; Tony Lee Memorial Trophy; Venue: Heritage Park; Result: 0-4; Admission: £5; Programme: Did not issue; Attendance: 267.

The Great British weather was in full force today with heavy rain all over the place and the journey north was one filled with concern as much of it was spent in poor weather conditions. However, as we neared County Durham it eased and there was absolutely no danger of it being off with the pitch being immaculate on arrival.

Heritage Park, now in its thirteen year since opening, is a ground that will serve Bishop Auckland FC well having spent a number of years ground sharing following their loss of the iconic Kingsway Ground.

The club is one of the best-known non-league clubs around having won the old FA Amateur Cup ten times. They are also known for helping Manchester United out in their hour of need following the Munich Air Disaster in 1958, with the club providing United with three players to help fill the void left. There is a memorial on the wall of the main stand that marks this.

The club narrowly missed out on promotion to the Northern Premier League at the end of last season failing to beat Ashington, a result that saw the Colliers of Ashington promoted instead of the Two Blues.

Today's friendly against Whitby Town was in honour of Tony Lee who passed away this year. He was manager of both sides taking them into the FA Cup proper rounds, the first with Bishop Auckland and the second with Whitby Town.

With just a week before the season gets underway properly, both teams fielded a more settled side with fewer substitutes, probably more in mind of a starting eleven for the following week. The game itself didn't feel like a friendly as both teams gave a strong performance and yes 0-4 is a little flattering but overall, it was Whitby Town who were the better side and deserving of the trophy on offer.

A very long but good day out and another Northern League ground marked off the list, with plenty still left to do.

contributed (via Brian Buck) on 23/07/23.

TT No.7: Brian Buck - Monday 17th July 2023; **St Neots Town U18** v Eynesbury United; Friendly Match; Venue: played at St Neots Town 3G Pitch; Result: 1-2; Attendance: 70 approx.

I was expecting this game to be played on the host club's main pitch, next door, but I suspect that it was being reserved for the Stevenage v Colchester United first team match, which was due to take place here on the following night, switched because the newly laid grass on the Lamex pitch wasn't yet ready for football.

I last saw football played on this 3G pitch just over ten years ago. I'm told that it was laid down in 2007 and as it has its own dressing rooms, separate from the main ground, I have always treated it as a 'new' ground. As 3G pitches only have a set shelf life, about two years ago it was re-laid. Furthermore, the floodlights have been replaced with brand new LED ones and additionally, on the far side there are now permanent dugouts and also, a small 20 yards long tarpaulin covered stand has been added to the clubhouse side, which is railed off. There are seats in it, consisting of about 25 chairs. The pitch is also railed off behind one goal and behind that there is steep grass banking, which tonight housed some young spectators. Overall, it's a lot different from your average 3G set up and in this respect, it's well worth a visit.

As for the game, I cringed a bit when I found out that this was in effect a boys' versus men's game. But I need not have worried as the game was played without friction and by the end this had been a worthwhile exercise. Generally, St Neots

looked the more skilful and initially fitter of the two sides, but the visitors defended well and were usually able to block most of their hosts advances before they got a shot in. However, on 35 minutes United took the lead with a well struck direct free kick from about 25 yards out. Overall possession was roughly even though and this situation continued after the break. Then on 64 minutes, St Neots equalised after a hard-hit cross from the right reached the scorer who drove the ball in at the far post. Then as the game continued United started to benefit from having more subs to choose from than St Neots and on 74 minutes they won this entertaining encounter with a hard hit angled shot from about ten yards out.

contributed on 18/07/23.

TT No.6: Brian Buck - Saturday 15th July 2023; **Arlesey Town** v Hendon; Friendly Match; Result: 0-4; Attendance: 80 approx.

Although I had all day to get here, I failed to arrive at the ground until about 15 minutes before kick-off time. But parking still wasn't a problem, despite it being much smaller these days due to the erection of some bungalows in it and I still managed to park right outside the entrance to the clubhouse. Although I only live 14 miles away from the ground, I believe that out of my previous visits here, 97 in all, none of them have ever been on a Saturday!

