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## TT REPORTS 2024-25

updated 11/11/24.

**TT No.57: *Steve Hardy*** - Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> November 2024; **BNJS** v Village C; Birmingham & District League Division Four; Result: 2-3; Admission and Programme: Free; Attendance: 2 H/C

Forget all the nonsense I told you recently about only needing a couple more grounds to recomplete the wonderful B&D League. Since then, I have found two more so today I decided to visit the nearest one to me. This turned out to be an error on my behalf as the other new club were also at home today, but 'home' was only a one-off and won't be used again.

Anyway, BNJS play at Barnford Park in Oldbury, and a lovely setting it is too. I asked the home Manager what BNJS stands for and he told me it is a shortened version of a very long Indian word. Unfortunately, neither he, nor any of the players I spoke to, had a clue what the word is. Facilities-wise there are none. Just an un-roped pitch surrounded by trees in their autumnal glory. There are a couple of park benches strewn around too, but as I was one of only two people there, they were not used.

Visitors Village C looked much the better side in the first half and were 2-0 up at the break. Both teams stayed out at half time, mainly because the dressing rooms were locked up. At half time I realised how really cold it was too. On went the gloves and woolly hat for the second half which made taking photos a tricky thing as the gloves had to come off to use the camera, and my dream shot had passed by some minutes ago.

The second half was a complete turnaround. BNJS scored twice in the 65<sup>th</sup> and 70<sup>th</sup> minutes and it was all to play for.

Despite a lot of effort from BNJS it was Village who got the winner near the end.

So, once again a great game in my favourite league and a weekend off for Sarah Satnav who decided she wanted to stay at home and watch a recording of Australian Lego Masters.

*contributed on 11/11/24.*

**TT No.56: Jon T Green** - Saturday 9th November 2024; **LIVERSEDGE** v North Ferriby; Northern Premier League East Division; Venue: Clayborn Stadium, Quaker Lane; Result: 1-0; Admission: £10; Programme: Online only; Attendance: 232

On a still, windless morning, on the outskirts of Cleckheaton, there is a buzz in the air. To be precise it's more of a hum than a buzz and comes from a leaf blower wielded by Liversedge President Bob Gawthorpe. Bob takes a few minutes out from his pre-match duties to tell me that he has been involved with the club for over 50 years as a player, manager and committee man. "I used to work as a schoolmaster in Batley and would come down here evenings to relax at the end of the day. The wife thought I was avoiding her!" he adds with a grin. He looks around the immaculate ground and continues "the pitch had a slope on it, but we used the money from an FA Cup run a few years back to get it levelled". "It's been a tough season" he continues "we lost our manager a month or two back and he took half of the team with him. We're getting better but our problem is we just can't score". A glance at the league table backs up his words as Liversedge sit perilously close to the relegation zone whilst today's visitors from Hull are in the play-off places.

With Bob returning to his clean-up operation, it's time to explore the ground; the main stand(s) comes in two parts the original larger section with some wonderful traditional metal seats and a newer, smaller section with the normal tip up variety. At either side are deep areas of uncovered terracing given views to the adjacent Jo Cox Memorial Wood (named in honour of the murdered local MP) and the hills of the Spenn Valley. Behind the top end goal is a covered terrace, The Cowshed, with a roof supported by what look suspiciously like telegraph poles. The clubhouse, and splendid decking area, are up a flight of steps and give a superb panorama of the ground. Hard standing behind the far goal and along the dugout touchline complete the scene.

After the strains of the Last Post have faded the match gets underway; Ferriby, ditching their normal green and white kit for a maroon outfit, with the hosts in their regulation pale blue. The visitors enjoy an opening spell of possession with right winger Josh Whiteley giving his full back a torrid time. Jack Crook tries a speculative shot for the hosts which is deflected away for a corner; it's a scenario which will be regularly played out during the afternoon with defences very much on top. The one clear sight of goal falls to Ferriby's centre-forward as we approach the break; Tom Corner picks the ball up 20 yards out and with 'keeper Luke Jackson, somewhat in no man's land, executes a chip beyond his grasp but also beyond the far post.

With an hour almost played, the visitors have a big and prolonged shout for a penalty as Lewis Dennison claims that his shot is blocked by a defender's arm. It's a crowded penalty area following a corner so getting any clear view of the incident is simply impossible. What is clear a few minutes later is keeper Ben Bottomley's clattering of Liversedge's Jack Carr as he breaks free. There are calls for a dismissal but, with covering defenders on hand, a yellow card is the correct decision. Not that the visitors escape with just a caution; Mekhi Haughton-Parris

takes the free kick and swings in a left footed cross from which Jack Crook smashes home what turns out to be the winner. The remainder of the game turns niggly with the visitors adding to their collection of bookings; Liversedge hold their shape and without pressing the ball form a defensive unit through which there is no path.

At the end of the game, I spot Bob standing outside the clubhouse, I shake his hand and he smiles broadly; it's been a good day for him and his beloved club.

*contributed on 11/11/24.*

**TT No.55: Craig Dabbs** - Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> November 2024; **Shawbury United** v Runcorn Town; North West Counties League First Division South; Venue: Shawbury United Community Sports & Recreational Centre; Result: 1-2; Admission: £6; Programme: 16pp, £1.50; Attendance: 79

This has been a priority for me this season, a second attempt at it came today after a waterlogged pitch scuppered my chances a few weeks ago. Those that don't know Shawbury is a village in my home county of Shropshire and was the only ground at steps one to six in Salop that I needed, it really was a must.

Shawbury United have fought for years for their own ground in the village, they've had to share at Wem Town, Ludlow Town (which is not even close) and lately Shrewsbury Town's 4g community pitch which wasn't up to standard but kept the club in business whilst this was being made ready for this season.

The ground has everything you need for this level of Football, enclosed, hard standing all around, two seated stands and lights, add in a lovely clubhouse and equally lovely staff - what more do you want? Oh, and then there is the curious area of covered (term used very loosely) accommodation near to the entrance; I can only imagine it's going to get the roof repaired when the better weather returns.

Shawbury United have spent many years in the West Midlands (Regional) League with the last three seasons in the Midland League Division One. When the FA laterally moved them to the NWCFL, I winced a little. Shawbury are not a big club and the NWCFL is a stronger league than the Midland, indeed when you look at the bottom four in the division you see aside from Runcorn Town who have had a very interesting managerial merry go round this season, you see Shawbury United, Wolverhampton Sporting Community and Allscott Heath, all playing in the Midland League last season. There is no doubt Shawbury have a fight on their hands to avoid relegation to the County League and with all the incredible work that has taken place to get them back to the village that would be such a shame.

The match then was a huge one for both sides. Runcorn needed the three points to move one point behind second from bottom Shawbury and this happened despite them going down to ten men and weathering a few storms along the way. Shawbury tried, they had a real go, looked good early on but seemed to tire as the game wore on. I do hope they can do enough to stay up.

*contributed (via Brian Buck) on 10/11/24.*

**TT No.54: Keith Aslan** - Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> November 2024; **WEST LONDON ATHLETIC** v Hayes & Hillingdon; Anagram Records Trophy; Kick Off: 14.10; Result 1-3; Admission & Programme: Free. Attendance: 18 (9 home, 4 away & 5 neutral)

It's a Saturday so no trains through Broadstairs. Not 'essential engineering work' this week, but 'rail improvement work'. At least Railtrack have got a sense of humour.

Today's match was played at the Quinten Hogg Memorial Ground or the University of Westminster Sports Ground depending on where you look, a ten-minute walk from Chiswick station. If I had a pound for every time I've been here, I'd have enough money to pay my winter fuel bill. In another life I lived a short bus ride away and used to watch Fulham rugby league team play at the stadium here on Sundays. The magnificent 658-seater grandstand is still in situ, fenced off due to health and safety concerns, but can't be taken down due to a preservation order. Well worth a look. Today's match was played at the opposite end of the complex, next to the railway line, ideal for a bout of trainspotting if the game got a bit slow. A sprawling sports field with four football pitches, a couple of plastic hockey pitches, and numerous tennis courts, nearly all of them in use this afternoon. A luxurious (and pricey) clubhouse is situated above the changing rooms which are a very long trek from the ground. Once you're out on the pitch you won't be going back until the end of the match.

Having only transitioned from Sunday football this season, with no sponsors or sugar daddy, the chairman has come up with some novel ideas to keep the club afloat and things are looking bright for West London. He formed the club in 2018 to 'take people away from violence and crime'. A noble aim, but not helped by the lack of 'Respect' handshakes in the Middlesex County League.

On the way to the game the secretary had emailed one hopper to apologise that the programme editor had decided to 'go green' and the proggy would be on line only. Probably the most pathetic excuse I've ever heard. But you don't mess with groundhoppers, as the secretary of Madeley White Star found out to her cost, and the secretary here was 'persuaded' to go into the office and print some copies out in exchange for one of our number putting the rope up. Fair play to the bloke, he wasn't the eco-warrior responsible for the programme. The editor didn't actually attend the match, a wise move on his part. When global warming finally destroys the planet people will look back on West London FC printing off half a dozen programmes as the final straw.

Strange goings on prior to kick off. At 14.02 the Ref lined the players up round the centre circle for the minute's Remembrance silence. This was quickly abandoned when it was noticed one of the linesmen was missing. Frantic conversations took place as to his whereabouts until somebody said they'd had a phone call from him saying he was going to be a few minutes late. He duly came yomping across the playing fields and the silence was reconvened. I have a couple of questions, 1) why could the original silence not have taken place without the absent linesman? and

2) How did the two punctual officials not notice their mate was missing until they got on the pitch?

The Anagram Trophy is one of my favourite competitions but I have no idea how it works. Some teams appear every year, others come and go, and quite a number make one appearance and are never seen again. Note to the Greta Thunberg think alike, this is one of the very few competitions where paper is still compulsory. The games usually pit two teams from different leagues who would not normally play each other. Not so today with both sides denizens of the Middlesex County. Hayes are second in the top division, with the home side in the lower echelons. This was reflected in the match, totally dominated by the away side, notwithstanding West London's late consolation goal.

West London are a great little club with friendly officials (excluding the programme editor) and I wish them well in the future.

*contributed on 10/11/24.*

**TT No.53: Jon T Green** - Saturday 2nd November 2024; **CHEPSTOW TOWN** v Undy Athletic; Ardal South East; Venue: Larkfield Park; Result: 3-1; Admission: £6; Programme: No; Attendance: 98 (headcount)

It's Derby Day in eastern Gwent and it's not one of those contrived for TV Derbies but a proper "we're only five miles apart and really don't like each other much" Derby. Since arriving at the ground everyone has mentioned the opening match of the season where Undy went two up in the first ten minutes before Chepstow stormed back to score an unbelievable eleven unanswered goals. The story is told with relish and with smiles that get bigger every time they think of the scoreline. Some exercise a note of caution admitting that their opponents had a weakened team that day and that "they are in decent form now". The latter is certainly true with Athletic having only lost one of the past five and that against leaders Treowen Stars. Chepstow sit in fourth place and will undoubtedly start the game as favourites.

Larkfield Park is on the edge of town but now surrounded by housing on three sides. "We have to put traffic cones out because one or two people complain" explains a club official "why buy a house next to a football ground if you don't like football?" It's a valid point but as I can't think of a suitable answer it's time to take a look around the ground. The modern clubhouse and changing room facilities form an "L" shape at the corner to the right of the only entrance. To the left, and sitting astride the halfway line, is a prefabricated 100 blue seater stand. It's a standard construction but with a curved barrier in front and a mature deciduous tree as a background it's at least photographically interesting. Hard standing continues to the far corner but then stops before the ground falls away down to a training pitch. It's a floodlit area but the club are not confident of being able to get planning permission for lights on the main pitch - those pesky neighbours again proving less than neighbourly....

The game begins at a frantic pace with Town's Adam Wakley firing across goal and Undy's Harris Thomas trying his luck from distance but it's not until the midway point of the half that the first goal arrives. Chepstow have been creating plenty of space down the left wing and it's from here that Wakley crosses. His centre is helped on by Christian O'Donnell to Mallachi Graham who jinks inside the covering defender before beating Jack Harris with a low right footer. Three minutes later the hosts have made it two as Josh Parsons nets with a deflected drive through a crowded penalty area. Undy desperately need to steady the ship and in fact do much better than just steady it as they reduce the arrears through a smart Scott Rodway goal.

In a frantic start to the second period, Town almost extend their lead, but Ryan Smith can only find the side netting after Harris has done well to keep out Graham's shot from distance. Undy respond and in a good spell of play, centre forward Harris tests home custodian Matt Swann before Gareth Cullimore heads narrowly wide from a corner. The match has been largely played in fine spirit with referee Mr Philip Bates exercising a pleasing level of sarcasm to keep everyone smiling. Things do however turn a little less pleasant as we enter the closing stages with yellow cards being shown to Athletic's James Gidney for a lunging challenge and Town's Adam Wakley for pointless dissent. Wakley does make amends deep into added time as his pass is converted by substitute Sonny Lewis to wrap up the three points.

With bragging rights confirmed there are plenty of happy campers in the bigger than usual crowd and as we file out into the gathering dusk, I am sure that I heard someone mention 11-2.....

*contributed on 04/11/24.*

**TT No.52: Jon T Green** - Friday 1st November 2024; **PONTYPRIDD UNITED** v Ammanford; Cymru South; Venue: University of South Wales Sports Park; Result: 3-0; Admission: £5; Programme: £3; Attendance: 238

Located some 10 minutes' drive south of Pontypridd, The University of South Wales (USW) Sports Park sits beneath a busy section of dual carriageway which links Cardiff with the towns of the Taff Valley. Upon arrival in the lower car park, be aware that match day charges do apply. The view of the ground is blocked by the enormous hulk of the main sport hall which, amongst other facilities, includes a full-size indoor pitch. In all honesty, it appears somewhat incongruous that for the last two seasons the USW has hosted Tier One football, with the likes of TNS being regular visitors, as the club have little presence save for the signage immediately around the entrance to the 4G cage. There is the requisite large television gantry sited between two prefab red seated stands with a combined circa 300 capacity but other than that it's simply hard standing on all four sides. Some height can be gained on the far touchline by standing at the top of a bank of light-coloured stones and leaning against the perimeter wire fencing.

With Ponty currently third in the Cymru South division the resignation of manager Gavin Allan (for personal reasons) and his assistant Josh Anderson in the run up to

the game was something of a surprise. The duo take charge of the team for the last time tonight against an Ammanford team who have climbed to tenth after a slow beginning to the campaign.

The home side start the game at a fast pace, looking comfortable on the ball and dominating possession. They create the first good chance after only five minutes as Liam Eason swivels inside the box and strikes a bouncing left footed effort that Luke Martin does well to push away. Eason goes close again as Taylor Marsh whips in a centre which the striker heads narrowly over. Ammanford are working tremendously hard in defence but it's no surprise when they fall behind just short of the half hour mark; Jamie Veale crosses and captain Jarrad Wright leaps highest to head in from close range. The visitors finally create a chance as we head towards the break, but Rhys Davies just isn't able to reach Adam John's teasing far post pass.

Davies continues to be Ammanford's target as they look to get the ball quickly forward but it's at the back where centre halves Euros Griffiths and Callum Jones are working overtime against Eason and his co-striker Daniel Griffiths. The home side are pressing for a second with Marsh finding the side netting before Eason smacks the cross bar with a fierce drive. Eason is not to be denied though and with thirteen minutes remaining he moves onto Veale's through ball, outpaces his marker and beats Martin with some aplomb. Ponty add a third in added time as substitutes Thomas Stokes and Alfie Lewis combine for the latter to sweep home his shot from the edge of the area. It's a win which sees them climb above Llanelli Town into second place but still three points behind leaders Trethomas Bluebirds who have also won this evening. By a quirk of the fixture list the two teams meet on the last day of the season and although April is still six months away I for one wouldn't bet against a final game title decider.

*v2 contributed on 04/11/24.*

**TT No.51: Craig Dabbs** - Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2024; **Welling United** v Chippenham Town; National League South; Venue: Park View Road; Result: 0-4; Admission: £17; Programme: 40pp, £3; Attendance: 554

There's talk of redevelopment here with some housing to be built but there seems to be a disagreement over exactly what should be built so staving off the diggers, for now. The ground has been here since 1925 and was home to the now defunct Bexley United until they folded in 1976. Welling United took on the ground moving from Butterfly Lane.

The ground has had quite a history, much a tale of suffering, bombed during the war severely damaging the first grandstand, then it became derelict for five years with the remains of the stand pulled down and the club folding. Then in 1951 the club were resurrected and the ground developed once more with the grandstand you see today only for Bexley to fold again. The ground fell into disrepair and there was a fire in the stand to boot; thankfully it didn't destroy it which is a minor miracle as much of it is wooden.

