

TT No. 11: *Keith Aslan* - Sat 12th November 2016; **Birstall** v Kimberley Miners Welfare; East Midlands League; Kick-Off: 15.01; Result: 2-1; Admission: £4; Programme: 50p; Attendance: 44 (37 home, 6 away & 1 neutral)

I received a phone call just as I arrived at St. Pancras to say my intended game at Chalvey was postponed so plan B was put into operation. Plan B was 'what on earth am I going to do now?' Professional groundhoppers have contingency plans, I don't. I just got on a train heading north and once aboard gave my mobile phone a good workout (how did we ever do this hobby before they were invented)? Got a positive response from Birstall with Mrs. Secretary saying the game was 99% certain to go ahead, coincidentally the same odds as Hilary Clinton was last week of becoming the next president of America! This presented me with an unexpected opportunity to refinish the East Midlands League.

Easy to get to with buses 22A&B (but not 22) leaving from opposite Leicester station to Birstall. Buses back do not run very late on Saturdays and while a 3 o'clock kick off is no problem, if you go to a game with extra time and penalties you could be struggling. Considering it is a suburb of Leicester, Birstall is a very nice place with plenty of eateries and drinkeries to while away the time. It says it is the biggest village in England, but I've been to a number of places that claim this. Much is happening at the ground to bring it up to standard for their newly elevated status. To go with a bit of cover behind the goal is a brand new *Atcost* stand along the side, with stacks of breeze blocks all over the place suggesting the improvement work is still ongoing. There are two 7ft high turnstiles a type rarely seen at the level. The bizarre aspect is that they cover a side entrance that hardly anybody uses, while almost everybody enters through the main entrance which is just a gate in the fence. The clubhouse has hot drinks and rolls for sale, inside I got talking to two people who were instrumental in forming the club in 1961. This level of football certainly inspires longevity.

The game was a corker, with goalmouth action and casual brutality in abundance. One down at half time, Kimberley equalized seconds into the second half and the game looked to be heading for a very hard-fought draw until the home side got a winner in the 89th minute. The referee added 4 minutes on to the first half, but with many more stoppages in the second period, he blew up just after Birstall scored without adding any time on to give the visitors a chance to equalize. Given that Kimberley had been winding him up all afternoon it serves them right. Well done ref.

As always, a thoroughly enjoyable day out with Chalvey still to look forward to next Saturday, weather permitting. Leicester one week, Slough the next, this is a hobby that takes you round all of England's major tourist attractions.