

The Squire

The newsletter of **GroundhopUK**.

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Hello again, and Happy New Year!!

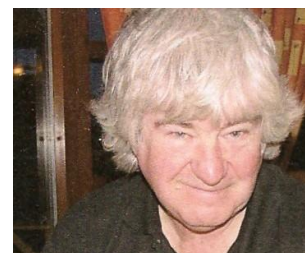
Since the last newsletter, we've had the disappointments of losing the Welsh Hop (hopefully back next year) and Witney (which we've decided not to run again). However, we've had the success of the new West Wales Hop, with 40 goals in six action-packed matches, and the first Sussex Hop played in an end of October deluge! In between there was the SCEFL Hop that was action-packed off the field for all the wrong reasons, including losing the hotel four days before the event (someone there had changed our dates for reasons unknown!) and the coach losing two back wheels in a freak incident on the M25. It's already been said elsewhere that it was thanks to the skill of Shirley, our driver, that the incident was not more serious. Once recovered, the coach was inspected by DVSA who found no mechanical defect – the coach had been thoroughly serviced only a week or two before – and concluded that it had been a freak accident.



Sad news to bring you next. In late August, David Dixon from Leeds passed away. You may



have seen him at hops some years ago when he was a regular fixture, usually accompanying Hedley and Ian. Barely a month later, Ronnie Wharton also died, another of the Leeds/Bradford contingent. Ronnie was great to talk to, particularly about music, his knowledge of the subject and the number of gigs he'd been to was something else. My thanks to Hedley Dye for the two photos.



To complete a terrible Autumn for Yorkshire hoppers, we also lost Les Leedham in November. You will all know Les as being the man who ran a sweetshop with his Sister-in-law, and often turned up at hops in the "Something Sweet" company van! Here he is in full flow behind the counter of the shop in a picture kindly supplied by Graeme Holmes.

I've also been told of the passing of Dave Finch from High Wycombe. Dave was a semi-regular on the hops a few years back but stopped coming due to family issues.

RIP all four.

Onto happier things now, and the line up for the Hops in 2024 is taking shape nicely....

North West Counties Hop 1-3 March 2024

We now have a provisional schedule:

Friday March 1

7.45pm FC St Helens v Daisy Hill

Saturday March 2

11am Longridge Town v Padiham

2pm Garstang v Ashton Town

5pm Squires Gate v Ramsbottom United

7.30pm AFC Blackpool v Runcorn Town

Sunday March 3

11.45am Euxton Villa v Darwen

2.30pm Charnock Richard v Skelmersdale United

Prebooking is already open for those who want coach and hotel, and is already over-subscribed. This isn't necessarily a bad thing, if we can get the numbers to make a second coach pay its way, then I have plenty of hotel rooms available (we're staying in Blackpool!). IF we can get a second coach, then I'll bring it from Cardiff, giving extra pick up points in the West Country and Birmingham (the first coach starts at East Midlands Parkway and goes via Crewe). If you wish to reserve the full trip then get in touch quickly. I expect this trip to be on open sale very shortly.

Scotland 15-17 March 2024

Provisional schedule:

Friday March 15

7.45pm Armadale Thistle v Ormiston Primrose

Saturday March 16

11.15am Luncarty v Crossgates Primrose

2pm Kinnoull v Penicuik Athletic

4.45pm Jeanfield Swifts v Dunbar United

8pm Sauchie Juniors v Hill of Beath Hawthorn

Sunday March 17

12.15pm Whitburn v Whitehill Welfare

Pre-booking will open shortly. With the trip heading for Perth, interest will be massive, so when you get the email asking if you want to pre-book, get onto it straight away as this will sell out very quickly. However, if the interest is there, we'll look at a second coach, and start this one from Nottingham, going via the M1 to have even more pick up points!

Easter and April

Easter is one of Phil's Hops in the SWPL. His details are out, and if you haven't seen them, they are attached with this email, including a revised booking form that looks suspiciously like I've seen it before! There may be time for an additional trip before the season is out (Hellenic League is favourite, with another up my sleeve!)