Welling United brought it all back to life and in 1999 Erith & Belvedere moved in after damage to their Park View home. The Deres have their own side of the ground, their own social club, stand, entrance and toilets all kitted out in blue and white. It's no doubt improved Park View Road further in what is rather unique in groundsharing terms. The stand on this side of the ground, with The Deres crests on the back, dates from 2002; they have their own changing rooms underneath which are coming in handy at the moment for Welling United as the changing rooms are out of action on their side of the ground.

When the development happens, Erith & Belvedere intend to stay put whilst Welling United will move out and groundshare until completion. This will give Welling United a new stand and over 100 homes on the site if the hurdles currently in place can be overcome.

The match was very much 15 opening minutes of shock and awe for Welling United as Chippenham Town dismantled the Wings. Once they composed themselves Welling looked much better and slowly grew into the game becoming more dominant. Chippenham knew that it was largely done and dusted and went through the motions of keeping Welling at bay and eventually getting a fourth to rub salt into the wounds of the home team.

*contributed (via Brian Buck) on 03/11/24.*

**TT No.50: Steve Hardy** - Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2024; **Eminent** v Shilton Reserves; Coventry Alliance Division Three; Result: 1-8; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance 4 H/C

Off to Nuneaton again today for my first look at the Coventry Alliance for this season. New club Eminent are based at a huge area of land called Paul's Land. This, I discovered from a plaque in the changing rooms, came from a family called Paul, who donated their entire estate to the local council back in 1944, on the proviso that no buildings should be placed there. The area is vast with six full-size footie pitches, a kids' play area plus (I think) a cricket square too.

Visitors Shilton Reserves are currently top of division 3 but won't be able to get promoted as their 1<sup>st</sup> team play in the division above. They were really impressive today and their 8 goals were the least they deserved.

As always seems to happen in a top v bottom match these days, it was Eminent who scored first on 6 minutes with an absolute belter from miles out that soared over the keeper's head. And that was as good as it got for them. Shilton equalised on 13 minutes and took the lead with a penalty two minutes later. A third came on 38 minutes to give them a 3-1 half time lead.

After the break the 4<sup>th</sup> duly arrived on 48 minutes, the fifth on the hour mark followed by 2 more on 70 and 88 minutes.

Full credit to Eminent though for not giving up at all despite being completely outclassed.



I really enjoyed my day out again, although getting lost in the middle of Birmingham added over 2 hours to my 45-minute trip home! Sarah Satnav didn't help either as she kept telling me to go down road 'A' when it closed off with no obvious alternative route to take.

*contributed on 03/11/24.*

**TT No.49: Keith Aslan** - Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2024; **LONG BENNINGTON** v Dinnington Town; Buckingham Insurance League Cup; Kick Off: 13.58; Result: 0-4; Admission: Free; Programme: £2; Official attendance: 64 - which it wasn't (real attendance: 41 (22 home, 8 away & 11 neutral)

This weekend is my birthday, the big seven O. Nothing to look forward to now except death, illness and train cancellations, but not necessarily in that order. I've reached the end of my allotted life span, but my fans need not worry, God owes me an extra six years as recompense for getting my free bus pass so long after everybody else.

Long Bennington is 6 miles south of Newark, an irregular bus service from outside the station which more or less fits in with a 2 o'clock kick off. No worries today with Stockport Taxis serving me well. I ticked off the nearby Greggs while I was waiting. Incidentally Newark is the only town in England that's an anagram of Piers Morgan. (think about it).

The ground is on the main road as you enter town. An open space with the pitch down a dip in one corner with a small, raised grass bank which had a seat atop of it. A prime spot, but it only had room for three of the eleven hoppers. A bit of nifty elbow work made sure I was one of them. Although adjacent to the A1 it wasn't noticeable with a row of trees blocking the view and the noise of passing traffic. There was a hall with a tea hatch but only sugarless coffee available. And even for this you had to be there at the right time with the barista only making fleeting appearances. Given that he was also the secretary and the manager this was understandable. This is multi-tasking to the max. And to add to all his duties he was hobbling around on crutches. Its people like him that keep these clubs alive.

Ivan Toney would have got very long odds on a home win with Dinnington unbeaten and a division above Long Bennington, but the Benny's gave a good account of themselves and were only one nil down up to the 68<sup>th</sup> minute. I may be 'celebrating' my 70<sup>th</sup> birthday but I am a mere stripling compared to one of the linesmen who looked to be in his eighties. His knees are better than mine though.

Train watch: All good today but I read in the paper that train fares will be going up above the rate of inflation, as they have done every year since privatization, making them just about the highest in the world. My memory must be playing tricks on me as I recall politician after politician infecting my TV screen every night telling me that privatization would mean cheaper fares. I must have dreamt it.

*contributed on 03/11/24*

**TT No.48: Steve Hardy** - Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> October 2024; **Nechells Athletic** v Village E; Birmingham & District League Division 6; Result: 6-4; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 5 H/C

Off on the train again today to the delightful area of Stetchford. I hadn't realised before making this trip that my station takes me all the way through Birmingham and ends up at Birmingham International Airport, via Stetchford.

Nechells have two teams in the B&DL, one in division 4 and another in Division 6. Both teams are called Nechells Athletic though, making it very difficult to know which one is which. My game today was played at the Washwood Heath Academy in Stetchford, which is a brisk 25-minute walk from the station. There are three grass pitches at the rear of the school and all look to be used on a regular basis.

The match featured the bottom and next to bottom teams in the bottom division. Having watched this league regularly for the past 10 years I had a fair idea of what to expect, and sure enough I had picked a classic. 10 goals with two hat tricks, and a very poor referee who didn't leave the centre circle. His best moment came in the 32<sup>nd</sup> minute when a linesman signalled an offside for a Village player. The ref obviously thought he was flagging for a penalty for some obscure reason and awarded one. Uproar from Nechells who tried to get the ref to talk to the linesman in question, but he refused, and the penalty was duly scored. That made the score 4-2 but luckily it didn't change the result.

Another four goals in the second half gave Nechells a deserved 6-4 win, but all credit to Village who never gave up and to both sides who played the game in a very good spirit. Thanks also to Nechells' Manager Rafa Costa who is a lovely man who helped me get there by confirming the game was on.

So, two more to go to complete the league again. Firstly, Hurley King Vets on November the 23<sup>rd</sup>, and then AFC Bromsgrove which I will leave until later in the season and give me something to look forward to.

*contributed on 27/10/24.*

**TT No.47: Keith Aslan** - Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> October 2024; **FELTHAM** v Cater Bank Hounslow & Abbots 'A'; Middlesex County League Division One South and West; Kick Off: 14.35; Result: 1-1; Admission & Programme: Free; Attendance: 38 (31 home, 0 away & 7 neutral)

Footballs come home. Like many teams Feltham began life in 1946 with servicemen returning from the war and it was at this very ground that Tudor Sports, as they were then called, came into being. It's been a rollercoaster of a journey which encompassed the dizzying heights of the Isthmian Premier, and after a nomadic existence for the past few years they have hopefully found a permanent home here at Feltham Rugby Club. Once again, I have nothing but praise for their friendly bunch of volunteers. Great people.

Groundhopping at its most stressless, a lie in, HS1 to London (HS1 good, HS2 a waste of taxpayer's money), dins at my favourite Euston trattoria then an easy ride

across town to Feltham Rugby Club. As this is London, buses everywhere and you can choose your journey. Feltham is the nearest station which I used coming home. Walkable, or so I was told, but I got the bus. Might as well get some value from my bus pass which I got six years after everybody else.

A quality venue with the Rugby Clubhouse serving all manner of hot and old food. It was here a programme was thrust into my paws with no thought of recompense. The ground is a fair way from the clubhouse, they won't be going in at half time, but the Rugby Pitch is twice as far and can be seen in the distance. I would think the rugby players would be knackered just getting from the changing rooms to the pitch.

Plenty of hoppers at this one, drawn by the programme. 32 pages of wonderfulness, a special edition to mark their first match here. A print run of 50 suggested a very optimistic projection of the attendance. The fabulously named Aaron Flower was subject of the player profile. You could have knocked me down with a feather when he listed his favourite team as Manchester United. The Cubs history was also a fascinating read.

Nothing to choose between the two teams, adjacent in the league with both having won 3 and lost 2, and this equilibrium continued in the match. Feltham however left it very late to equalise, the 90<sup>th</sup> minute, but I was pleased they did as Hounslow spent rather too much of the second half practising what is now called 'game management', but I know it by a different name. There was a minute's silence before the match, but nobody knew who it was for which rather obviates the point. And why have it two minutes after the game should have started? Even then we weren't ready to go as Feltham embarked on the longest cuddle you've ever seen. I wonder what Shankly or Clough would have made of these pre-match orgies?

Connections coming home all achieved and I was back at my country dacha in time for 'Strictly Come Dancing'. So all good.

*contributed on 27/10/24.*

**TT No.46: Jon T Green** - Saturday 19th October 2024; **BENFLEET** v Newbury Forest; FA Vase First Round; Venue: Woodfield Park; Result: 1-1 (7-6 on pens); Admission: £6; Programme: £1; Attendance: 167

Woodfield Park is a veritable oasis set amongst the hustle and bustle of Saturday lunchtime Essex metro land. Passing the cricket and bowls clubs you physically reach the end of the line at the football ground. It's a work in progress around the periphery but once inside this upgraded facility is looking in good shape. Due to grading requirements from the beginning of the 2018/19 season 'Fleet ground shared at nearby Canvey Island, although their reserve and junior teams remained at Woodfield, with the first team only returning to their spiritual home in time for the beginning of this campaign. With mature fir trees skirting the far side and gently wooded hills rising up in the middle distance, you could be forgiven in mistaking this for another more rural part of the country. This injection of "green"

helps soften the presence of three prefab type covered enclosures - the blue seated Dave Wells stand holds just over 100 - with two shallow covered terraces at either side. Hard standing at the pitch rail is available on three sides. (of note are the remains of the brick dug-outs, originally set in front of the main stand these have sensibly been replaced and by perspex ones on the far side of the ground.)

The visitors, Newbury Forest, are finding life tough in the South Division of the Eastern Counties League and, with the hosts comfortably mid-table in the Essex Senior, it has all the makings of an intriguing afternoon. After a wet start to the day, the pitch has a few spongy areas and in horse racing parlance would be described as firm with good to soft in places. Certainly, the near touchline is soft as evidenced by the linesman who increasingly squelches through 40 yards of mud. The tall Max Jobson is looking the main thrust of attack for Benfleet but all of the early chances are created by Newbury with Leon Sterling, Chaka Barnett and Ruben Carvalho all trying their luck from distance. Carvalho is team captain and for an absolute man mountain has a good touch about him. Everything flows through him in midfield and his careful studious approach is resulting in his side having plenty of possession. With half of the opening period played Forest win a corner on the left from which, following a goal mouth scramble, Arthur Wright hooks his shot on the turn against the top of the post. Minutes later there is a big shout for a goal as Barnett's effort is cleared perilously close to the line. Chances for the home side have been rare so it's something of a surprise when they take the lead a little less than 10 minutes before the break; a long ball from the centre circle is well controlled by Jobson who turns inside his marker before poking a low shot beyond Manuel Costa Silva. 'Fleet then might have added a crucial second as Toby Dickinson heads over from close range.

Newbury start the second half at a good pace and with Benfleet sitting increasingly deep the game is compressed into the home side's half. Barnett only just fails to reach a centre before Wright sends a header bouncing over the bar. In a rare attack Benfleet again go close as, after a corner is headed back across goal, Corey Rider nods his effort just off target. With the visitors increasing their physical presence upfront with the introduction of the solid Aloisio Santos they look increasingly likely to score. They have to wait until the 80th minute for that equaliser when they execute a clever free kick routine with Matt Connolly dummying and Cesario Mendes sliding the ball to Deivid Sertvietis on the edge of the box. Sertvietis takes his shot first time and loops up a curling effort which drops perfectly behind the stranded Josh Blackburn. The goal is met with silence around the ground other than a few shouts from the Newbury bench. Five minutes remain as Jobson outjumps Costa Silva only to see his header roll agonisingly wide of the upright. And so, it's on to a penalty shoot-out; Benfleet go first and after a perfect ten kicks we head to sudden death. Another five are dispatched and with the score at 7-6 Newbury's captain steps forward. His right footer is low and across goal, sadly it's a little too far across goal and, as Blackburn watches, it trickles past the post. It's a slightly disappointing way to end a highly entertaining match, no dramatic save or shot blasted high into the net. To their credit Benfleet don't

unduly celebrate which is a classy moment. For their efforts they have a tricky looking tie away against Brantham Athletic in the next round.

*contributed on 22/10/24.*

**TT No.45: Craig Dabbs** - Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> October 2024; **Basingstoke Town** v Taunton Town; Southern League Premier Division South; Venue: Winklebury Football Complex; Result: 0-2; Admission: £12; Programme: 28pp, £2.50; Attendance: 708.

The weather had it's say overnight with my choice of game going just as I was about to head for the car. With time against me messing around looking at fixtures wasn't an option, so it was who's on 3G within a reasonable distant, the answer, Basingstoke Town.

When Basingstoke Town were forced from The Camrose Ground due to the Chairman wishing to develop it, it was nothing short of criminal. It's still there rotting, permission not given and the club still in his name. Therefore, the club upped sticks and went to share at Winchester City changing their name slightly to incorporate the word 'Community' as they couldn't use the original name. Hang your head in shame Mr Razzak.

The club now play at Winklebury Football Complex which is right on the edge of town and is owned by the Hampshire FA. Unlike AFC Stoneham, where I made a visit a few weeks ago, this 3G Hampshire FA facility is much better and has been enhanced to allow step three Football to take place.

The match pitted an unbeaten Stoke side against a Taunton side that's had a few problems of its own. However, in a game largely dominated by Basingstoke, Taunton did enough and took their chances in a game that became increasingly fraught overspilling after the final whistle into a bit of a brawl.

*contributed (via Brian Buck) on 20/10/24.*

**TT No.44: Steve Hardy** - Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> October 2024; **LA Potters** v Keele University Seconds; Staffordshire County League Division Two North; Result: 0-6; Admission: Free; Programme: No; Attendance: 8 at KO & 26 at full time h/c.

Two weeks ago, I reported on my abortive trip to Stoke to watch FC41 playing at Trentham Community Sports Centre. Well, not one to be defeated that easily, I returned today. This time I was watching another club who play there, LA Potters. The LA stands for Longton Area, and the Potters club have been playing for a good few years now, mostly as a junior side.

As I reported last time, the venue is the Trentham Community Sports Centre, which houses a floodlit caged plastic pitch and at least three full-sized grass pitches up a very steep set of steps at the rear of the site.

Last Saturday, both teams lost heavily, so I thought I might see a good few goals. Well, I did, but all from a Keele side that only contained five of last week's team. Three simple tap ins (Is that grammatically, correct?) gave Keele a 3-0 lead at half time, and the second half started with an absolute belter of a 4<sup>th</sup> goal from miles

out that left the home keeper stranded. I timed the goal at 47 minutes, but the league write-up has in at 56! Surely, I didn't snooze off for ten minutes, did I?

If this report makes it seem like Potters were outplayed, then it would be wrong. They had loads of chances themselves, but the Keele keeper was excellent, and his defence ended up reducing Potters shots to long distance, well over the crossbar, efforts.

So, another super game in blazing sunshine. I know...really?

*contributed on 20/10/24.*

**TT No.43: Keith Aslan** - Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> October 2024; **WITNEY TOWN** v Hanborough; Oxfordshire Charity Cup; Kick Off:13.31; Result: 3-1; Admission & Programme: Free. Attendance: A whopping 123 (113 home, 6 away & 4 neutral).

The day didn't start well, my train from Broadstairs was cancelled for no apparent reason, and everything else needed to run on time for me to make the match. It did. An easy one to get to with a 20-minute service from outside Oxford Station to within an eight-minute walk of the ground. It's good to see these buses are very heavily loaded, there is even has a half hourly night service. But I do wonder who wants to travel between Oxford and Witney at 3 o'clock in the morning.

Witney have been bereft of a football club since 2013. Formerly in the Southern League they used to play at the iconic Marriots Close ground, which is now a shopping centre. They then moved to a new build on the outskirts of town, that's now a housing estate. Nowhere to play they descended into the Hellenic League then oblivion. On deciding to resurrect the club this season Witney came up trumps with a new ground, it's a plastic pitch, but not as we know it. Proper ground this, none of your green mesh fences here, it's surrounded by wood, which elicited a contented sigh from yours truly. The viewing area is along the nearside where the changing facilities and refreshment room is situated. You can either watch the game pitch side or from a slightly raised terrace which is completely covered by a verandah. This will keep you dry when the weather turns pluvial, not an issue in today's shirtsleeve conditions. Although pretty close to a McDonalds, no need for a visit, plenty of hot food and drink at the ground.

Must be the only club in the Oxfordshire Senior League to issue programmes, so I'm ticking it off while the enthusiasm is still there. One of their main sponsors is a firm called 'Print Ready' which is a good sign. The local public have embraced the new club with an astounding attendance for this level. Something I've never come across before, on entering the ground you are met with a meeter and greeter who welcomed you and handed out the programmes. He refused to take any money, and he was there again at the end to bid everybody farewell.

