

TT No.88: *Keith Aslan* - Saturday 10th February 2018; **SAINT HELENS TOWN AFC** v Whitchurch Alport; North West Counties League Div. 1; Kick-Off: 15.03; Result: 1-5; Admission: £5, Programme: (brilliant) £2; Attendance: 178 (133 home, 42 away & 3 neutral).

St. Helens is famous for two things, glass and darts. In some freak of genetics, 3 of the top 20 darts players in the WORLD come from this non-descript northern outpost with the towns darts shop being prominent sponsors of the football team. After spending the past seven years homeless, this season the team are back where they belong with a new ground and plastic pitch meaning in spite of the rain this was a stress-free day out for yours truly with a football match guaranteed. Given their seven-year exile it was fitting they entered the field to the sounds of the Thin Lizzy standard 'The boys are back in town' blaring out over the tannoy. My own personal choice would be 'Hello, hello I'm back again' by Gary Glitter who we don't hear nearly enough of these days. Whatever you think about his extra-curricular activities he did make some mighty fine records.

Ruskin Drive is a 25-minute walk across town from the railway station. It is a brand-new complex with Pilkington Recs. having a rugby league fixture next door to the football. Confusingly it's the same entrance to both, the pay hut is divided into two with both sports having equal billing. For the paper fetishist the Recs. also produce a programme and their attendance was not dissimilar to the football crowd. While many hoppers have slagged off the ground they are missing the point. St. Helens are back playing in St. Helens and that is all that matters. Beggars can't be choosers and the opinions of a groundhopper who is only ever going to make a single visit is of no consequence. For the record it is a three-sided ground with a bit of atcost architecture around the half way mark. Of course, fans of green fences won't be disappointed. The clubhouse was showing the lunchtime footie but the bar staff were overwhelmed until the rugby crowd emptied out for their earlier kick off. I seized my opportunity and ordered a scrumptious sirloin steak and chips from the many wonderful meal options available. Not cheap, but well worth the money.

All around the ground, and in the programme, there are homages to their most famous old boy, Bert Trautman, who played 51 games for the Saints before moving on to Manchester City. A thoroughly nice chap by all accounts who achieved immortality by playing on in one match with a broken neck. Brave or stupid, you decide. His presence in the St. Helens team led directly to the town being twinned with Stuttgart, the first such twinning with the enemy after the war. Today the home side were no match for Whitchurch who chalked up their 10th consecutive win, with a brief St. Helens comeback early in the second half not proving sustainable. Alport were well supported by a large number (everything is relative) of enthusiastic fans. As with all new grounds the stewarding was a nonsense, I counted nine, four didn't seem to do very much while the other five did nothing at

all and just stood and watched the football. Nice work if you can get it. The 56-page glossy programme was a work of art, about the best I've seen all season with everything you could possibly want from it. Possibly they could send a copy to the Margate programme editor, 50p more expensive and quite frankly, rubbish. Another excellent day out dodging the raindrops.

04/20