

TALES

TRAVELLERS

By **Brian Buck**

254th game of the season. Good Friday 14th April 2006. Newton Abbot Spurs 4 Newton Abbot 2 (Axworthy's Devon League)(11am kick off) att 155 approx. I was on the road at 6am and arrived at the ground some 35 minutes before kick off, giving me more than sufficient time to chat up the exceedingly attractive tea bar ladies beforehand. The programme was very interesting as well and it contained photo copies of matches in days gone by, stretching back almost to the last war. This game was the reverse of the one I had seen on Good Friday 2004, which Newton Abbot won convincingly, 4-0. But there was to be no repeat today. In the best match of the weekend the ref awarded Spurs a penalty after just 13 seconds, although it wasn't converted until 45 seconds had elapsed. The hosts had a young keeper between the sticks and he was caught out unexpectedly by many of us present on 41 minutes when a 35 yard dipping shot beat him. This quelled some of the arguing that was going on in the visitor camp. But within 36 seconds of the restart Spurs were ahead again and on 50 minutes they extended their lead from the penalty spot when the ref spotted a handball inside the area. It was 4-1 by the 59th minute and at this point the hosts were confident and rampant. But on 67 minutes poor marking at a corner gave the visitors a consolation goal in this hotly contested local derby, played out in some fine surrounding scenery.

255. Good Friday 14th April 2006. Hatherleigh Town 3 Seaton Town 3 (Devon & Exeter League Premier Division) (3pm kick off) att 100 approx. From Newton Abbot it took me about an hour to get to my next game going on 'A' Roads all the way. What the map doesn't tell you is that some of these roads around here disintegrate into single track roads with passing places at some points! The first thing that has to be said is that the club were exceptionally well geared up for the visit of about 10 of us Groundhoppers. The game had been well advertised locally and it seemed to capture the imagination of some irregular visitors from the town. Sadly for the club the number of Groundhoppers attending was limited because most of them were attempting to do a Central Midlands League Hop. But while we were most certainly enjoying ourselves here, they were getting frustrated because the coach, taking them from one game to the next, got stuck in some mud and they missed a lot of that next game! We were soon approached by the website manger who must have taken well over a hundred photos on the day and rather like a rogues gallery, pictures of most of us Groundhoppers present now feature on the club website. I would just like to point out at this stage to any casual viewers of this website that I am not Bill Oddie and I had just come back from the pub when my picture was taken! However we do have one thing in common; we both like 'birds!' This was an exceptionally nice place to watch football, apart from one thing! Other the hedge on the far side of the pitch there were some dog kennels and the occupants insisted on barking whenever anyone came anywhere near their sight lines. They only calmed down when someone had the bright idea of actually feeding them! Sadly though their tea time wasn't until our game was nearly over! Once the ref had completed a very long pre-match chat with the club lino's we got underway. Really both sides needed to win this one to stave off the threat of relegation, so it was a keen game. It was Hatherleigh who took the lead on 22 minutes, but by half time Seaton, sponsored by Fry Days Fish & Chips, had taken a 2-1 lead. I wonder who sponsors the visitors on the other days of the week? Within 46 seconds of the restart the hosts were level again by way of an own goal and for a long while it seemed that the score might remain that way, but the tension was building and on 84 minutes when

a Seaton player took a corner he kicked the corner flag instead of the ball. It's the first time I've ever seen this happen. But the drama wasn't over yet. In the 90th minute Hatherleigh went back into the lead with seemingly the winning goal, but it was heartbreak for them four minutes later when Seaton equalised with nearly the last kick of the game. This was a lovely afternoon and us Groundhoppers present were very grateful to the host club in making our day a very memorable and special one for us.

256. Saturday 15th April 2006. Poole Borough 3 Gillingham Town 3 (Dorset Premier League) (3pm kick off) att 95 approx. Coincidentally I spent the previous night at my aunts in the aforementioned Seaton, so it wasn't too far to drive to this game from there, even though the traffic was a tinge heavy around Bridport. I arrived at the ground just over an hour and a half before kick off and the place was dead, save for the groundsman putting up the nets. So I went down the pub and returned nearer kick off time. This is not the greatest venue in the world, being little more than a railed off pitch in a public park, although the club buildings, shared with rugby on the other side, are in close proximity to the pitch. Furthermore, it stated to rain soon after the start. I wasn't the only person to have been in a pub an hour before kick off, so was one of the lino's, and an official one at that! The ref had requested his services at short notice when the original chap couldn't attend. He had a good game though. It has to be said that the visiting side and their fans were some of the most bitchiest people I have come across this season. They were cocky too and seem to expect to turn the hosts over easily, having beaten them 6-0 at their place earlier in the season. But the other two teams, Poole and the match officials, stood up to them well. Gillingham took a 5th minute lead and increased it on 28 minutes, but it was 2-2 at half time. Poole had surprised the visitors by scoring on 36 and 38 minutes. Just before the half expired the ref heard a visiting player moan, "F*****g hell," at one of his decisions, to which he replied, "I hope so, I'm not going to heaven!" In the second half things hotted up as Gillingham went for the jugular, but it was good news for the hosts and most neutrals when the volatile visiting keeper pushed the ball into his own net from a corner! But in an increasingly exciting match the visitors equalised 4 minutes later and that's the way it stayed.

257. Saturday 15th April 2006. Crown and Manor 0 London Tigers 1 (Cherry Red Books Middlesex County League Alec Smith Premier Division Cup Final) (Played at Yeading) (7.45pm kick off) att 125 approx. After this match it was a comfortable drive to Yeading where I arrived about an hour before kick off. My only previous visit here was on 28 October 1986 when I was part of a 150 crowd to see them beat Harefield United in a Middlesex Senior Cup 2nd Preliminary Round match. £5 to get in here was a bit steep I thought, especially as it was to transpire that the match wasn't going to be that great. I was a bit suspicious when London Tigers Tigers came out at the start, all holding hands! Then they bowed to the very noisy crowd! Also present tonight was the man who created the internet web site Football.mitoo, although when I put some points to him he did stress that he only created it. It is up to the leagues as to how they use it. The only goal of an average game came Tigers way on 42 minutes. Crown and Manor, whose home ground used to be where I first saw them play, at Albury Ride in Cheshunt, tried hard but couldn't redress the difference. Apart from the excessive noise made by the fans of both sides this was a game which won't live too long in my memory!