Brendan Rogers used to play for Witney and Ron Atkinson had his first managerial job here. Rons punditry career came to an abrupt and spectacular end. His sudden disappearance from our screens is a cautionary tale; if you're going to make racist remarks make sure the microphone is switched off first. Britian's first million-

pound footballer, Trevor Francis, made his Nottingham Forest debut here in a testimonial.

A game worthy of the surroundings, when Hanborough equalized fifteen minutes from the end some dreaded extra time looked to be on the cards. But two late goals, the second being the last kick of the match, saw Witney through to the next round. Ironically Hanborough play in the Witney and District League while Witney play in Div. 2 of the Oxfordshire Senior. It must be very expensive on footballs here. I counted seven kicked out of the ground, and in view of the geography of the place, I can't believe they retrieved many of them.

I expected to be on my own today, but it must have leaked out that I would be attending and the hopping fraternity was well represented. Hats off to the ever-youthful Ted who also came here eight days ago when the match was called off. I don't think I would have returned so soon.

*contributed on 20/10/24.*

**TT No.42: Jon T Green** - Friday 10th October 2024; **HARWORTH COLLIERY** v Dinnington Town; Central Midlands Alliance League - Premier North; Venue: Recreation Ground; Result: 1-3; Admission: £3; Programme: £1; Attendance: 275

We've done a lot of work here" says chairman Jonathan Wilson standing in front of the Shaft Side Bar. "Behind us here used to be a wooded hill where steam trains ran through the trees to reach the mine. I've got a photo here somewhere" he adds rapidly scrolling through his phone whilst trying to fend off the attentions of two youngsters who have greedy eyes on a bowl of hot dogs. "The pit head was over to the left where the new housing is, and the main shaft was directly behind us (hence the name of the bar). We've opened up this entire area, made the kitchen bigger, included a club shop and upgraded the toilets." It's an impressive achievement for a club that only charges £3 to get in and that's if you're not a member of the Miners Welfare Association who get to watch for free. A prefab 50-seater stand has been built on this side of the ground but, with club flags flying from the roof and the orange and black colour scheme prominent, even this looks a cut above the regular low-cost builds. Back to Jonathan who says "the Main Stand used to form part of a covered walkway for the miners, we kept the basic construction and added in a metal flooring. We've tried to keep the history of the pit alive". The gate house (more of a container shape than a standard turnstile arrangement) was used by Rotherham United when they were at Don Valley" he explains "and over there next to it is another tea bar." On an evening that has more than an autumnal feeling to it I head over and five minutes later exit with pie, mushy pies and gravy. Sadly, trying to get to write down the team line-ups and balance the food doesn't go entirely as planned and a trail of green liquid is soon splattered over my shoes.

League leaders Dinnington Town are the visitors tonight and with them comes a perfect record of played 11, won 11. Harworth are handily placed in sixth position and, with only two defeats, still fancy their chances although it's a big ask against a club "who pay big money". That big money almost pays dividends as early as the

third minute as left back Ashley Cooper swings over a cross and Bradley Kerr glances his header only just wide. After that early scare the home side grow into the game; centre forward Callum Edwards is up against the physically stronger William Eades although his shrill cries, as he goes down under every challenge, are a touch theatrical. Colliery earn themselves a free kick twenty yards out which Mason Lewis curls over the wall and has Dan Booth scrambling as the ball flies narrowly past the post. As we reach the midway point of the half Town take the lead; right winger Cameron Evans flies down the touchline and, when he centres Logan Liggins, sweeps the ball beyond Nathan Adamson. On the half hour Town double their lead and it's Liggins again; the striker nipping in front of his marker and hooking in Cooper's near post cross. Edwards forces Booth into a fine save a few moments before the break but half time is reached with the league leaders comfortably in control

The second half begins brightly for Colliery, and they are unlucky not to be back in the game as full back Tymur Krit sees his header hit the angle of bar and post. Even unluckier is defender George McKernan who puts through his own goal after Liggins fires a low shot across goal. With the points secure Town noticeably take their foot of the gas and the tempo of the game dies. There is some joy for the home fans with 65 minutes played as Harvey Smith, up for a corner, reacts smartly to score from close range. It's then fairly low-key stuff until a couple of minutes from time when home captain Cory Goodwin surges through the Dinnington rearguard before lifting his shot just over the target.

Sitting in the car park after the match I notice that the mushy pea residue is still all over my trainers, 20 minutes later and despite a liberal application of WD40, some brake fluid and a bottle of bleach it's still there. They tasted amazing but it does make you wonder what's actually in them.....

*contributed on 14/10/24.*

**TT No.41: Keith Aslan** - Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> October 2024; **BUYGLASS.CO REINDEER** v Greyfriars; Eurosoccer Nottinghamshire Senior League Division 2; Kick-Off: 13.59; Result: 1-3; Admission: Free; Programme: £2; Attendance: 53 (24 home, 0 away & 29 neutral)

Another superb Rob Hornby extravaganza. A groundhop fest with programmes, refreshments and what I would imagine to be Reindeers record attendance. Even a couple of passing dog walkers commented it was a far larger crowd than usual.

For the athletic groundhopper (surely an oxymoron) it's about a couple of miles walk from Mansfield station. For the rest of us it's a half hourly service from the bus station. The Racecourse ground is a very pleasant venue. Although it actually shut in 1854 it doesn't take much of a stretch of imagination to picture what it used to be like with the basic outline of the course still visible.

A couple of tents were set up, one selling drinks and delicious fairy cakes at 3 for a quid. Unsurprisingly given the avaricious nature of Groundhoppers they didn't last long. Some greedy people were even bulk buying and taking them home for future



consumption, or that might just have been me. The other tent was the domain of mien host with Rob dishing out programmes and badges. Never having had the best of health he's now confined to a motorised wheelchair. Still on fine form though, one of life's good guys.

Only formed last season the strange name is an amalgam of their sponsors and the pub the players get tanked up in after the match. I saw them play at Notts Olympic last season and noted the phenomenal throw ins of one of their players. Look out for Shae O'Rourke, only seventeen and no taller than 5 foot 7, always plays at number 33. His throw ins are a beauty to behold, and he has the unique ability to launch the ball deep into the penalty box from the halfway line. Alas it didn't help Reindeer today, always second best, 0-3 down at half time, their second half goal was always going to be just a consolation.

Rob really pushed the boat out on the programme. 20 pages of quality reading from which I learnt, among other things, that Sean Connery used to play for Bonnyrigg Rose. Plus, a page on the Referee. Back in the sixties, seventies and eighties any programme worth its salt had a Meet the Ref. Article. For some unknown reason they nearly all used to list gardening among their hobbies. Ray Ferguson didn't put his so we'll never know if he got the game over with nice and early so he could get home to prune his roses. Two periods of exactly 45 minutes, ironically given his name there was no 'Fergie time'. Final whistle at 3.37. What a man. Mansfield station was full of hoppers after the match waiting for a train none of them were expecting to catch.

Among the glitterati present was the *Groundhop UK* supremo and a merry bunch of aged hoppers spent the afternoon discussing our aches and pains. There's another Rob hop coming soon. Count me in.

*contributed on 13/10/24.*

**TT No.40: Steve Hardy** - Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> October 2024; **Stafford Town Development** v Cannock Dynamos; Staffordshire League Macron Cup Group Stage; Result: 4-1; Admission: £3; Programme: No; Attendance: 27 h/c

I have been doing this groundhopping lark for nearly 60 years now, and during that time there have been horrible days when everything goes wrong. Today was one of them!

My plan was a trip to Trentham in Stoke for FC41 Reserves v Chasetown U23s in the Staffordshire Challenge cup. FC41 are one of several clubs who play at Trentham Community Sports Ground which is very close to the beautiful Trentham Gardens. I arrived at 1.45pm for a 2.30 start to find a Ladies Hockey match which was in full swing on a floodlit plastic pitch in a cage. And that was all. No sign of any footballers although I did find the grass pitches where footie should have been taking place.

So, what to do? A 2.00pm ko was out of the question so I tried a few 2.30pm games on my way back home. Nobody at Stone OA but a match was on at Stafford Town. Hurrah! A delayed kick off meant I didn't miss any of the game, which was

between Stafford Town Development and the first team of Cannock Dynamos in the Macron cup. I have no idea what the Macron cup is, but I was told it involved groups of 4 teams playing in a knock-out tournament.

The match itself was really good I thought. Both teams went for it in the first half, with Town scoring after just 4 minutes and Cannock replying a minute before the break. The second half though was totally different with Town well on top throughout and scoring further goals on 47, 72 and 78 minutes. I just couldn't understand why Cannock had fallen apart so easily, until a quick headcount showed they had played the whole game with just 10 players. There were 3 subs on the bench too, but none of them were used.

I contacted the Staffs County league when I got home to find out what had happened. No result on their website and the fixture had mysteriously disappeared. No reply from them as yet either.

Ho hum. As I said earlier these things happen. Hopefully that is my one cock-up for the season.

*contributed on 06/10/24.*

**TT No.39: Jon T Green** - Friday 27th September 2024; **AMMANFORD** v Taffs Well; Cymru South; Venue: Recreation Ground; Result: 3-0; Admission: £5; Programme: Free single sheet; Attendance: 171

For the first time this season it's a genuinely chilly evening; grey clouds scud across the darkening horizon bringing with them squally showers that leave heavy raindrops dripping from the roof of the stand.

Ammanford's home at the Recreation Ground is on the edge of town and, so far as I could see, totally un-signposted. Walking out from the central car park, I discovered that I had already driven past the entrance, although that could be lack of observation on my behalf...The Rugby Union club is based next door with whom there seems to be a good relationship, something which is not always the case in this part of the country. Three new turnstile blocks have been installed during the close season and, with the clubhouse seemingly a work in progress, there is plenty going on. The only accommodation is provided by a 220-seater stand; it's a prefab construction but the black and white seats give it a classy touch.

On the pitch it's not been the best of starts for the home side with two wins from eight outings leaving them just one place off the bottom, Taffs have fared only slightly better being a point ahead from a game fewer. The visitors have turned out in a kit of mint green with dark grey shorts and socks, it's an unusual combination to say the least. Despite this they do start the livelier with a powerful header from Christian Mbongompassi going close. Adam John is the main focus of attack for Ammanford and along with captain Morgan Clarke in midfield they are both enjoying plenty of the ball. It's a pretty even encounter but Taffs are having more shots on goal with Drew Caple trying his luck from a variety of distances.

It's goalless at the break but the state of parity only lasts a further six minutes before Ammanford take the lead; some nice link up play on the edge of the box eventually leads to Callum Thomas drilling his right footer into the far corner. Taffs should have been level almost immediately, but David Lyon is far too casual with his close range shot when it seems as though he must score. It's a miss that the visitors will pay for as Rhys Davies moves onto a high through ball before confidently beating 'keeper Shaun Gardiner. The game as a contest is over way before Harrison Lewis heads in a third with a couple of minutes remaining. With results going against them across the weekend the defeat leaves Taffs at the bottom of the table; early days of course but the second half capitulation against another struggling team should be considerable cause for concern.

*contributed on 01/10/24.*

**TT No.38: Jon T Green** - Saturday 28th September 2024; **CARDIFF CORINTHIANS** v Morryston Town; Ardal South West; Venue: Riverside Ground; Result: 2-3; Admission: £5; Programme: No; Attendance: 61 headcount

"Alan. Alan. Alan." the guy behind me is desperately trying to get the attention of the chap who should be manning the entrance gate. "Alan. Alan. Alan" his cries are getting louder and, although I can see who I think is Alan sitting on a nearby wall, he makes no sign of moving. In the end I give my admission money to the shouty chap and wander into the club house.

Chatting to two of the committee members, they tell me that Corries are one of the oldest clubs in Wales and the oldest in the Cardiff area. "We've played at this ground for over half a century now but the (Radyr) cricket club are the majority owners of the land, so we have to find other places around the city to play during the Summer season - it costs us a fortune." "There is a lot of interest in the club online" they continue "but that doesn't translate to people through the turnstiles." (I didn't want to say that employing Alan on the gate perhaps wasn't helping in that regard...) The club have impressively obtained a Tier Two licence but with the cricket outfield encroaching on one side of the ground further development, and floodlighting, seems impossible. What they do have though is a very smart 100-seater amber and claret stand which backs onto the railway side of the ground. The River Taff flows not far away and, despite what I think of as a dry few months, the grass here is already spongy in places.

Corries sit just outside of the top three with the visitors from Swansea just a couple of points behind them in the table. The first 45 minutes are a strange watch; the home side dominate in every way with Morryston only sporadically having possession in their opponent's half. The visitors do however maintain a rigid 4-4-2 formation with the bank of midfielders sitting only a few yards in front of the back four. Chris Hajgato hooks a shot dangerously across goal and Aron Davies should have scored as he breaks free only to lift his lob over both Town's Korean goalkeeper Sangmin Park and the crossbar. Everyone is just thinking about a half time pint and a pie when the visitors score; for once they have numbers in attack

and, when the ball is pulled back across the edge of the area, centre-forward Charlie Coates sends a bouncing strike beyond the diving Alex Smith.

The second period begins with a further surprise as Corries quickly equalise; Thierry Otu crosses from the right and Mackenzie Biggs out jumps Park to head home. It's now full-on attack v defence football with Town doing everything they can to slow play down. Park is booked for obvious time wasting but, as I have never yet seen a 'keeper second yellow carded for the offence, it doesn't really change the pace of the game. With a little over 15 minutes remaining Town again spring a surprise and retake the lead. Coates moves onto a great pass down the line and when he centres David Williams, at full stretch, hooks his shot over Smith. Things then go from bad to worse as Smith makes a total hash of Jandir Zola's corner somehow managing to fumble it over the line. Sixty seconds of regulation time remains when Corries keep their chances of a point alive as Otu strides clear to clinically finish. Eleven minutes of added time see some frenetic action; Davies strikes an upright with Park well beaten before the 'keeper beats away a stinging free kick from the same player. There is just time for Corries Mo Abdullah to receive two yellow cards for clumsy rather than malicious challenges. In the end it's a result which sees Town leapfrog their hosts in the league table but one can't help but feel that their spoiling tactics didn't truly warrant the three points.

*contributed on 30/09/24.*

**TT No.37: Steve Hardy** - Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> September 2024; **Tweedmouth Rangers** v Stirling University; East of Scotland League Division Two; Result: 1-2; Admission: £5; Programme: No; Attendance: 8 H/C

Tweedmouth Rangers have a neat little ground at the back of Berwick Rangers' Shielfield Stadium. Or so I thought! Turns out that they left it at the end of last season and are now installed on the main Rangers pitch. Having already been to Shielfield a couple of times before I didn't really want to go again. Luckily, I had a back-up plan which was Berwick Town v Tweeddale Rovers in the Border Amateur League, so I drove over to their ground only to find the place deserted. It was pouring with rain by now, so I reluctantly returned to Rangers where there was plenty of cover.

£5 admission, with no concession for us grockles, was a tad expensive in my opinion and may well explain why the attendance was a very small 8 (or 46 if you believe the club write up on Facebook).

With Berwick Bandits Speedway also living at Shielfield Stadium, spectators are some way away from the pitch, although the view from the main stand is really good, and dry.

Visitors Stirling University are, of course, the University second team as the firsts play in the Lowland League and were busy winning 1-0 at Cumbernauld Colts yesterday.

The match itself was excellent and Rangers were a tad unlucky to lose in my opinion. They dominated for the first hour, taking the lead on 41 minutes after a

scrambled corner was nudged in. The second half began the same way, until a long-distance screamer went straight in on 68 minutes. Heads went down after that, and it was no surprise to me that Stirling won the game on 84 for a very lucky victory.

Later on, I discovered that Berwick Town had in fact played and had lost 7-2 to Tweeddale Rovers. I wonder where they played.

*contributed on 29/09/24.*

**TT No.36: Keith Aslan** - Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> September 2024; **NORTON ATHLETIC** v Norwich United Reserves; Anglian Combination Division 2; Kick Off: 14.16; Result: 6-2; Admission: Free; Programme: 8 colour pages - free; Attendance: 44 (36 home, 7 away & 1 neutral)

I've been intending to do this one for some time, only problem is getting there would make for a good SAS training exercise. Today it was now or never. Early kick off, no engineering works and a rare BBC weather forecast that showed zero percent chance of rainfall all day.

Train to Norwich, bus to Loddon then a 3-mile limp to the ground. Arriving in Loddon the memories came flooding back of my visit to the village sometime in the last century. A dinky little place and I recall the programme had a drawing of the church on the cover. Why can I remember things like that, but not what I did yesterday? The walk through the Norfolk countryside was joyful in the Autumn sunshine and my dodgy knees got a really hard work out with the added bonus I didn't fall over once. Thanks to my faithful Ordnance Survey Map I took in some quality footpath action. The map was the real McCoy, an inch to a mile, none of this newfangled metric stuff. It cost 6/6d, none of this newfangled decimal stuff either. Hard for younger readers to imagine that back in the day if you couldn't read a map, you got lost.

