

**TT No.93:** *Keith Aslan* - Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> February 2018; **ASHFORD** v Gillingham Town; Kent FA Reliance Junior Cup Group A Quarter-Final; Kick-Off: 14.17; Result: 1-1 after 94 minutes (2-2 after extra time and 3-1 penalties); Admission: Free; Programme: £1; Attendance: 43 (33 home, 0 away & 10 neutral)

There's been no rain for three days which down here in Thanet is the prelude to a hosepipe ban but on the plus side the unseasonably arid weather means Ashford finally get to play a game at Ham Street. This must come as a huge relief to their secretary who can now get her Friday evenings back without them being punctuated with a barrage of phone calls from groundhoppers. It was still very boggy underfoot, but this is to be expected when you have a ground on Romney Marsh. While only one stop nearer to Ashford than their previous abode, it is far more convenient for the carless hopper with Ham Street station actually in Ham Street as oppose to Appledore station which is two miles away from civilization. Ham Street also has an hourly bus service from Ashford, useful when Southern trains are on strike. A team called Ham Street used to play here during a short spell in the Kent County League about five years ago, but other than that Ashford are the only senior team to operate out of the village.

As with their time at Appledore, spectator comforts are a cut above what you would expect at this level. A marquee contains seats and a secretary selling hot drinks, pies and programmes with today's full-colour edition numbered issue 12 volume 2. Good to see something resembling a crowd here, it was in single figures when I visited Appledore. Couldn't quite get to the bottom of the move with the official explanation being the ultimate aim is to play back in Ashford and this ground is closer. Indeed, it is, but not by very much, and given they were only paying £30 a game to hire their previous ground I think there might be more to it than that. Ham Street is not so much a sleepy village as a comatose one and I would thoroughly recommend giving the local pub, the Duke of York, a very wide berth with sky high prices and the rather elderly barmaid having to have three attempts at getting the right price for a pint of Fosters and a packet of Quavers (at one attempt she was charging £11.20p for the Quavers!) Also present in the hostelry was a well-known hopper who was taking photographs of the beer pumps to put on his social media site. And to think some people call me sad!

Gillingham Town is a new one on me, they play in the Rochester and district league with their ground only about 400 yards from the more well-known club from the town. Ashford dominated most of the match and when they finally broke through mid-way through the second half it looked to be all over. But Gillingham raised their game and equalized to take the match into extra time. Having had much the better of the extra time the home side retook the lead in the first period only for Gillingham to raise their game again and get another equalizer. If only they could play with the same enthusiasm when they weren't actually losing, they might well have won this game. After their second comeback, Gillingham retreated

back into their shell and were content to play for penalties, not a particularly wise tactic as they weren't very good at taking them.

An early return to my Broadstairs dacha meant I was able to spend my Saturday evening watching T.N.S. v Dumbarton on S4C. Watch the two Scottish goals on you tube, they were a bit special. But why do they continually tantalize people by saying you can get the English commentary by pressing the red button. You can't. And I, along with most Welsh people, don't understand Welsh.

04/20