Somehow, today the place looked a lot different than it does for evening games and the surroundings are quite attractive. The ground was also decorated with some advertising boards on the pitch railings. 19 of them were the same though, all celebrating the fact that they were FA Vase winners in 1994/5 season. Weatherwise it was an extremely unseasonable windy day, more so when the occasional rain shower passed by. In the first half the wind was at Hendon's back, but in truth it was doing neither side any favours.

Once again this was a game where few serious goal scoring chances were created. There were just two in the first half, both from Hendon, the first of these being the opening goal, which arrived on 23 minutes. This was a wind assisted shot from some 30 yards out which was deflected on its way to goal. It was unlikely that any keeper could have stopped it. In this period Hendon were a yard sharper than Arlesey, in everything they did, although the hosts created a couple of useful moves, neither culminating with a shot though.

The second half saw Arlesey make use of the wind for a while, but it didn't last and soon Hendon were in the ascendancy once more. On 61 minutes they doubled their lead with a close-range downward header. On 75 minutes they extended their lead after their scorer was allowed to run at goal for about 25 yards before shooting home from near the edge of the area and on 83 minutes they wrapped up an easy win when they capitalized on a misplaced pass from about ten yards out. By now Arlesey had been made to look a very ordinary side, but they had been well beaten by a very useful Hendon team.

contributed on 18/07/23.

TT No.5: Craig Dabbs - Saturday 8th July 2023; **Pontypridd United** v Pontardawe Town; Friendly; Venue: University of South Wales Sports Park; Result: 3-0; Admission: £4; Programme: Did not issue: Attendance: 106.

It wasn't my intention to travel down to Treforest near Pontypridd today. I had actually earmarked Newport City v Cefn Cribwr at Newport Stadium until I found it was switched to Cwmbran. Then I noticed this one, and it more than made up for any Newport City disappointment. I had consistently, over several years, kept the top tier of Welsh Football complete until the start of last season when the newly rebranded Pontypridd United moved on up into it. I swore, nothing against the club, just the distance involved in getting it done. I'm also a bit of a traditionalist and I don't like how a league splits mid-season into two sections and goes again, so that puts me off a bit.

I last saw Ponty when they were Town, playing in black and white at Ynysangharad Park in the centre of Pontypridd on a groundhop. The ground has a small stand with lights and is also railed and enclosed. It does however have limitations being set within a public park so when the club decided it was time to move on to better things the Park wasn't an option and the USW in nearby Treforest provided a much better solution.

The venue isn't exactly alien to me either, although it's changed significantly since 2009 when I last rolled into the car park at the then named University of Glamorgan Playing Fields to watch Bridgend Town in their short stint playing nowhere near home. The pitch and stand are still there over on the far side of the complex, the other end now has a smart sports facility with a 4G cage next to it which is now home to United.

Now let's be honest here, it's no oil painting. It has three seated stands, two kit stands on the USW building side and a temporary looking stand that I've so often seen at Rugby grounds down the years. It's functional as it ticks the boxes for top-flight Welsh Football and although they are now in Treforest they seem to have a bit more of a fan base than they did when they were in the Welsh League at Ynysangharad. Another thing I will mention is the warm welcome I received, little things like that do go a long way.

The top table of Welsh Football is ever improving. It's a very different beast to those early League of Wales days and although it was an early pre-season game the difference in standard between the two sides was evident. Pontypridd completely controlled matters, not to say Pontardawe didn't have chances, they did but they were few and far between.

contributed on 09/07/23.

TT No.4: Keith Aslan - Saturday 8th July 2023; **HAROLD HILL** v Romford; Friendly; Kick Off: 13.02; Result: 2-4; Admission: Free; Programme: 50p (you won't get much for ten bob these days); Attendance: 74 (30 home, 28 away & 16 neutral).

This is what it's all about, stress free groundhopping doesn't come much freer from stress than this. An early kick off just a short ride out to the leafy Essex suburbs. Now on Crossrail with a train every few minutes, Harold Wood is the station you'll want (Harold must have been pretty big beans around these parts). I reckon even with two fully functioning knees the ground must be a nigh on 40-minute walk from the station, but who cares with the 496 offering a 15-minute door to door bus service. Programmes available from behind the bar on arrival, and a vital ingredient for this type of match, a bouncy castle. Today was a good day.