What a ground. I got there just in time to see the ribbon being cut to open the new stand. The ceremony was well attended by, I assume, the descendants of Phil Hoadley, a former stalwart of the club after whom the stand is named. You'll stay dry in the rain here now, and like the rest of the ground, it's wooden. I've said before, wood is so much more pleasing to the eye than any other building material. Changing rooms, stand, dugouts and tea bar. All wood. And the pitch is fully enclosed with a wooden barrier. After my exertions getting there, a couple of very welcome seats made by trees to ease my knees. If you like the aesthetics of football grounds this is one for you.

I often wonder where the people come from to a ground like this with no signs of civilization anywhere near. A conversation with the young lady in the tea bar answered the question saying she was from Lowestoft. Querying why she travels so far she said her ex. is the physio here. I didn't probe too deeply but they must still be on pretty good terms. She also dug me out a telephone number to book a taxi back to Loddon. Chet Taxis are highly recommended if you're in the area.

This was men against boys with most of the Norwich team not looking old enough to legally buy alcohol. An unusual stoppage after 15 minutes when the referee noticed both goalkeepers were wearing identical kits. This is against the rules and the game should have been stopped until one of them changed. But this referee proved the whole afternoon that he was brimming over with common sense. A quick chat with the managers instructing them not to allow either keeper into the opposite penalty area and it was all sorted in a few seconds. Mind you I doubt either one had this manoeuvre in their tactical arsenal anyway. With a four-goal margin the referee saw no point in adding random minutes onto the end and blew up dead on the 45. Good man, Paul Newby according to the programme. I wish there were more like him.

This was a life affirming day out and the trains all did everything they were supposed to do. Not always the case.

*contributed on 29/09/24.*

**TT No.35: Keith Aslan** - Friday 20<sup>th</sup> September to Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2024 (inclusive); **WEST WALES HOP** featuring matches at: 1 - **Seaside** (v Garden Village); 2- **Ynystawe Athletic** (v Dafen Welfare); 3- **Penlan** (v Rockspur); 4 - **Mumbles Rangers** (v Bryn Rovers); 5 - **AFC Glais** (v Pontardulais Town) and 6 - **Giants Grave** (v Cwm Wanderers); all West Wales Premier League.

1 - Friday 20<sup>th</sup> September 2024; **SEASIDE** v Garden Village; West Wales Premier League (all games); Kick Off: 19.00; Result: 0-1; Admission: £3; Programme £2 (all games); Attendance: 207 (45 home, 10 away & 102 neutral)

What worse way to start a hop weekend than a ride on Great Western Trains who are vying with Avanti for the title of the world's most useless railway company. I left plenty of time to pick up the coach at Cardiff, but plenty of time just doesn't cut it when travelling with these charlatans. Team leader, Mr. Berazai, held the coach for 20 minutes for the passengers/customers on my train, not so lucky were the hoppers on the next one who had to make their own way to the first game. Apparently, rain had affected the points. Rain? In England? They could never have seen that coming.

Seaside is a 15-minute walk from Llanelli station. Nothing to see here, plastic pitch inside a cage, with 207 people, their record attendance, crammed into a 'viewing' area along half of one touchline. The home team should have won this one and Garden Village can thank their keeper for this victory who kept out everything Seaside had to offer. The game was enhanced by the presence of a well-known hopper who has to come back if there's no goals, and who gets very animated the longer a game remains 0-0, which was what everybody was hoping for. But when Garden Village scored in the second half somehow the magic went out of the evening.

How nice it is to get on a coach straight after the game and being dropped outside our hotel in Carmarthen half an hour later.

2 - Saturday 21st September 2024; **YNYSTAWE ATHLETIC** v Dafen Welfare; Kick Off: 11.00; Result: 2-2; Attendance: 194 (38 home, 2 away & 154 neutral)

A nice fully railed rustic ground, with eats and drinks in the cricket pavilion which is 100 yards further down the lane on the opposite side of the road. The predicted rainfall occurred while on the coach and by kick off it was mercifully dry, but raindrops were to fall on our heads on day two.

A good game and honourable draw. The linesman's girlfriend was on the touchline and in breaks of play he came and gave her a kiss. Linesman never do that to me.

Craig Dabbs is now Chris Berazai's full time oppo. and is in charge of crowd collation, programmes and match tickets. My ticket was Number 1 which Craig said denoted my status, but I think he might have been sarcastic.

3 - Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> September 2024; **PENLAN** v Rockspur; Kick Off: 14.01; Result 0-1; Attendance: 332 - biggest of the weekend (95 home, 52 away & 185 neutral).

Match of the weekend with Rockspur having won all of their games to date, and this afternoon made it 10 out of 10. Penlan is an area of Swansea you wouldn't want to visit; it makes Birmingham look like Disneyland. Without going into too much detail, let's just call it deprived. A large cafe, followed by a yomp across Swansea's version of Hackney Marshes to a pitch on the outer reaches. Two massive dugouts, which I mistook for stands at first glance, and fully railed. The club had enterprisingly erected a beer tent outside the ground which when the league officials rolled up, they unenterprisingly insisted they take down. Apparently, they said you can't sell alcohol so close to the pitch (other clubs on the hop did so).

In the pre. match blurb this game was predicted to be 'tasty'. Tasty it was. Great entertainment if you aren't too worried about watching a game of football. 5 sending offs, 10 bookings, numerous brawls between players and benches, plenty of violence breaking out all over the pitch, with only the spectators behaving themselves. It's all the fault of the Welsh F.A. They don't have any 'Respect' handshakes down here, so what can you expect. I bet the referee enjoyed his afternoon.

4 - Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> September 2024; **MUMBLES RANGERS** v Bryn Rovers; Kick Off: 17.31; Result: 7-0; Attendance: 160 (38 home, 0 away & 122 neutral)

With the previous match showcasing a team that's won all their games, this one offered the team that's lost all theirs. Played on the plastic adjacent to Swansea University's ground, it did at least have a grass bank that many people laid out on to watch the game. The sun had decided to give it a real go for the final match. With the game delicately poised on 7-0 at the end of the 90 minutes I'd love to know what the referee's thought process was when he added on an extra five minutes. What on earth did he think was going to happen in the additional time?

Returning to the hotel, what could be better than spending the evening in the bar with a few pints of Carlsberg, a monumental Roast Beef Sandwich and some good company. Well, I got two out of three. The Ivy Bush Hotel is the best and biggest

hotel in Carmarthen, I can't fault it on any level. A number of famous people have stayed there. In the seventies a handsome young sleeping car attendant used to be billeted there when on the Milford Haven run. Who would have predicted half a century later he would have become everybody's favourite groundhopper. Perhaps even more famous than me, Horatio Nelson was a regular visitor for some clandestine sexual activity with his mistress, Emma Hamilton. By all accounts Nelson was a bit of a ladies' man, somewhat surprising considering all the bits he had missing.

5 - Sunday 22nd September 2024; **AFC GLAIS** v Pontardulais Town; Kick Off: 10.59; Result: 1-3; Attendance: 191 (30 home, 3 away & 158 neutral)

The pluvial weather was back with a vengeance for this morning's encounter with a lot of bedraggled hoppers squelching around. At least there was some cover, although I don't think it was built with 150 odd groundhoppers in mind. The match was played at Pontardawe which I have done. I know this only because I spent the previous week digging out the programme. It might just as well have been a new ground as I didn't remember anything about it. When I mentioned that I must be getting early onset dementia the response I got was 'surely far too late for that'.

You'd be well gutted if you turned up 2 minutes late for this one, that was all it took for Pontardulais to take a 2-0 lead. All credit to AFC Glais for getting back into it and midway through the second half they'd narrowed it to 1-2. A late goal for the visitors sealed it. Two of the mouthiest managers you'll come across. The home one in particular spent most of his time slagging off the nearside assistant referee. If I was the lino. I'd have given him a good slap, possibly why I never became an official. This was the only game of the weekend where the two teams went back to the changing rooms for half time. Still managed an 11-minute break though.

6 - Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2024; **GIANTS GRAVE** v Cwm Wanderers; Kick Off: 14.01; Result: 4-1; Attendance: 204 (56 home, 2 away & 146 neutral)

Last game of the weekend, the rain had turned to drizzle, but as everybody was already soaking wet it didn't matter much. Something called Cowl was the grub on offer. Basically, you get everything in your larder and fridge and turn it into a soup. Jolly tasty. Why are they called Giants Grave I hear you ask. No idea I reply, and neither does anybody else.

1-1 20 minutes into the second half, few could have foreseen the eventual outcome with the Giants coming on strong in the last quarter.

Back to Cardiff to reacquaint myself with the shambles that is Great Western Railways. 27 minutes late back into Paddington. Fortunately, due to connections, I still got my anticipated service back to Broadstairs, it just meant spending an extra half hour on a jam-packed train rather than chilling out in the Greggs at St Pancras.



To sum up, another brilliantly organised trip with *Groundhop UK*, and well done to Chris and Craig for their efforts. Its weekends like this that make me almost glad to be alive.

*contributed on 23/09/24.*

**TT No.34: Craig Dabbs** - Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> September 2024; **AFC Stoneham** v Salisbury; FA Challenge Cup Second Round Qualifying; Venue: Stoneham Lane Football Complex; Result: 1-7; Admission: £7; Programme: 24pp, £1; Attendance: 375.

When you are trying to get around the pyramid clubs and grounds, you have to accept that sometimes you may have to put in the big miles to watch something dull. Therefore, you have to try and mitigate that by finding a fixture which a little more interesting. So, this is my reasoning for paying Stoneham Lane a visit.

AFC Stoneham started life in 1919 as Royal Engineers (Ordnance Survey Office) FC, and they played at a local level for many years using the Civil Service Ground until its closure in 1999. After a brief spell at Lordshill Recreation Ground, they moved into Chestnut Avenue in 2002 which is where I last saw them in 2019 just prior to its closure. Now covered by houses, the club relocated to the then brand new Hampshire FA HQ, a £10m build found on the other side of the motorway. It's a sprawling site on both sides of the lane, with multiple pitches sitting over the one side for junior Football and three 3G pitches (two are supersize which offer various layouts to cater for different age groups and formats) and the main pitch which has a kit stand over on the other side on the main site. There is access around all four sides and is Step Five compliant for AFC Stoneham's use.

Salisbury from Step Two provided the day's opposition. It was a mismatch on paper but with AFC Stoneham flying at present, it did offer the slight possibility of a cup upset. That was largely extinguished inside the first twenty minutes with Salisbury showing clear dominance and the gulf between the two levels. AFC Stoneham did have a few chances; indeed they got a goal back but as the result clearly shows it was mainly one way traffic.

*contributed (via Brian Buck) on 15/09/24.*

**TT No.33: Steve Hardy** - Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> September 2024; **Telford Town** v Gornal Colts; West Midlands Regional League Premier Division; Result: 0-0; Admission: £3; Programme: £1; Attendance: 87 H/C

I had never heard of Telford Town until last week, so I looked them up on the interweb and discovered they are in fact the former Wellington Amateurs in drag. Seems they were taken over by the former Hednesford Town owner this summer and he wanted the name changed. The fact that they still play at the old Ammies ground should, perhaps, have given me a clue!

Town are currently top of the Premier division of the WMRL, and they told me their ground is suitable for promotion up to step five should they achieve it. On

yesterday's performance I reckon they will, but they will need to be a bit sharper all over the pitch in my opinion.

Visitors were Gornal Colts who, despite being in mid table, put on a terrific performance yesterday. The 0-0 scoreline may look like it was all Telford with Colts hanging on throughout, but that was not the case. Colts had a good few shots themselves, but neither side could score.

I spoke to several of the Town committee who were sat on benches on a mound of earth behind the dug outs. Really nice people who spotted me as an outsider from the start. Said they had two groundhoppers visit them midweek from Stockport and were amazed that anyone would drive all that way for an evening match.

Good to see a programme being issued too. They don't manage to issue for every game, but they do for most Saturday games.

Another week off for Sarah Satnav too, as I had been to School Grove many times before. One thing I had forgotten though are the terrible parking problems there. The ground holds about 20 cars at a squeeze and the road leading up to the ground has no parking bollards all the way along it. Meant going all the way back to the main road and hoping to find a space there.

*contributed on 15/09/24.*

**TT No.32: Keith Aslan** - Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> September 2024; **CHALFORD** v Almondsbury; Gloucester County League; Kick Off: 15.01; Result: 1-1; Admission: Free; Programme: £2; Attendance: official 124; you're having a laugh; Attendance Actual: 72 (56 home, 6 away & 10 neutral)

A typical Saturday out. Wonderful day in the Cotswolds, lovely club, then all spoilt by the useless train 'service' coming home.

The ground is six miles from Stroud with an irregular bus service making it difficult, but not impossible, to get to. Once again Stockport Taxi's did the job for me. A glorious run through the Cotswold's passed Brimscombe and Thrupp's ground looking resplendent in the Autumn sunshine. Incidentally the tiny village of Thrupp is the birthplace of both Dennis Neilson and Fred West. I didn't notice any plaques celebrating the pair. In Stroud the town's Tesco has a sign reading 'Parent and child parking'. Should children be driving cars?

Normally on-line awfulness here but as this was Chalford's first ever home match in the Gloucester County, a well-known Stockport hopper used his 'charm' to persuade them to issue a proper programme. Midfielder Andrew Roberts was the subject of the player profile, and all you need to know about him is that he supports Manchester United. My fans will be relieved to know I was presented with the paperized Totterdown proggy from a fortnight ago, so plenty to read on the elongated journey home.

If football grounds are your bag this is definitely one for the bucket list. Situated amid beautiful countryside with a stand that pre-dates Atcost by decades, and two attractive new wooden dugouts either side. Wood is good. Hot drinks available

from the clubhouse which for some inexplicable reason was showing some bore-fest called cricket on the television. A barbecue was well patronized by an impressive turnout of greedy hoppers.

With both sides unbeaten, expectations were large for the game, and it lived up to them with a high-octane match which left both teams records deservedly intact. Chalford had the better of the first half, Almondsbury the better of the second, with the teams scoring in their dominant phases. The home team could have been two up were it not for a spectacular triple save from the Almondsbury keeper. A Chalford player was sent to the sin-bin for telling the referee he was useless (he wasn't). Looks like the pre-match Respect handshakes didn't work today. Or any other day come to that, a fact that's blatantly obvious to everybody except the F.A.

Train watch: All was going so well until the train coming back stopped at Reading, and like everything else between there and Paddington, stayed there. The guard certainly didn't raise any false hopes of ever getting to London with her chirpy messages that we wouldn't be moving 'for the foreseeable future'. I learnt later it didn't move again at all, leastways not in the direction of the capital, and was cancelled. We all traipsed over to the southern platform for an agonisingly slow run into Waterloo. One and a half hours as opposed to 23 minutes it should have taken to get to Paddington. Got back to my country dacha one and three-quarter hours later than I should have done. Privatization, not quite as good as the politicians told us it would be.

*contributed on 15/09/24.*

**TT No.31: Brian Buck** - Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> September 2024; **Worcester City** v Hinckley LR; Isuzu FA Trophy Preliminary Round; Result: 1-4; Attendance: 551.

Today I was kindly taken to this game, my 50th of the season, where we arrived in good time, even though we stopped off for a quick slurp in Alcester on the way. This was the second time I'd seen a Worcester City home match, the first occasion coming on 18 April 1983, when living in Cheshunt at the time, I travelled on the Enfield supporters club coach to see them draw 1-1 with their hosts at their wonderful old St Georges Lane ground, in an Alliance Premier League ground (attendance 1,063).

While they are still trying to relocate to a new ground of their own, these days they play at Claines Lane, which is on the north side of Worcester and is a venue which is also the headquarters of the Worcestershire FA. I'd seen games here twice before, the first of which came on Early May Bank Holiday Monday 2000 and saw County Sports win 10-0 against Wellsbourne in a Rapide Midland Combination Division 1 match (attendance 50 approx). It was a busy day as earlier in the day I'd been to St George Easton-in-Gordano (Somerset County League) and then Bishops Cleeve (Hellenic League). I was back here a year later on the late May Bank Holiday Monday to see them beat Burntwood Town 6-0 in the same league

(attendance 40 approx), with my two earlier matches being at Wootton Blue Cross and nearby to Claines Lane, Archdales 73.

Parking and the weather are an issue here on days like today when there is a big crowd. But because we got here about 40 minutes before kick-off, we found some street parking in nearby Grange Road. There is limited parking at the ground, but it will cost you and I think that there is further 'pay to park' parking in a school somewhere, but otherwise you are on your own. Also, the only cover here are two seated stands, for roughly 300 (max) spectators, one of which may have been in situ when I was last here. There might be some overhang of the County FA HQ building, on top of the raised banking behind the goal, but otherwise you get wet. Today we had just a few spots of rain.

