

TT No. 121: Keith Aslan - Saturday 14th March 2020; **AFC STONEHAM** v Solent University; Wessex League Premier; Kick Off: 14.59; Result: 2-2; Admission & programme: £3 for ancients (a bargain); Attendance: 108 official - (131 accurate(ish) - 118 home, 4 away & 9 neutral)

Plane tickets; check. Accommodation booked; check. Jersey here I come. Westside however didn't fancy the trip and less than 24 hours before kick-off they decided to stay at home to 'protect players safety'. Visiting an island with no cases of Coronavirus is dangerous. Let's just spend the day shopping, going to the pub, travelling round on public transport etc. Far less risk there. So, my marquee trip of the season went down the chute and I found myself in more prosaic surroundings.

Although Stoneham is about a mile from Southampton Airport Station as the crow flies, unless you've got wings it's a very long, circuitous walk. Eastleigh is the station you want with a door to door bus service, number 2, every 15 minutes. Waterloo was in meltdown with a signal failure closing three quarters of the station and cancelling the same ratio of trains. You'd have thought that the number of weekends the place is shut for 'Rail improvement work', they might have improved the signals a bit. On the underground an announcement came over the 'tannoy' that Waterloo has fourteen escalators. All very interesting but hardly relevant to my journey.

Stoneham only moved into their current ground a couple of months ago. It's a sports complex, like Skelmersdale last weekend there's nothing wrong with it, just a bit samey from the neutrals point of view. Much has been made about not being allowed entrance unless you've filled out a form on a computer and printed off a bar code to scan yourself in. 'Not working today mate' so people were freely going about their business without hinderance. Does it ever work? Once inside, the cafe was the selling point for me. Food, drink and chat with hoppers I hadn't seen for ages while you can watch the lunchtime football on a big screen, or you could if there was any to watch. The ground is surrounded by a green fence with an *Atcost* stand, you get the picture. No handshakes of course, but the players all went into a pre-match homo-erotic huddle, no chance of catching an infection there then. A good sporting contest (in spite of missing out the 'Respect' bit), a draw just about the right result although Solent's equalizer came in the time referees add on to the end of games for no particular reason. Stoneham are going great guns in the league, two points behind the leaders, not that it matters much now. They were formed in 1918 and in their very thorough history highlighted in the programme, I learned this was previously the old Ordnance Survey club. I have fond memories of visiting them because the programme had a photograph of an Ordnance Survey map on the cover, I'm really into that sort of thing. Can't remember anything else about the trip though. Must look up the programme.

Waterloo back to normal on my return so an early arrival home. Shocked to find *Match of the Day* has been replaced by *Mrs. Browns Boys*. Things really are getting

serious. I shall be spending the week ensconced in my country dacha. This isn't self- isolation - I just don't have much of a social life.

04/20