Essex Olympian club Harold Hill play at the Hendersons Sports Club, fully roped off, and surrounded on three sides by trees, not only aesthetically pleasing to the eye, but providing shelter from the rain, which today wasn't particularly heavy, but persistent. Big screen plus hot and cold drinks in the clubhouse which also advertised food but I didn't partake having already stuffed my face in the cafe outside Harold Wood station.

Last time I can recall seeing Romford play was at their old ground on Good Friday morning in 1969, virtually a Southern League Championship decider against Hillingdon Borough with a crowd approaching four thousand. A different world back then. They've had their trials and tribulations since that momentous match and are now currently settled in the Essex Senior League but without a home ground, or any sign of getting one. Harry Hill (copyright Cherryhopper) have spent most of their 75-year existence happily floating around the Essex Olympian League.

A good workout for both sides, particularly the Romford number 3 who only received a booking for an assassination attempt that would have warranted a sending off in more formal circumstances. His half time substitution didn't come as a surprise. Harold Hill gave a good account of themselves and twice took the lead. Two goals in the last eight minutes sealed it for Romford. Highlight of the match for me was when a Romford supporter came round offering sweets to the crowd, an offer I gratefully accepted. What a nice thing to do. The nearside club linesman spent most of the game on his phone. How did people survive before these things were invented?

Arrived back at my country dacha at six o'clock, if only all groundhopping was this easy.

contributed on 09/07/23.

TT No.3: Brian Buck - Saturday 1st July 2023; **Bedfont Sports** v Hanworth Villa; Friendly Match; Result: 2-2; Attendance: 100 approx.

This was the second time I've started off my season with a visit to Bedfont Sports, after having lured the now Beds County League chairman, Peter Francis here for two games on 2 July 2011, which were played out on the grass pitch behind the main pitch, which these days is a 3G one. My real reason for coming here today though was for the benefit of Mrs Buck, a closet plane spotter, who got quite excited when I told her that the planes fly so low over the pitch, that you can almost see the passengers in them finishing off their prawn cocktails as they come down to land at the adjacent Heathrow Airport.

We drove here, allowing plenty of time to cope with the expected local traffic and also, so we could have a pre-match meal in the nearby Green Man pub, which was very enjoyable. Eventually we arrived at the ground shortly before kick-off, taking our seats, complete with leftover 3G carpeting, so as to see the planes come over. Guess what? They didn't! Well, they did, but they'd changed the flight paths, so we saw them land in the distance and in a different direction, take off in the further distance. I was expecting a reaction from Mrs Buck, along the lines of "This is the last time I come to football with you!" There have been quite a few of those days in the past! But to be fair to her, she took it quite well and when we got home, she told me that she had enjoyed our day out, but I think that she was talking more about a) her meal and b) the few planes she did see!

As for the game, Bedfont were relegated from the Isthmian League at the end of last season and are now in the Combine Counties League, whilst Hanworth were one match away from promotion to Step 3 but lost in their playoff final. Bedfont have got a new manager and quite a few new players, whilst Hanworth remained largely unchanged. With the weather still being warm, but cooler than of late, no drinks breaks were deemed necessary. The first half saw high work rates from both sides. Bedfont took the lead after 7 minutes, when from a rebound Bedfont took the lead from about 15 yards out. The scorer's name was Kanek but I preferred to call him Kane K! On 13 minutes Hanworth equalised with a close-range header following a corner, and then took the lead on 27 minutes with what looked like an involuntarily chested own goal to me. The start of the second half saw the hosts make changes, but the visitors gradually brought on their subs. Gradually the energy shown by both sides faded as tiredness crept in. But on 90(+2) minutes Bedfont did get the equaliser, by way of a close-range header from a corner, but only the team celebrated, with there being little reaction from most of the decent sized crowd, who were more interested in socializing or even plane spotting!

contributed on 04/07/23.

TT No.2: Craig Dabbs - Saturday 1st July 2023; **Northampton Sileby Rangers v Cogenhoe United**; Friendly; Venue: Redwell Leisure Centre; Result: 2-2; Admission: Free; Programme: Did not issue; Attendance: 49.