Having parked in Grange Road we then walked to the ground along Droitwich Road and after walking under the A449 dual carriageway we soon came to the man-made entrance to the ground for pedestrians which is up some steep steps. Once inside the ground it is quite impressive, far better than the ramshackle look it had about it on my previous visits.

As for the game, we had seen Hinchley get thrashed 4-0 at Darlaston two weeks earlier. They are bottom of the Northern Premier League Midlands Division and as today their hosts were in second place in the same division, a home win was obviously expected. But it didn't pan out that way as the hosts were lethargic throughout, despite taking the lead on 20 minutes. But LR equalised six minutes later. They then took the lead on 48 minutes, increasing it on 71 minutes with a breakaway goal following a rare home attack. After they claimed a fourth goal on 77 minutes the hosts had a player sent off right at the end, to bring to a close a match, the outcome of which was a huge disappointment to the home fans who were expecting a comfortable win today.

*contributed on 10/09/24.*

**TT No.30: Jon T Green** - Saturday 7th September 2024; **CROYDON** v Clapton Community; Southern Counties East Football League - Division One; Venue: Croydon Sports Arena, Albert Road; Result: 4-3; Admission: £7; Programme: £2.50; Attendance: 201

Watching a game at an athletics venue is always going to be a slightly unfulfilling experience but with this being an early season "six pointer" it was time to brave the South London traffic and head off to Croydon. The news on arrival was a little mixed with the impressive main stand having been closed by the local authorities some months ago. It's basic construction, roof and sides, look in pretty decent condition and, although there are a few seats missing, there are certainly more dilapidated stands still in regular use up and down the country. With no immediate news on its reopening (quite rightly the council have more pressing matters) the only covered accommodation is provided by three low terraced stands on the back straight side of the ground. Under normal circumstances these would be more than

sufficient but across an eight lane track the view is, at best, distant. The clubhouse is located at the top of a steep set of steps with access to it on match days only available from inside the stadium. There are some interesting artefacts displayed inside and, with an elevated view from the benches outside, there are worse places to watch the game from.

Croydon seem to be a club working hard to engage with the local community and today they have laid on face painting, a bouncy castle and some African street food - it all adds to the atmosphere and, with their biggest crowd of the season on hand, they get off to a sensational start. Less than two minutes have been played when Lauris Chin explodes into the penalty area where he is felled; Georgi Steeds steps forward and despite Jack Francis getting a hand on the ball, he can't prevent the penalty from being converted. Clapton are wearing a red, yellow and purple kit in honour of the colours of the International Brigade who fought during the Spanish Civil War - over 20,000 have been sold worldwide which shows either a keen historical interest or they have absolutely no dress sense. If the kit is bad (I'm sorry but it really is...) then the visitors performance is not much better; Ed Mbango is terrorising his full back and only a sharp block from Francis keeps him out. From the resultant corner Brandon Barrance out jumps everyone to head in number two - this is no mean feat as he's probably the smallest man on the pitch. With half an hour played Pat McKay wins possession for Croydon just inside his opponent's half, swings a long through ball to Chin who is flattened by Francis as he advances in on goal. Steeds puts his penalty in the same place as Francis dives the other way. Steeds is again involved with the fourth as his left-wing corner is scrambled home by Will Bell. The first half can best be illustrated by two bright green parakeets who have spent the last 45 minutes sitting blissfully undisturbed atop the home team's cross bar.

After the break Clapton do rally, squeezing and pressing the play back into the home side's half; Julian Austin tries a shot from distance but it's not until the 79th minute that their best player, Noah Adejokun, cuts inside and drills a right footer low into the net. A few minutes later Noah Salama is red carded for a clumsy challenge and with it goes any hope of a comeback, or so you would think. Three minutes of normal time remain when a long free kick from Ross Broadway is forced home by Cameron Gordon. Deep into eight minutes of added time Sam Cook reduces the deficit still further with an unstoppable 30 yarder to set up a manic finale as Clapton go in search of an unlikely equaliser. That they fail is of great relief to Croydon who, from an almost impregnable position, so nearly throw away the three points.

A quick word about the visiting Ultras who nosily backed their team all afternoon even when they were four down. No annoying thump, thump, thump from a drum, just proper old-fashioned terrace singing. The view might have been terrible, but the accompanying soundtrack was first rate.

*contributed on 09/09/24.*

**TT No.29: Craig Dabbs** - Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> September 2024; **AFC Parabellum** v Nottingham Greens; Nottinghamshire Senior League Division Three; Venue: Melbourne Park; Result: 5-1; Admission: Free; Programme: 16pp, £2; Attendance: 45

Rob Hornby and non-league football in these parts go hand in hand. He's involved with the Notts Senior League and from time-to-time issues programmes on behalf of its member clubs in order to give them a small payday as opposed to, in most cases, nothing at all. AFC Parabellum are new to the league this season. The name was thought up by some of the players, it's Latin for *Prepare for War* and they are certainly winning their battles on the pitch at present. More of that later.

Melbourne Park is situated in the Aspley area of Nottingham. The site comprises of three pitches with two being railed. The far one was the home of now defunct Nottingham FC who left the Central Midlands Alliance last season, and the near one is home to AFC Parabellum. Railed, permanent dugouts and little else other than a view across the city and of St Margaret's Church behind the far goal, it's all they need for nominal step 10 Football.

So far then it's played three won three, with 24 goals for and 2 against for the hosts. In contrast The Greens are sat on zero for now and therefore you would forgive me to expect a very heavy home win. So yes, it ended in a comfortable 5-1 result but by their own admission the homesters were below par today. Greens, who seemed to turn up a little late causing a few 'where's the opposition?' comments before the game gave a decent account of themselves. They certainly don't play like the second from bottom side and I expect them to improve on that. It's clear that AFC Parabellum should've been placed in a higher division of the NSL. They are clearly too strong for Division Three and it will be interesting to see how long they manage to keep their war effort going as they kick on up the league.

*contributed (via Brian Buck) on 08/09/24.*

**TT No.28: Steve Hardy** - Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> September 2024; **Claverdon B** v Phoenix Town; Birmingham & District League Division 3; Result: 4-1; Admission: Free; Attendance: 5 H/C

At last!! The start of the new season in the Birmingham & District League!!

My trip today was another on the train to Redditch, where Claverdon FC have left the Arrow Vale Sports Centre and moved to Trinity High School, where they are playing on yet another floodlit 4G pitch in a cage. No need to stop spectators entering the cage though as the five of us were really well behaved.

Visitors were new boys Phoenix Town. I know nothing about them or their history, but I overheard their manager saying: 'First game in a league today so the standard will be much harder'. Maybe they are an old club under a new name, but if anyone knows, please let me know.

The manager was right though. Phoenix scored first on 2 minutes but that was as good as it got. Claverdon missed loads of chances until a deserved equaliser came

from a cracking shot on 17 minutes. You can't fault Phoenix for their effort though and with their keeper in fine form they held out, sometimes desperately, for long periods before the experience of the Claverdon players overwhelmed them with 3 more goals for a 4-1 win.

Trains back to Birmingham New Street are half hourly, and as I couldn't make head nor tail of the bus timetable, I decided to walk to the ground. Total disaster in both directions before getting lost on the return walk and only just making my train. The train home was another delight as we filled up with girls heading for the bright lights of Birmingham. Some of them, mostly women who should know better, were wearing very little and their tattoos were everywhere. Good job I didn't drive as Sarah satnav would have been shocked.

This season I can only see 3 new grounds that I need to recomplete the league. In retrospect then perhaps I should have saved the first one until the weather turns and the 4G pitch would have been a live saver. I just couldn't wait to get back to it though.

*contributed on 08/09/24.*

**TT No.27: Keith Aslan** - Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> September 2024; **CANTERBURY CITY** v Meridian; South East Counties League Division 1; Kick Off: 15.02; Result: 2-1; Admission: £5 for old people; Programme: from the 'Footieprint' stable, £2; Official attendance: 60 (57 home, 1 away & 2 neutral).

This is the way forward for my Saturday afternoons. No scouring 'Traveller' for the ever-diminishing number of new grounds with a programme. No late nights trying to get home on trains that don't run. A stress-free day on Thanet, pottering about doing my chores in the morning then a short bus ride to Chernobyl-on-sea for lunch at my favourite Margate trattoria. A stroll up to the ground, and after the match, a ten-minute bus ride back to my country dacha, and I didn't go near a train all day.

Canterbury football club died in 2001 when the council evicted them from their ground so they could build houses on it, so no surprises there. They reformed in 2007, quickly went through the Kent County League and in 2009 they embarked on an odyssey to play matches at every ground in East Kent. So far home games have been played at Herne Bay, Ashford United, Deal, Faversham, Sittingbourne and now Margate. All these places have one thing in common, none of them are very close to Canterbury, and it must be the only city in the country without a football team. The council have stymied every attempt to move back, aren't our politicians wonderful. Their nomadic lifestyle looks to be continuing for the foreseeable future and the fact they continue to exist at all is down to a few dedicated supporters who keep the club going against all the odds.

Throughout all this upheaval Canterbury have always produced a good programme, which according to their chairman, makes a small profit. Midfield maestro Rob Lawrence was the subject of the player profile. In answer to his four ideal guests to invite to a dinner party he listed Winston Churchill, Franklin Roosevelt, Joseph Stalin, and everybody's favourite, Adolf Hitler. Having the two biggest mass

murderers in history round for dinner would be a bit of a downer for most people I would have thought!

Not a club to undersell themselves, Canterbury's twitter advertised this match as 'a clash that's hotter than your Saturday Curry' They had a lot to live up to and failed. Meridian played in a fetching pink kit. They are a Muslim club, but did have a token white in the team. With Meridian bottom of the league having lost all their games this should have been a stroll for Canterbury who are one point off the top. It wasn't. Meridian went 1-0 up on 15 minutes with a cracker of a goal, and Canterbury spent over an hour ineffectually trying to equalise. They finally managed it with a cross that went all wrong and ended up in the back of the net. They got the winner in the 92<sup>nd</sup> of the 90 minutes. Meridian can feel hard done by. It will always be one of life's mysteries as to why the floodlights were switched on at half past three on a sunny day. Who pays for that?

Back home so early I was in time to watch most of the England game on T.V. I didn't bother, why spoil a good day.

*contributed on 07/09/24.*

**TT No.26: Brian Buck** - Saturday 31<sup>st</sup> August 2024; **Benfleet** v Buckhurst Hill; Essex Senior League; Result: 1-0; Attendance: 100 approx.

Today I was once again grateful to get a lift here, to a ground I'd visited only once before, on 16 May 1988, to watch Benfleet 0 Rayleigh Town 1 (Southend Charity Cup Semi Final) with an attendance of 60 approx. I can't say that I remember much about the place, except that it was and still is, tucked away in the northern part of Benfleet, or New Thundersley, as it is shown on Ordnance Survey maps these days.

Anyway, the ground is about three miles north of Benfleet railway station and has a 'seaside' feel to it as the area we drove around to the South Benfleet Social Club, for our pre-match pint. It gave the impression of being full of bungalows. The ground is located down a tarmacked track, to your right after passing two cricket grounds on your left. But once there you find that the ground is set in what feels like a country park and from your seat in the stand all you can see in the distance is good views of trees and more trees. I can't remember which part of the now landscaped complex they played on when I was last here, but these days there is room enough for three pitches and there are more pitches in the adjacent next field, which I only spotted when looking at satellite pictures at home later. All the facilities are on the clubhouse side of the ground, which includes about a 150-seater stand, flanked either side by standing cover. Strangely though, it's only a three-sided ground, despite room available to make it four sided.

As for the game, it was played out between two sides, who once graced the Essex Olympian League not so many years ago, in chilly, windy conditions and with the threat of rain in the air, although it never materialised. Although both sides did try hard to entertain us, they only succeeded occasionally and in the first half the visitors looked the better side for 20 minutes until the hosts took over. It was more



of the same after the break, but once more although both sides got the ball forwards there was no end product. That was until the 84<sup>th</sup> minute when Benfleet managed to score when a player let fly from about 35 yards out. It was wind assisted and it flew over the keeper. In the 89<sup>th</sup> minute the visitors then had a player sent off for a dreadful facial challenge and after ten minutes of added time this brought to an end what was, at times, a decent game.

*contributed on 03/09/24.*

**TT No.25: Craig Dabbs** - Saturday 31<sup>st</sup> August 2024; **Carlton Town v Stamford**; FA Challenge Cup First Round Qualifying; Venue: The Bill Stokeld Stadium; Result: 1-0; Admission: £10; Programme: 44pp, £3; Attendance: 190

I rolled into the car park at 1330 which is generally the time I like to arrive for a 1500ko. The Bill Stokeld Stadium has been home to the club since the mid-nineties around the time they joined the Central Midlands League, being named after a previous chairman.

Once inside, it really wasn't what I expected for a club at this level. Perhaps it's been the quality of ground I've been doing of late so I'm not going to knock it as I know how difficult it is keeping clubs afloat and it does the job. There's seating in the form of a kit stand at the one end, cover down the one side where you enter in the form of an overhang from the kitchen and changing rooms. I can't remember what it's called and for me the best bit, the shed in the corner at the other end provides the last bit of cover if you exclude the bar area. So yes, functional and the club have done well with it since rising up through the system to step four where they've been now for a number of years.

Onto the match. Stamford are flying high playing at a level above with Carlton Town currently mid table in theirs. The game had its moments, it wasn't a boring watch at all, although for all the world it looked like a 0-0 scoreline. That's until Carlton Town popped one in late on in injury time, cue the home support singing we're going to Wembley. Now that would be a story.

*contributed (via Brian Buck) on 01/09/24.*

**TT No.24: Craig Dabbs** - Saturday 31<sup>st</sup> August 2024; **Wickersley Youth U18 Girls Blue v Doncaster Rovers Belles U16 Blue**; Friendly; Venue: Millmoor Ground; Result: 2-4; Admission: Free; Programme: Did not issue; Attendance: 63

After last week's trip to Galashiels, I was looking forward to a bit of a lie in and a simple trip to Carlton Town. Then I got home from work and the first thing on *Facebook* I saw was that there were games taking place on both Saturday and Sunday morning starting at 1000am. I knew Sunday was out of the question and although there wasn't any opposition mentioned for Saturday's game, it did fit well into the Carlton Town trip. It was also a chance to tick off Rotherham United's old ground which is now back in use for youth football. So, after checking it was ok to attend and being told the girls want people to come along and watch, they want a crowd, it was another early start.

Millmoor has been in use since the late 19th Century. It was home to Rotherham County between 1907 and 1925, then Rotherham United from then until their departure in 2008. The ground is capable of holding over 8,000 with a small section of the Tivoli End now open to spectators although you are welcome to go elsewhere but the seats are a little dirty these days. The Main Stand which is still in construction phase is completely off limits as it's now dangerous. Indeed, work stopped on this in 2007, a year before the club had its dispute and moved out.

The ground has been kept alive all these years by Booth's who own the scrapyard which operates at the Railway End of the ground; a little fact I was given about them is they supply the BAFTA awards each year. Also, the large brick building at that end in the corner was the old indoor training area, now a maintenance shed but the old police control room and cells remain by it.

Booth's have invested in the pitch and completed some renovation work allowing Wickersley Youth to move in. I was shown around by one of their employees who is also one of Wickersley's managers. Both Booth's and Wickersley seem to be working well together to ensure a future for this old ground.

Onto the match. Well, on arrival I still didn't know who the opposition was and it was only following a chat with one of the player's dads, did I find out! It was decent morning. The referee explained to both teams why he had made decisions throughout the match as he likes to educate not just officiate which was refreshing and, of course, the U16's won which surprised me considering the age difference.

Over the road at The New York Stadium Rotherham United were playing Huddersfield Town in a match kicking off at 1230. So, during the game a number of fans from both sides walked in, some stopped to watch, others curious, stuck their heads in to take a few pics and left.

*contributed (via Brian Buck) on 01/09/24.*

**TT No.23: Steve Hardy** - Saturday 31<sup>st</sup> August 2024; **Hednesford Forest** v Cannock Dynamos Reserves; Staffordshire Senior League Division Two South & Central; Result: 2-7; Admission & Programme: Free; Attendance: 25 H/C

Hednesford Forest are a new club to adult football, being formed as recently as 2023. Normally they will play their matches at the 5's Pavilion and Sports ground in Hednesford but, following a large hole appearing in the plastic pitch, they, and every other club who play there, have had to move elsewhere.

Today's game was therefore moved a few miles up the road to Rugeley Community Centre which has changed a lot since my last visit there. Now we have a shiny new floodlit plastic pitch, where spectators are allowed to stand along half of one side.

As you can see from the score, this was yet another goal fest for me. I have seen six games this season. One ended 0-0 but the remaining five have yielded a net busting 34 goals. In truth Forest were only briefly at the races today though. Their big moment came after 8 minutes when already 1-0 down they managed a fluky equaliser. After that Cannock took over and were 4-1 up at the break. Forest again

pulled a goal back on 49 minutes, but Dynamos scored 3 more in the last 10 minutes despite having made wholesale changes to give all their subs a run out.

