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TT REPORTS 2023-24

updated 02/10/23.

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 hatrick 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 Seliaerts 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 stiffs 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 unattended. 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 an 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.