It's back! In truth, it never went away as there's football throughout June if you care to go, but I do like having that break before another eleven months of travelling all over the place.

Pre-season friendlies for me offer two things essentially, one it's a chance to visit grounds I haven't been to in years and second, it provides odd venues that you don't normally see crop up on a Saturday during the competitive season. This one falls into the latter.

Redwell Leisure Centre isn't a classic venue at all. It's a 3G cage at the back of an aging leisure centre on the edge of a housing estate in Wellingborough. Picture painted, I knew what it was going to be like prior to setting off, but at only a fifteen-minute drive from home it was a nice easy start to the long haul.

The centre built in 1992, is earmarked for a refit and needs one as it's tired looking. Up until 2019 when the cage was built all the Leisure Centre seemingly offered was indoor activity as there's really nothing else outside. The venue itself at least offers viewing from within, down most of the one side but other than that it's your bog-standard cage that I've done so many of.

The match was understandably lacking in blood and thunder. It's the start of July and if you go to these games expecting that, well in the large you'll be disappointed. Rangers looked the better, more settled outfit with a number of their players knowing each other already. Their opponents Cogenhoe however have had a few more changes and are much less settled for now. Despite that they did turn the two-goal deficit into a draw which can only be a positive for what is my local side.

contributed on 02/07/23.

TT No.1: Keith Aslan - Saturday 1st July 2023; **EUXTON VILLA** v Chorley; Friendly; Kick Off: 15.07; Result: 0-3; Admission: £3 for old people; Programme: £2; Attendance: 312. (81 home, 220 away & 11 neutral).

It's always been my ambition to complete the North West Counties League before I die, but I expect my many fans are asking 'why tick a friendly when the league starts in a few weeks?' Well, I'll tell you. Our old friends, the R.M.T., are celebrating a year of strikes when the new season starts, putting me out of action for two weeks. And the odd Saturday when there are trains there aren't any thanks to Railtrack carrying out what are laughingly called 'track improvement works'. So, I'm somewhat limited as to when I can travel and today was one of the few Saturdays that had trains running, an opportunity not to be missed, in spite of the fact that the London Gay Pride Rally was going to have to take place without me.

This one is difficult to do without a car. Going out I got a bus from outside Preston Station to Euxton Tesco, and a half hour walk. Coming back I got a train from Euxton Balshaw Lane to Wigan, which requires a 47-minute walk and you'll need an Ordnance Survey Map for this one. My dodgy knees got a good workout today. Well off the beaten track, the ground has all the facilities the ground graders crave, with a small highbred *Atcost* stand in one corner, and an area of covered standing along the opposite touchline. There was a barbecue, which looks to be a regular feature, and a clubhouse serving hot and cold drinks with a screen that would have had the football on if there had there been any, but today was showing that weird game called cricket. Referees must look longingly at this 'sport' and while they can make 90 minutes of football last for hours, they could drag a cricket match on for days. Euxton's old ground is next door, again fully railed and looking as though it would have been pretty impressive when fully operational.

Arrived over an hour before kick-off and both teams were already pointlessly running round cones, so how the game managed to kick off so late only the referee knows. The match was further delayed when the linesman spotted a hole in the net. Given that half an hour earlier the self-same linesman had jogged past the offending gap one can only wonder why he didn't check the net then rather than 4 minutes after the game should have started.

A good match as far as friendlies go with Euxton putting on a good show but always on the back foot from their higher rated opponents. Chorley's opener was a literal net buster with the ball ending up outside the ground as it went through the hole in the net which hadn't been properly fixed. Might as well not have bothered in the first place. The English weather gave us a bit of everything from boiling hot sunshine to thunderstorms, but at least the heavy rain came while I was on the bus.

My Avanti train was 31 minutes late back into Euston. The magnificent 'Annie' did sterling work on the tannoy comforting everybody, but regular Avanti passengers (or customers if you prefer, which I don't) took it all in their stride. The service wasn't cancelled so we were all quite happy, anything else would have been a bonus.

contributed on 02/07/23.