I discovered later that the damage at 5's has now been repaired, so Forest will be back playing there next week. That means the Rugeley pitch could be a very rare one-off venue indeed.

A fellow spectator reckoned that Forest may not finish the season. True they are very poor and argued amongst themselves from the off, but they did try to play some football, and I really hope they can stay the course.

Finally, my thanks to referee Amrit Singh who showed that grey haired gentlemen of a certain age, can still sport a ponytail. Thank you, sir!

*contributed on 01/09/24.*

**TT No.22: Keith Aslan** - Saturday 31<sup>st</sup> August 2024; **TOTTERDOWN** v Wick; Gloucester County League; Kick Off: 15.00 on the dot; Result: 2-5; Admission: Free; Programme: on-line abomination; Attendance: 66 (52 home, 8 away & 6 neutral)

Compulsory programme issuing has always been the stand-out feature of the Gloucester County League. This season no more, and clubs can do what they want, hence the work of the devil here, an on-line 'programme'. Somebody has put a lot of work into it, to what end? It's a complete disconnect with the game it purports to accompany and nobody will bother to read it on a computer. A fellow hopper contacted the club to send him a PDF copy (whatever that is). He will now send it to MK Programmes who will paperize it and post it back to him, and I will get my programme whenever I next see him. What a load of hassle and expense.

New arrivals in the league, Totterdown is a fifteen-minute bus ride from outside Bristol Temple Meads station. Every 20 minutes, with a five minute walk the other end, it's easy peasy to get to. They play at Bristol Barbarians Rugby Club, a neat and tidy venue, fully railed, with the Rugby pitch adjacent. It's a large complex with another pitch behind the goal. People who know about these things told me St. Phillips Marsh used to play on that one, also Gloucester County League alumni. Inside the rugby clubhouse teas and coffees were being sold at an inflation busting ten bob a go.

My kind of referee was in charge of this one. Punctual start, 10-minute half time, done and dusted by 4.45. Football is so much better when played like this. Totterdown were 1-0 up at the break, then it all went a bit awry in the second half and the home side's winless start to the campaign continued.

Train watch: An hour later back to my country dacha than I should have been. My train from Bristol to London was cancelled. Almost to be expected these days. Good to see the new government have already started to fix broken Britain with the announcement they're bringing in legislation to make it illegal to smoke in pub gardens. Obviously everybody's number one priority.

*contributed on 01/09/24.*

**TT No.21: Jon T Green** - Monday 26th August 2024; **LEICESTER NIRVANA** v Northampton O.N. Chenecks; United Counties Football League - Premier Division South; Venue: Hamilton Park; Result: 3-2; Admission: £7; Programme: £1; Attendance: 53

Hamilton Park is something of a surprise - situated just a few minutes from the hustle and bustle of the Leicester ring road, it's an area of peaceful walks winding through an ever-burgeoning housing estate. Nirvana's ground, sitting on the edge of the parkland, has a distinctly rural feel with mature trees and green spaces almost totally surrounding it. The small car park leads to a modern clubhouse and changing rooms. Food is served at the bar with the large glass frontage giving excellent views out across the pitch. A shallow set of steps leads down to the hard standing and metal rail surround. All of the covered accommodation is along one side with a 100-seater prefabricated stand supplemented by an interesting tubular steel construction above a flat area of terrace. Although the ground is fenced in, the club have not blocked off the view by covering it in tarpaulins so there is a free view of the action for anyone standing in the park. A few people watched from there, but the majority paid to come inside which says an awful lot about the honesty of the footballing public.

It hasn't been the best of starts to the season for the home side and, although they have drawn three of their opening five fixtures, they are still without a win. Chenecks won 6-0 here in the cup a few weeks ago but today, with their journey down the M1 hampered by a Bank Holiday accident, they arrive distinctly out of sorts. The referee makes an early decision to put back kick-off by 15 minutes and when we do get under way it's Leicester who make the early running. Centre forward John Jorin almost puts through Jordan Nelson, but Tyler Hart is quickly off his line to block the shot. It's Nelson's only action of the afternoon and soon after he is substituted clearly carrying a heavy knee injury. The blustery wind, blowing straight down the pitch, is clearly giving Nirvana some advantage and after 27 minutes they take the lead as a long floated free kick from Mohammed Polli is headed at full stretch into the top corner by Jaylan Wildbore. Wildbore is amongst a clutch of wonderfully named players - Jonny Muddiman and Harry Chipchase both of Northampton - who surely belong in the pages of Roy of the Rovers. If a one nil lead was unexpected then two nil was beyond all expectations but that's exactly what happened as Wildbore scored slams a left footer beyond the grasp of Hart.

With the wind at their backs the visitors look more potent after the break as Muddiman goes close with a header. With 20 minutes left Chenecks do reduce the arrears; substitute Nathan Anyanwu pressurises his full back into conceding a corner from where Luke Davis out jumps the Leicester defence to head beyond 'keeper Jake Williams. The impressive Wildbore might have restored their advantage, but he can only fire across goal after Hart had made something of a mess of his attempted clearance. Another goal is in the offing and when centre back Lynus King mistimes his tackle inside the box, Lewis Irwin coolly converts the spot kick to draw Northampton level. Another drawn game looked likely but then Nirvana conjured a winner; a long diagonal ball found Jorin, a simple square pass

into the path of Tawanda Mangondoza, a sway of the hips and then a low drive past the wrong-footed Hart. It was a splendid goal to win a thoroughly entertaining match.

Reading through the programme that night I noticed the phrase “The beauty of football and the reason we all love it is, you never know!!” - just how prophetic were those words?

*contributed on 28/08/24.*

**TT No.20: Brian Buck** - Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> August 2024; **Darlaston Town** v Hinckley LR; Pitching In Northern Premier League Midlands Division; Result: 4-0; Attendance: 117.

Today I felt well enough to accompany my friend to this game. Weatherwise, it was a good choice to come here as it would have been a very wet day had I stayed local, but around Costa del Walsall it was mainly sunny, but with a cold breeze blowing. On the way to the ground, we passed what used to be known as Fort Dunlop. But these days it's a Travelodge, presumably for 'tired' people! Before we turned up for the game, we visited the Swan pub, situated in a part of Darlaston seemingly caught in a time warp. The pint of naked ladies went down very well!

I've been to this ground before, back in February 2016, in the days when the hosts were playing in the West Midlands (Regional) League Division 1. I went there by public transport, arriving early and departing late, and the club looked after me very well.

Today was more of a case of walking from the car to sitting in my seat in the stand as soon as possible! Since then, they have spruced up the place nicely, with the provision of two areas seating, one on each side of the pitch, plus one covered standing stand, being the most noticeable improvements made. But there is much work still to be done before the ground grading boys come knocking at the end of March.

Following their promotion at the end of last season this was Darlaston Town's first home match in this league, and they were looking for their first league win today. The visitors meanwhile came here without a point to their name, of which the long version is Hinckley Leicester Road. As for the game, regular readers will know of the number of games I've seen recently which consist of midfield battles with little goalmouth action. This wasn't one of them because, on three minutes, the hosts took the lead when after receiving the ball the scorer turned and hit it home from just inside the area. Two minutes later the lead was doubled after a blocked shot was followed up. So, as both sides were now inspired to get on with it, we saw no midfield bugging around. With Darlaston looking for a third goal Hinckley slowly became more organized at the back, but they conceded again on 39 minutes when the scorer was set up to score from the edge of the area. Game over? Yes, but not quite, as at the start of the second half Hinckley, perhaps aided by the pressure being no longer on Darlaston, played much better and they created two serious

scoring chances. But it didn't last and on 64 minutes Darlaston got their last goal of an enjoyable game with a close-range header from a left side cross.

*contributed on 27/08/24.*

**TT No.19: Craig Dabbs** - Saturday 24 August 2024; **Gala Fairydean Rovers** v East Kilbride; Scottish Lowland League; Venue: Netherdale Stadium; Result: 4-4; Admission: £10; Programme: 32pp, £2.50; Attendance: 194

This will live long in the memory. Netherdale has been on the hit list for years and I've never quite got around to doing it, until now. The ground is part of a larger complex that also incorporates Gala RFC next door and a large expanse of pitches over the far side.

Netherdale Stadium's jewel in the crown is the grade A listed main stand, it's Brutalist architecture at its finest. Opened in 1964 it was designed by Peter Womersley, providing seating for 500. It was given its A status by Historic Scotland in 2013 quoting that it's "a significant work of late modernist architecture in Scotland" The stand was closed for work on its concrete in the 2018/19 season which is probably why the small kit stand sits opposite to have provided seating whilst the renovation work took place. Now it's immaculately kept and to top it off there are two turnstiles in the same style either side of the stand.

The rest of the ground aside from the kit stand is open to the elements with a small 3G cage at the one end and the rugby club at the other and, unsurprisingly considering their standing in Scottish Rugby, is equipped with a very smart stand of its own, but nothing like what's served up here.

Just when you thought it couldn't get any better, it was a cracking match! I'm going to make a statement here and say it's probably the best game of football I've seen. Gala haven't had the best start, sitting bottom on one point and with East Kilbride second, you know what I was thinking. However, Gala came out of the blocks flying and took an early lead, the tempo was relentless and remained so throughout. The game went back and forth, easily forty attempts on goal between the two sides, absolutely zero time wasting and two red cards to the visitors, it had everything and after 96 breathless minutes of the kitchen sink being thrown around you can't complain with a 4-4 draw at all.

What an incredible day at a lovely club with such a warm welcome, it was well worth the twelve hours sat in a car.

*contributed (via Brian Buck) on 25/08/24.*

**TT No.18: Steve Hardy** - Saturday 24 August 2024; **Wednesfield Community** v Atherstone Community; FA Vase First Round Qualifying; Result: 2-9; Admission: £4 for grockles; Programme: Free team sheet; Attendance: 58 h/c

Where do I start with this afternoon's fun and frolics? Well, my main reason for going was to get hold of a programme from Wednesfield under their new name of Wednesfield Community. They don't issue for league games, but they had to today

as issuing is compulsory in the FA Vase. Just a single sheet, but one that could be quite rare as it is likely to be the only one they ever issue.

Wednesfield are in a bit of a mess at the moment. All games lost have been by at least 5 goals each and today was no exception. Totally outplayed throughout by an Atherstone side who themselves had lost 7-0 last week, their only tactic was hoofball to their tall centre forward. He did his best, but Atherstone soon worked out that Wenny's defence was terrible, and midfield was non-existent, and took them apart.

Amazingly, Wenny took the lead on 10 minutes when a cross-field pass was easily intercepted by a Wenny forward who had the simple task of chipping the ball over the advancing keeper. That was as good as it got though, as the Adders equalised almost immediately via a penalty. The kick was saved but another player had a simple tap in of the rebound to level things up. Straight from the kick off, Atherstone scored again and then got a third on 43 minutes for a 3-1 half time lead.

The second half saw goals come fairly regularly with Wednesfield scoring a consolation to make the score 2-6, but even after making a mass substitution, Adders still found it easy to score 3 more for a 9-2 win.

It is difficult to see where Wenny go next. They lacked any confidence (naturally) and were arguing amongst themselves from the start. Most of the crowd of 58 had come from Atherstone so the support isn't there for them either. I really hope they can survive, as they are one of my favourite local clubs to visit midweek.

*contributed on 25/08/24.*

**TT No.17: Keith Aslan** - Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> August 2024; **SHAWBURY** v Ashville; North West Counties First Division South; Kick Off: 15.00; Result: 1-3; Admission: £4 for wrinklies; Programme: £1.50p; Attendance: 125 (112 home, 4 away & 9 neutral).

Bus every two hours from outside Shrewsbury Station for this one. At least it would go from outside the station if the area wasn't dug up for the ubiquitous roadworks. The on-board train matrix display was advertising the station as Amwythig, presumably for the many Welsh travellers who found the word Shrewsbury too confusing. Can't make out why a train from Manchester to Shrewsbury has all the stations flashing up in Welsh. The bus back is a seven-minute walk from the ground and leaves at 17.01. Miss it and you might as well spend the weekend in Shawbury.

Although they've been around since 1992 this is the first season Shawbury have actually played in the place. The first 25 years or so they operated out of Wem. When their floodlights disintegrated Shawbury ground shared at Ludlow, and latterly played on the outside pitch at Shrewsbury Town which was awful. Their words not mine. So, it was a big deal when they opened a brand-new ground in Shawbury itself at the beginning of the season. As a rule, I'm not a big fan of new builds, but this was an exception. You wouldn't know it was new, and I mean that in the best possible way. Surrounded by fields it has two adjacent Atcost stands with good sightlines, both with perspex sides offering an extra bit of protection

from the ravages of the English weather. With so many new clubhouses looking antiseptic, this one has a lived-in vibe. Comfortable, lunchtime football on the tele. and an array of hot and cold food. Everyone was very welcoming, and all in all, a very nice place to spend an afternoon.

Shawbury are finding it hard going in their first season in the North West Counties League. I had assumed they were promoted, but unusually for me I was wrong, this is the same Step as the West Midlands League, and they were just involuntarily moved across. But as their official said, the standard is somewhat higher. 2-0 down at the break, the home sides cause wasn't helped by their keeper having to retire injured on the half hour. They pulled one back in the second half, but Ashville sealed it with a penalty late doors and a Shawbury player was sent off for whingeing about it.

Travellers were in abundance providing some excellent company. I even became acquainted with that rare animal, a young groundhopper. I trust his enthusiasm will last as the next day he was going to Swansea v Cardiff, an 'interesting' fixture. Also met up again with the hopper who was locked in at Allextion last week. I said he would have had a chuckle to himself about it. Apparently he didn't.

Train watch: Avanti were down to their usual standard. Train from Stafford 51(fifty-one) minutes late. Previous two (and the one following) were all cancelled so four trainloads were funnelled into one. Had to stand all the way back to London. Third World train service for a Third World country.

*v2 contributed on 24/09/24.*

**TT No.16: Jon T Green** - Saturday 17th August 2024; **HEANOR TOWN** v Hinckley Leicester Road; FA Cup Preliminary Round; Venue: The Town Ground, Mayfield Avenue; Result: 3-2; Admission: £6 (cash only); Programme: Online only; Attendance: 106

It's a busy day at The Town Ground - bouncy castles are being inflated for the kids, a marquee is already in place for the post-match live band and in between there is the not insignificant matter of an FA Cup tie.

Heanor triumphed away at Uttoxeter Town in the Extra Preliminary Round, by the odd goal in five, and have been rewarded with a tie against Hinckley Leicester Road. The visitors play in the Midlands Division of the Northern Premier League and, despite having had a poor start to the season, are still a step higher in the pyramid (5 v 4) than their hosts.

Sitting in a cafe adjacent to the marketplace, I discover the big topic of conversation is the roadworks which are bringing traffic to an infuriating halt. More relaxing are the views out across the Derbyshire countryside and the well-tended gardens of the Memorial Park. The ground is a short walk from here and, although solidly in a residential area, feels surprisingly spacious due to a junior/practice pitch abutting the main event. Rather unusually, the only seated accommodation (four rows of long black metal benches) is provided by the Keith Costello Stand situated behind the near goal. Although set back from the pitch, it is slightly raised



giving a better view than might be first anticipated. A large boxy covered enclosure sits astride the halfway line and proves to be a popular meeting place for home fans. To its right is an area of grass covered terracing and to its left hard standing which continues around behind the far goal. The clubhouse side is only partly used with the area adjoining the junior pitch out of bounds for spectators - this makes it a rather quirky 3 1/3-sided ground; there must be others, but I haven't visited them yet. At the risk of appearing food orientated (only on a Saturday, honest) there is a wonderful selection at the well-stocked tea hut (cash only) from where I couldn't resist a pre-match chip cob. Oh, the luxury....

With almost forty minutes played very little had happened, Hinckley looked the more composed side playing some neat football with Heanor struggling to get possession on a patchy surface. Then everything changed; Town's Yasuto Ohmuna took a corner from the left and centre back Sam Brown struck a fierce low drive through a crowd of players and beyond Jake Laban into the visitor's goal. In fairness, it was somewhat against the run of play, but the enthusiastic home fans didn't care, and they cared even less a minute before the break as the long-limbed Aaron Coyle made it two after Ohmuna had seen his initial efforts blocked.

Playing down the slight slope in the second period Hinckley looked to seize back the initiative; Dom Brennan went closest with a shot from distance that Alfie Roberts did well to keep out. Their frustration was growing though with Michael Armstrong booked for a heavy challenge on Town's captain Greg Marriott before Jarred Acton followed his teammate into the official's notebook. After Brown had nearly put through his own goal and Liam Read headed wide, Hinckley finally pulled a goal back with just nine minutes remaining; Brennan scoring with a well-controlled shot from just outside the box. The crowd fell silent but not for long as Ohmuna out muscled his marker before setting up Coyle who beat Laban with a clinical strike. The action wasn't quite over as, straight from the restart, Simon Alcott was clumsily fouled in the area with Read scoring from the spot. Five minutes of added time saw no further change in the scoreline with the ecstatic Town players being applauded from the field. Their reward? A plum home tie against near neighbours Ilkeston Town in the next round. For me? A quick go on those bouncy castles...