United Counties League, 26-28 July

Difficult to say exactly, but what we do know is that we'll be based in Nottingham University so will be looking at the Midlands. What I'd LIKE to do is below, but of course is subject to relegation, promotion, and sideways moves. IF it all works out, here's my **very** provisional draft:

Friday: Ashby Ivanhoe

Saturday: Lutterworth Athletic, GNG Oadby, Kirby Muxloe, Loughborough Students

Sunday: Harrowby United, Asfordby

Also in the frame: Rugby Borough, Racing Club Warwick, Coventry United, Daventry Town, Lincoln United

Still "to do": Newport Pagnell, March Town United, Histon, Godmanchester, Eynesbury, St Neots (looks like a decent 2025 line up there!)

In addition, 2024 marks 20 years since the famous CML "five in a day", so under the twenty year rule, Kimberley, Dunkirk and Sandiacre could all be back under consideration.....

Wales 2024 (Part 1)

IF we can get the FAW to amend the dates of the cup competitions, then we will be back for 2024. If we can't, then that will be that for our flagship – and longest running – hop. Should that happen, we'll look for a Step 7 league in England that wants to do a hop (we can't go Steps 5/6 because it will also be FA Vase weekend). There's one obvious candidate that we already have a tentative agreement with and would be very popular.....if we can get rid of their hostility towards Sunday games! Mind you, August is before most Sunday football starts so that should keep them happy....

If we can agree things, then the aim is to be back in Gwent.

Wales 2024 (Part 2) 20-22 September

Heading for West Wales for the second year with the new League and provisionally we have this:

Friday September 20

Game in the Ardal under lights

Saturday September 21

Ynystawe Athletic – Clydach – AFC Glais

Sunday September 22

West End – Giants Grave

Again, all subject to promotion and relegation, some interesting names have applied for promotion to the League, and there's the possibility of Morryston Town coming down (in which case they would be on the weekend for sure).

One other word of news is that the League are ruling out 3G cages which have no spectator access from next season. That affects Evans & Williams (planning to share at Stebonheath Park if promoted) and Rockspur (looking to move anyway, possibly to Llandarcy Park)

SCEFL, 4-6 October

No provisional line up yet, although London has been mentioned.....

Southern Combination, 25-27 October

Most of the away clubs from the 2023 Hop will be the host clubs for this year. What we already know is that Pagham v Steyning will be the Friday evening game (as long as both are in the same division!), this is the match that was washed out on Saturday morning.

Crowborough Town, Jarvis Brook, Roffey, Oakwood, East Preston should be the other five, but again, subject to movement.

One other thing to consider is that this may move to 6-8 September, I'll be talking to the League about this. Watch this space!

Still in the pipeline:

European trip – possibly to warmer climes or more likely to somewhere that has a Summer season. The Baltic countries look favourite for that.

Craig's Grand Days Out – distance defeated us for The Stanks, but a bit of planning and preparation for a long day and we can do it. Accommodation is horrendously expensive in Berwick, and this may be more than a day trip to make it work. Watch this space! Similarly, we can go to Fort William, but be prepared for a three day trip for one match. Maybe we'll start things slightly easier.....!!

Guernsey and/or Jersey by FastCat from Poole, with collection points en route – let's see what the fixtures and Condor Ferries timetables bring! At a first glance, there's a day trip opportunity in April BUT it's a bit tight on times. There's some February options that involve a night over on Guernsey which may appeal, but for those who would rather fly flights are not cheap (twice that of the most expensive sea crossing)

The "Football Holiday" – this is an idea that works as a six-day break watching matches at all levels in a particular area. We'll just go to games that are scheduled at all levels, so a trip for those who will do football wherever and whenever they can! It's still a rough outline at the moment, but also offers the chance to visit other attractions such as the National Football Museum or Stadium tours to make it a brilliant week!

The former grounds tour – a weekend that visits locations of former grounds. South Wales for the Vetch, Ninian, Somerton, Aberdare Athletic and the Mushrooms of Mid-Rhondda! North for Peel Park (Accrington), Nelson, Bradford Park Avenue, Huddersfield. Keep an eye open for this one!

That's it for now – See you all very soon!