*contributed on 20/08/24.*

**TT No.15: Craig Dabbs** - Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> August 2024; **Audley** v Madeley White Star; Staffordshire County Senior League Premier Division; Venue: Town Fields; Result: 2-1; Admission: £3; Programme: 20pp, £1; Attendance: 58

When I saw that Audley were issuing, I thought that I would pay them a visit and I was pleasantly surprised. To be honest I didn't expect much more than a railed pitch, yet Audley can be added to the ongoing list of nice surprises I've been having of late with visits to Redditch Borough, Avery and Boldmere Sports & Social Falcons in the last few weeks, all being better than I had expected.

As an aside I last saw Audley play back in 1998 (it was in this league against Eccleshall in a game at Pershall Park). I sounded a bit like a broken record then as

I kept suggesting to their secretary that the club should join the North West Counties League. Thankfully they did and are now in their 21st year in the competition.

The facilities at Audley are very good indeed and who, like Boldmere (see *TT no. 14* below covering my recent visit there), are at, or near to, step 6 entry level. The ground is enclosed with enough hard standing in place and has three stands all bunched together with bench seating down the one side. If it isn't entry level compliant, then it's very close to it. Although erecting lights shouldn't be a problem here, raising sufficient funds to do so might be at the moment. Quite rightly it seems that the club will only consider big ticket things like lights when funding is in place and are quite happy where they are rather than overstretching themselves which is of course the sensible approach to take at present.

The club are also having a go at doing programmes this season. It's extra revenue for them and an outlet for advertising their sponsors. Today's programme came with a raffle ticket to encourage sales and I will say it's very much a work in progress with the club looking for more content to pack it out a bit and make it a better read. I'm not knocking the club at all, as I find it very commendable that they are trying to make it work for them and that's to be applauded.

The match itself was not a bad watch. Audley were the better side, but White Star gave enough of themselves to make Audley work hard for the points which after going a goal down they stepped it up, running the Madeley side ragged for a while. In all, it was a deserved home win for Audley.

*contributed (via Brian Buck) on 18/08/24.*

**TT No. 14: Craig Dabbs** - Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> August 2024; **Boldmere Sports & Social Falcons** v Castle Vale Town; Midland League Division Three; Venue: Boldmere Sports & Social Club; Result: 5-1; Admission: £4; Programme: 8pp, Attendance: 43

I recently found out that Boldmere S & S Falcons FC had started issuing matchday programmes. As it was not too far from work, I decided it would be clever to tackle Birmingham head on in rush hour. However, in view of the many roadworks, I realised it was going to take time, so I snuck out early.

I knew for its level it was a fairly decent set up and once I found the narrow entrance between two houses, I discovered it was a bit more than that, dare I say it but good enough for Step 6 at entry level. The ground is fully enclosed, fully railed, has hard standing down two and a half sides and has three stands. The next move is to add twenty seats into one of them and raise the money for lights as they've been granted permission. So off the pitch the foundations for a move up the pyramid are there and on the pitch since moving from the Birmingham AFA as founder members of the Midland League Division Three. In 2014 they've spent five seasons in both Division Two and Three without really doing a great deal but now there's some impetus and a collective desire to move the club on which is great to see.

That desire was certainly shown on the pitch. Castle Vale Town are no chumps, they've had a solid start to the season as well but despite showing a degree of evidence to support this they were no match for a more powerful home side. Apart from the five goals they scored, I think they had three disallowed as well.

*contributed (via Brian Buck) on 18/08/24.*

**TT No.13: Keith Aslan** - Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> August 2024; **Allextion & New Parks** v Stapenhill; Midland League Division 1; Kick Off: 15.00; Result: 0-0; Admission: £3 for senile citizens; Programme; £2; Attendance: 72 (58 home, 10 away & 4 neutral)

Allextion & New Parks are newcomers to the Midland League with a half hourly bus service from Leicester City Centre dropping you outside the ground. You want the 13, unlucky for some, but not for groundhoppers as the service fits in perfectly after the match. This was coupled with another faultless journey on the trains making for a joyful day out.

Leicester has rebranded itself 'Richard the third country' since the Plantagenet supremo's remains were discovered buried underneath a carpark here seven years ago. You can walk down Richard the Third Avenue, have a pint in the Richard the Third pub and visit the King Richard the Third Visitor Centre. His connection to the city is somewhat nebulous. He wasn't born or ever lived in the place and the only reason he was buried in Leicester was that he died at the nearby Battle of Bosworth. Dickie wanted to be buried in York, but it was decided that was too far to take him (Cross Country trains have always been unreliable) so his body was dropped off in Leicester which a few centuries later proved to be a boon for the local tourist industry.

Allextion & New Parks are embracing their recent elevation. While the ground is still pretty basic, railed, floodlit with a small stand behind the nearside goal, it does contain some major turnstiles that wouldn't look out of place in the Premier League. Off the field things are really swinging. Programmes, badges and food are all in abundance in the clubhouse. Although still one and a half hours to kick off I partook of a quite magnificent burger, definitely in my all-time top five. The clubhouse is a haven, with absolutely nothing else of interest in the vicinity.

I don't have a problem with nil nil's. You can often get a very good match without any goals. This wasn't one of them. The lack of scoring was down to two things, rubbishy finishing and even more rubbishy finishing. The two goalkeepers did their jobs well, the forwards not quite so.

Getting away from the ground was like something out of the 'Krypton Factor' with locked gates all over the place. They were all open when you came in. You were told to park in the adjacent leisure centre car park, but a fellow hopper wasn't having any of that and parked in the car park for players and officials so he could make a quick getaway. The only exit from this was via one of the many gates that were locked at the end of the match. I bet he had a little chuckle to himself.

*contributed on 18/08/24.*

**TT No.12: Jon T Green** - Saturday 10th August 2024; **BOVINGDON** v Huntingdon Town U23; South Midlands Football League - Division Two; Venue: Green Lane; Result: 4-0; Admission: £3; Programme: No; Attendance: 70

As the visiting players exited the field after their pre-match warm-up, one lad said to another “are you ready for the slaughter?”. His mate shrugged, grinned and kept on walking. Whilst this might not have been the most upbeat of attitudes upon studying the facts he may have had a point: a) Bovingdon finished runners-up in the league last year; b) this was Huntingdon’s first game at this level and c) on a warm afternoon they only had twelve men.

Green Lane is a long road full of large houses with well-manicured front gardens. At one end it intersects with the attractive High Street - the 18th Century Bell Inn is a lovely pub for a pre-match pint, and at the other with Bovingdon Green, where you can find the quintessential English village cricket club. The ground itself is situated next to a tennis club, the sort where the members can actually play properly so you know it’s a bit upmarket. The single covered stand with its fading white woodwork contains a few rows of wooden benches and a small terrace which unfortunately today is being used as more of a storage facility than somewhere to watch the game. Not that we are in need of any shelter as it’s a pleasant afternoon and most people are taking advantage of the nice weather to sit outside the clubhouse close to where a couple of ladies are busy cooking up a huge batch of burgers. As you would expect for a club operating at this level, the rest of the ground is undeveloped with only a narrow strip of hard standing next to the grandstand. The dugouts are situated on the far side and at best can be described as bijou; the ‘Home’ one is in the process of being extended but whether this upgrade will extend to the visitor’s bench is unclear, a cunning psychological ploy perhaps?

From the start it’s clear the home side are going to dominate the game; Tom Flanagan looks a cut above the rest, Keane Fullwood has pace to burn and centre forward Scott Burge is always threatening. Huntingdon centre half Tom Steeples is doing his best to stem the tide, he’s playing with a smile on his face and with a mixture of comedy and sarcasm which is getting a laugh and winding up the home players in equal measure. Bovingdon are creating chances at will but without really forcing any real saves from Town’s captain ‘keeper Zander Watson. When Watson is finally called into action, he does well to save Burge’s weak penalty and then even better to block the follow-up shot. There have been some heated exchanges between captain Haydn Cassidy and his manager as the frustration levels continue to rise - Cassidy does not reappear after the break so maybe the fallout was more serious than it first appeared. With Town just beginning to think that they might reach the break on level terms, Flanagan twists and turns his way free and scores into the far corner. The same player then doubles the advantage after Fullwood skips his way down the right flank before providing a perfect pass.

During the interval the Huntingdon management team keep their charges on the pitch (maybe to avoid the lure of a freshly cooked burger) and are delivering an incredibly positive team talk; “they (Bovingdon) will be getting blasted for that,

they should be ten up. Let's shore up the centre of midfield and then hit them with our pace. We can still get a point from this". His confidence certainly boosts his players as Jack Peters almost puts in David Starling before the latter has a great chance but can only strike his shot against home 'keeper Leo Smith. Sadly, for Town this was as good as it got as Bovingdon gradually reasserted their superiority, Gary Dowling going close with a far post header and Joe McCarthy narrowly failing to turn in a Flanagan centre. Things then get even more difficult for the visitors as Dylan Hughes receives his second yellow card and is rightly dismissed. It's not until the very closing stages do Bovingdon add to their tally; Burge reacts first after Steeples can only deflect a low centre into his path before, with seven minutes of added time played, Fullwood crosses and Dowling, looking suspiciously offside, nets from close range.

In reality not too much can be read into this result, Bovingdon have some classy players and will clearly be amongst the pace setters whilst Huntingdon will gradually gel as a unit and, with continued positive comments from the sidelines, could yet develop into a competitive side.

*contributed on 13/08/24.*

**TT No.11: Craig Dabbs** - Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> August 2024; **Avery** v Wombourne Allstars; West Midlands (Regional) League Division One; Venue: Tat Bank Road; Result: 2-6; Admission: £4; Programme: 12pp, £1.50; Attendance: 62

Avery? That was the question put to the chairman. It's the company in its various guises that made weighing equipment. The connection, seeing as Avery FC were only formed as a youth team in 2020? Well, they used to play in Bearwood where Bourneville RFC are and this was the original home of Avery FC who many years ago played in the Birmingham Works League, so they adopted the name. Now they have a tie up with Warley RFC over the two sites they have, in nearby St Johns Road where the youth team is based and the newly formed first team have set up camp at the main site on Tat Bank Road.

The current configuration at Tat Bank Road is a pitch immediately in front of the clubhouse with Warley RFC's pitch to the left and Avery's to the right. The proposal the club are making is for Warley to move in front of the clubhouse and for Avery to take their place. This means that they will move away from an absolute gem bit of cover that I knew nothing about prior to visiting; it's obscured by trees on maps, and that looks to have been the case for a number of years from looking at *Google Earth*. All I can say for now is it wasn't there in 1945 as the site was covered by industry.

So, the foundations are there for the club to progress should they start to get it right on the pitch. After this fixture Avery's playing record reads: Played: 3; Won: 0; Drawn: 0; Lost: 3; Goals For: 3; Against: 23; GD: -20. Grim, and that's because they are still building with mainly youth players on the pitch at present.

I was told that one of the problems is that their heads drop when they go behind. So, after doing just that and the score doubling in just five minutes full credit to

them that their heads didn't drop, and they kept plugging away even threatening to pull level at one point. In truth they were second best and if Wombourne had put away their many chances the scoreline would've been very high indeed.

I do wish them well. Starting up and establishing a club isn't easy, they've made good progress as a youth team over four years, and I hope that they stick at this transition into adult football because if the beatings continue to come then the danger is that everyone's heads drop.

*contributed (via Brian Buck) on 11/08/24.*

**TT No.10: Keith Aslan** - Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> August 2024; **AVERY** v Wombourne Allstars; West Midlands League Division 1; Kick Off: 15.01; Result: 2-6; Admission: £2 for the elderly; Programme: £1.50p; Attendance: 62 (44 home, 8 away & 10 neutral).

Previously just a youth set up, this season sees Avery's first ever season as a grown-up team and while early results have left a bit to be desired, they have an enthusiastic bunch of volunteers and there's a really good vibe about the place. Nobody at the club seem unduly concerned about getting tanked every match.

The club play at Warley Rugby Club in Oldbury, an easy place to get to for the carless. Langley Green station is a 6-minute walk while buses to Birmingham City Centre stop literally outside the gate. Can't fault Avanti today, spot on coming and going. However, on the hour and a quarter run from London I couldn't help pondering how nice it would be if only there could be a way to cut a few minutes off the journey time. So big thanks to our politicians who are doing just that with the wonderful HS2, and all for a paltry 100 billion quid. Unfortunately, I'll be long gone before it's finished, as will nearly everybody else, but major infrastructure projects like this are what makes England the great nation it is. Although the Birmingham station revamp is over six years old, I still manage to get lost. If you need to change onto another platform now you have to leave the station, walk through a shopping mall and come back in at a different entrance. And this is better how? At least it didn't cost 100 billion.

Stopped off at Ronnie Mac's Oldbury outlet for my dins. I had a 'happy meal' which was rather ironic. I shouldn't imagine happiness is an option if you live in Birmingham and work in McDonalds. Arrived at the ground one and a half hours before kick-off and watched the lunchtime footie in the clubhouse (no food or hot drinks). A young lady was already on the gate with a box of the finest paper. Volume 1 number 1, good to see a club making the effort to issue these days. The pitch is adjacent to the rugby field with a mixture of metal barrier and rope surrounding it. Surprisingly there is cover, a corrugated iron structure that looks like a very large bicycle shed which I think it originally was. It would keep you dry in the rain and today it sheltered me from the unremitting sunshine.

Avery's results so far have been 0-9 and 1-8 and it looked to be more of the same today when Wombourne took a 3-0 lead after 20 minutes. But Avery fought back and it was 2-3 early in the second half when for 15 glorious minutes Avery were chasing an equalizer. It was not to be, but scores are improving every match and a first victory can't be that far away. It's the height of the 'drinks break' season. How football was quite happily played for 130 years without them I can't imagine. And why does it take two and a half minutes to have a drink of water?

A good day out in Birmingham if that's not a contradiction in terms.

*contributed on 11/08/24.*

**TT No.9: Steve Hardy** - Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> August 2024; **Norton Canes v AFC Somers**; West Midlands Regional League Division One; Result: 2-3; Admission: Free; Programme: Free; Attendance 17 H/C

After losing its step six status, the WMRL now consists of just 2 divisions with division one seemingly grabbing any passing club that even hints at wanting to join them.

Tonight's match was a prime example of this. This is the first season as an adult club for Norton Canes, so they have no history for the league to judge their admittance or not. Visitors AFC Somers played in the Birmingham League when I saw them a few years ago, so have at least played as a team before.

Norton Canes are playing at Burntwood Leisure Centre for their debut season. There are 2 grass pitches here, as well as a plastic pitch and all were in use this evening. My match took place on the grass pitch next to the car park and despite all my scepticism turned out to be an excellent and entertaining spectacle.

Somers took the lead on 21 minutes and held it until half time. The second half began with a flurry with Norton scoring twice on 50 and 54 minutes to take the lead, only for Somers to equalise shortly after. End to end stuff followed before Somers scored a deserved winner on 76 minutes to complete a 3-2 win.

Just 6 miles from home this one, so I gave Sarah Satnav the evening off so that she could watch the wall rock climbing. An Olympic sport...really?

*contributed on 07/08/24.*

**TT No.8: Brian Buck** - Monday 29<sup>th</sup> July 2024; **Girton United v Swavesey Institute**; **Cottenham Charity Cup Semi Final**; Venue: played at **Cottenham United FC**; Result: 1-2; Attendance: 20 approx.

I always enjoy coming here, as I was born in Cambridge Maternity Hospital. I actually lived in Cottenham for the first two years of my life. I was made aware of the existence of this game earlier in the afternoon.

In the good old days, all the local villages in the area had their own charity cups, and the Cottenham Charity Cup has survived longer than most although this one appears to be struggling this season. A few years ago, there were at least six sides in it, and they played group matches first of all. However, tonight, this was the

only semi- final to be played as Cottenham's opponents had dropped out of the other one a few days earlier.

This match did not capture the public's imagination either. Swavesey, the 'senior' of the two sides tonight took the lead on 4 minutes when the unmarked scorer thumped the ball home from about ten yards out and for the remainder of the half they were all over Girton and it seemed to be a question as to how many they would score. However, for no particular reason they couldn't find the net again in this period, perhaps because they thought that in the unlikely event of Girton scoring then they could up their game immediately. We listened to their half time team talk, which was in 'we've already got this won mode', but things didn't pan out that way initially as Girton stuck to their game plan and Swavesey lived with what they had. Then on 54 minutes Girton did actually equalise after their scorer ran on largely unchallenged. Now we had a game on our hands. Girton now played with more confidence and Swavesey found that they couldn't just turn it on with a drop of a hat. However, on 86 minutes they did manage to conjure up the winner with a powerful header from a corner. There was still time for Girton to equalise but another run on goal by their previous scorer was halted following an offside flag raised by a club lino, which upset a Girton player to the point where he was red carded by the ref. Overall, sentiment apart, the right team won, just!

*contributed on 06/08/24.*

**TT No.7: Brian Buck** - Saturday 27th July 2024; **Harrowby United** v Eastwood Community; GCE Hire Fleet United Counties League Premier Division North; Kick-Off: 6pm; Result: 1-8; Attendance: 437.

We then moved onto our second game of the day, which was part of the United Counties League 'Hop', arriving with about twenty minutes to spare. There was no queue to speak of to get in, as most of my fellow Groundhoppers had arrived long before us. This was my third visit here, the last one being in May 2015 when a friend and I made the uphill walk from Grantham railway station to reach this ground, which is on the east side of town.

As with all 'hop' games you see a myriad of people you haven't seen for ages, so the temptation is to spend more time talking to them than you do watching the match. With this in mind, on arrival I headed off to the seats as quickly as possible. The downside of sitting here was that you had the sun in your eyes, but my multipurpose hat helped a lot. This match was more low-key than the previous game, both in the playing and reffing of it. The pitch here was big, possibly full size and when players took corners it seemed like they were taking goal kicks.

The visitors took the lead on 26 minutes, from the spot after an attacker, going away from goal, had his legs pulled away. The goal was given, but apparently shouldn't have been allowed because the taker halted his run as he ran up to take the kick. This lead was doubled immediately before half time with a shot from about ten yards out which went just inside the post. In the second half the game quickly slipped away from the hosts. On 50 minutes the scorer 'passed' the ball into the net after swapping passes with a colleague, before completing his hatrick



with another 'illegal' spot kick on 56 minutes. Then on 64 minutes Harrowby pulled a goal back, which I didn't see, as I was busy talking to the UCL chairman, Alan Poulain at the time. With time running out, I made my way towards the exit, but I need not have hurried, as there were twelve and a half minutes of added time at the end and during this period Eastwood scored four more goals to give them a well-deserved win, but perhaps by a slightly inflated margin.

*contributed on 06/08/24.*

**TT No.6: Brian Buck** - Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> July 2024; **Newark Town** v Ashby Ivanhoe; GCE Hire Fleet United Counties League Premier Division North; Kick-Off: 3pm; Result: 1-1; Attendance: 246.

Due mainly to health reasons it is rare that I get a 'new' ground in these days, so I was very grateful to be driven to this game and I was immensely thankful to my driver for taking me here. So, after ticking off a very pleasant 'micro' pub on a housing estate near to Newark beforehand, we rolled up at the ground about half an hour before kick-off. Its address is YCMA Newark & Sherwood Sports Community & Activity Village, Lord Hawke Way and is a relatively new build. In fact, when I walked along the old railway track to visit Newark Flowserve many years ago now, I recall that the whole complex was basically fields.

The attendance surprised me as this was not a 'Hop' fixture, but the place seems to have captured the imagination of the locals and they were out in force today. The venue is a caged 3G pitch, not only can you walk around the whole pitch once inside it, but they also have two seated stands plus a small area of standing cover behind the bottom goal. Initially we sat in the biggest of the stands on the far side of the pitch, but soon found out that this is where their rowdy fans, both adults and children, also stand. So, after tolerating this for a short while we moved into the other seated stand and sat with the 'normal' people.

As for the game, it was physical and very competitive, contested in the main by mature looking adults rather than by players who looked as though they'd just left school. As a whole the match was generally fairly even, although the visitors looked as though they might end up winning it. It was they who took the lead on 39 minutes, from the spot, following a foul, deserved because they had looked more like scoring than their hosts. The second half saw both sides create less up front. The game was still physical, but the strong ref was up for it and by the end he'd booked three Ashby players. As the match drew to a close so Newark brought on some influential subs and without exactly throwing the kitchen sink at Ashby, more like a wash basin really, they by now deservedly equalised on 87 minutes with a well hit shot from about 25 yards out, which may have taken a deflection on its way to goal.

*contributed on 06/08/24.*

**TT No.5: Brian Buck** - Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> July 2024; **Great Paxton** v Ramsey Town; Friendly Match; Result: 3-2; Attendance: 15 approx.

Thanks to *Twitter (X)* I was saved a longer journey tonight when this fixture showed up late afternoon. I've been here a few times in the past, notably one evening when they had an attendance of something like 320 for a game. The trouble was that about 300 of them were watching the game from a train, stuck at a red-light signal for the entirety of the match, due to a fire up ahead.

On my arrival here I noted that one of the home players was walking around the pitch with a wheelbarrow and a spade filling up the holes in the pitch with dirt. He didn't do a great job though and while waiting for the players to get ready the ref took over and filled in some more holes. They have no lights here, so I was a bit surprised that they didn't kick off until 7.20pm. Would they get it all in without shortening the game?

At its peak the attendance was roughly 20 people but after about 20 minutes five of them, all female, departed to The Bell pub, adjacent to the pitch, possibly because they had embarrassed themselves having a kick around on the side of the pitch, having to stop when the ball went onto the main pitch, leaving one red faced 'player' having to go on and retrieve it!

As for the game, it was keenly contested. Neither side looked especially fit and although the enthusiasm was there the quality wasn't, but I enjoyed it. This was more my type of football and both sides enjoyed themselves. Ramsey took the lead at the end of the first half when a shot was parried and followed up by a teammate. Then on 50 and 59 minutes, Paxton were given and scored from two spot kicks, both given for fouls. On 79 minutes Ramsey equalised when from a deep ball in, it was headed home. Four minutes later Paxton got the winner when an unmarked player shot home from just inside the area. The match was then played out to its natural conclusion with the light holding up well.

*contributed on 06/08/24.*

**TT No.4: Jon T Green** - Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2024; **STAPENHILL** v Coventry Copsewood; Midland Football League - Division One; Venue: Maple Grove; Result: 0-3; Admission: £6; Programme: £1; Attendance: 96

On a warm Summer's Day there can be no finer way to approach the town of Stapenhill than across the Trent Washlands. Leaving neighbouring Burton, a raised walkway takes you above the riverside meadows before crossing the magnificent 19th century black and white wrought iron bridge. The tower of St Peter's pokes its head above the tree line and, with the flowerbeds of Stapenhill Gardens in full bloom, it's an idyllic spot. The club's Maple Grove ground is a mile or so away on the southern edge of town and manages to be both suburban and rural in equal measure. Entrance is via a well sized car park and once inside a paved covered terrace, extending only to the near goal, is immediately to your right. Trainy's Bar is the current clubhouse with a new outside kitchen area being built a few yards away - when completed in the next few months it'll allow fans to grab some food and drink whilst still within view of the pitch. Changing rooms are situated between here and the Main (Freddie Sleight) Stand. It's an interesting construction, split into three sections: the middle one has wide square brick supports whilst the

two end “wings” seem to have been converted from the original terracing. Overall seating capacity is just over 150. Of note is a strip of grass between the front of the stand and the pitch rail - most clubs simply concrete this area so it’s certainly an unusual feature.

Behind the far goal is a fenced off area which, perhaps at some stage, was used as a kids practice pitch. Intriguingly there is a small black wooden building outside of which is a board featuring the slogan “cakes, cakes, cakes”. Sadly, and despite a thorough inspection, there seemed to be no Victoria Sponge or Lemon Slices on offer - a cruel hoax if you ask me. This end of the ground and the entire side opposite is out of bounds to spectators rendering it effectively a two-sided venue.

Both sides finished last season in mid table and with the newly formed Nuneaton Town certain to be the team to beat this time around it’s already looking a competitive division. Despite winning a succession of early corners, Copsewood found themselves under pressure in the opening stages with Stapenhill’s centre half Harry Lansdowne volleying over from Connor Ward’s free kick. The visitors then almost gifted their hosts a penalty after 11 minutes as Faith Okundaye’s back pass sold his ‘keeper short but, fortunately for him, the referee adjudged the subsequent foul on Cameron Steele to have taken place outside of the box. With the free kick being cleared for a corner Steele then went mightily close with a right foot effort that Nathan Pearce acrobatically turned over. Despite his early error Okundaye was a tower of strength, marshalling his defence and always looking to bring his midfielders into play. As the half drew to a close the match exploded into life: Coventry’s Harvey Wells got free of the home defence only to see his lob drift disappointingly wide of the target. There followed a moment of contention as Steele and full back Ryan Pedley clashed with the latter appearing to stamp on the Stapenhill man. Steele raised his shirt to show stud marks on his shoulder blade but, with neither the referee nor his assistant having a clear view, Pedley avoided what would have been a straight red card. Within seconds of the incident Copsewood were ahead; Paul Hollis beat away the initial shot but could do nothing to stop Sam Ellis firing home at the near post after Harvey Wells had squared the ball to him.

Coventry began the second period looking to wrap up the opening day points and that’s exactly what they did with a further two goals in an eight-minute blast. Firstly, Wells sent a towering header just under the bar following Harvey Billing’s out swinging corner before Sean Kavanagh moved onto a long goal kick and calming lobbing Hollis. It was the kind of terrible defensive giveaway which drives managers and coaches to distraction. There was still almost half an hour to play but, despite the home team ringing the changes with a slew of substitutions, they never truly looked like reducing the deficit, until the closing seconds when substitute Seb Duffy failed to turn in the rebound after Pearce had failed to hold Steele’s long-range effort.

Stapenhill will of course have better days and in midfielder Connor Ward they have something to build the team around. Copsewood look strong at the back and with a

dangerous forward line could yet prove to be a surprise packet in the promotion race.

*contributed on 05/08/24.*

**TT No.3: Steve Hardy** - Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2024; **Nuneaton Town v Paget Rangers**; Midland Football League Division One; Venue: Bedworth Town FC; Result: 6-1; Admission: £8 (£6 concessions); Programme: Yes; Attendance: 511

A first look at Nuneaton's latest incarnation took me to Bedworth. The old club folded after their landlords evicted them for non-payment of rent etc, so the new club must be delighted to have been invited in by Bedworth which is only a few miles down the road. It is years since I last visited the Oval, so long that I don't think they had a plastic pitch the last time I was there.

The attendance was a very noisy 511, and it is good that see that the public of Nuneaton, who have had put up with all sorts of problems over the years, now have a team to support again.

The match itself was as one sided as the scoreline suggests. Paget actually had the nerve to take the lead on 24 minutes but that was as good as it got for them. Town equalised four minutes later, got a second on 31 minutes and a super third on 38 minutes for a 3-1 half time lead.

The second half was one way traffic and although the Paget attackers tried really hard, their defence was absolutely terrible allowing Town three more easy goals and it could have been many more.

Of course, this was only the first game of the season for both clubs so it would be silly to make any predictions. My only comment would be that Town will finish a lot higher than Paget.

*contributed on 05/08/24.*

**TT No.2: Craig Dabbs** - Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2024; **Redditch Borough v Southam United**; Hellenic League Division One; Venue: The Cherry Tree Stadium; Result: 3-1; Admission: £5; Programme: 20pp, free; Attendance: 60

Redditch Borough has been on the radar for a while, but you know me by now when it comes to programmes, so a few days ago I checked their availability and found out yes there would be one. Yesterday, however, all was going well until I saw the dreaded QR code appear on "X". After a couple of text messages and a phone call late in the evening I decided to offer my services and spent printing programmes until 02.30. Aside from my own self-interest what you may not know is the fact that I'm trying to get a small portfolio of clubs on board where I can print programmes off for them at a reasonable and affordable amount and I felt it only right that Borough had a printed one for their first game at Step Six. I arrived early in Redditch with a lot of paper to fold up and I'm very grateful that the club has given me the chance to print their programmes this season on the back of this.

Cherry Tree Stadium isn't far from Redditch United's Valley Stadium; the change here is remarkable from what the club inherited when they moved here in 2017. A lot of the work has been completed now for this new chapter apart from the floodlights and seats which are to come sometime in the future.

It's no exaggeration that the clubhouse here, set away from the ground but on the same complex is one of the finest I've seen. There are three separate rooms one of which was being set up for a function when I left. The ground a short walk away does have its own tea bar which negates the need to walk back for refreshments and the overhang from this forms part of five areas of cover in the ground, curiously all devoid of any back to them.

The match itself was very nearly over before it really got going. A Southam player suffered a dislocated knee in the fourth minute which resulted in nearly an hour's wait before moving him onto a stretcher and off the pitch to allow a restart just as the ambulance arrived. Not long into the restart they suffered another injury to a player and despite flashes of promise they were second best to the newbies of the Hellenic League.

The potential here for this club to kick on and move up is great. I can't help but think of Worcester City and how Worcester Raiders crept up on them into becoming a viable opposition playing at the same level before City moved up one level higher again this season. There's simply no reason that in time Borough v United could be a Boxing Day fixture, so we'll see how it pans out.

*contributed (via Brian Buck) on 04/08/24.*

**TT No.1: Jon T Green** - Friday 26<sup>th</sup> July 2024; **TAFF'S WELL** v Llanelli Town; Cymru South; Venue: Rhiw'r Ddar (Gentles Construction Stadium); Result: 1-1; Admission: £6; Programme: Online only; Attendance: 235

Cast your mind back if you will to a time when you last went to a league match where a) it wasn't under threat from water logging in the days running up to the game or b) it wasn't raining at some point during the 90 minutes. Can't think of one? No, me neither. Imagine my surprise then to find the village of Taff's Well bathed in a golden light on a distinctly warm Summer's evening. The ground is situated a little way from the centre and, with parking on the local estate something of a contentious issue, you are advised to arrive early or face the prospect of a lengthy walk.

Rhiw'r Ddar, to give the ground its unsponsored name, sits between wooded hillsides and a busy dual-carriageway road. Entrance is via a single turnstile with the clubhouse (packed to the rafters with memorabilia) and changing rooms to your right behind the goal. A new gym, club shop, kitchen and managers office are being built and very smart they are going to look too. Tonight, there is a burger stall and, heaven help us, an ice cream van - what's happening here? Have we swapped South Wales for the South of France? Temptation calls in the shape of a chocolate Cornetto but luckily common sense prevails due to having put on a clean white shirt..... Like many Welsh grounds there is a total absence of covered

standing but, for those who like to watch their football sitting down, there are two pre-fab stands facing each other across the halfway line. The Malcom Fraser Stand has 152 black and yellow seats with the Don James Main Stand opposite having just sixteen fewer. Both have been raised on brick bases and are reached via short flights of steps (also a disability access ramp in the case of Don James). This gives considerably enhanced viewing and is certainly better than the normal pitch level installation. Dugouts are built into the front of the Don James stand which again adds to the uncluttered sight lines. Of note is a now redundant shallow covered terrace which sits close to the tree line and is totally blocked by the Malcolm Fraser stand.

At the end of last season Llanelli Town had amassed precisely double the points earned by their hosts; only champions Briton Ferry Llansawal finished above Town whilst the Wellmen escaped the drop on goal difference alone. Llanelli might be known as the reds but tonight they turn out in an all-green strip against a home side wearing a somewhat garish yellow and black kit. It takes around 30 seconds to see that Taff's are set up to nullify the visitors passing game as they immediately revert to a 4-5-1 formation with centre-forward Owain Edwards being the only player regularly in their opponent's half. Barely ten minutes have been played before Joe Hunt swings over a cross from which Joe Lloyd sees his effort scrambled away when he looked odds on to score. Town's captain Ethan Cann then goes close with a long-range effort before his side go even closer as Hunt's in-swinging free-kick is helped onto an upright by Lewis Iles. Only the diminutive David Lyon is showing any attacking prowess for the home side and then often he is overwhelmed by sheer weight of numbers. The opening goal arrives on 33 minutes as Henry Jones finds space between the defensive lines before firing an absolute rocket into the top corner. Both Kurtees Rees and Iles might have extended Llanelli's lead before the break, but they are so clearly the better side it's difficult to see anything other than a routine away win.

Within four minutes of the restart, the game is turned on its head as Edwards clips a ball to the far post where Lyon beats Scott Coughlin with a well-placed finish. The same player almost puts his side ahead but can't repeat the trick after outpacing the Llanelli back line. Lyon is then booked for dissent and incurs the wraith of his coaching staff who suggest that "you might want to shut up because you're no use to us on the bench" - wise words indeed. The match then resumes its attack v defence style but, with centre-half Ben Parry getting in the way of pretty much everything, clear cut chances are becoming increasingly rare for Town. Only in the last ten minutes do Taff's come under sustained pressure; 'keeper Shaun Gardiner stretches to keep out Rees' header before Sean Cronin smacks a close-range header against the post. There is just time for Cann and substitute Theo Wharton to drag their shots wide before the referee signals the end of the game. The reaction of the home crowd and players is akin to a victory and is neatly summed up by Chairman Kevin Francis who turns to his son and says, "I wouldn't have put money on that result before the game". Who indeed Mr Chairman?

*v2 contributed on 30/07/24.*