

Servicemen kicked out of town

FOUR servicemen from Naphill were rounded up by police, ordered out of High Wycombe and sent to Kent on a football supporters' coach.

The men met a friend on the coach on their way to Wycombe Wanderers' home game with Gillingham on Saturday. But police stopped the coach party after it went to a pub and ordered it back to Kent.

The servicemen, Corporal Mark King, Sergeant David Abbot, Lance Corporal John O'Callaghan and Senior Aircraftman John Askin, protested that they were from RAF Strike Command, but said police would not believe them and refused to let them off.

The men were forbidden to speak about the incident by base officers but a friend said: "They showed their warrant cards but the police told them to get on the coach or they would be nicked."

"They had to go all the way to Kent and get a train from Gillingham. We didn't know what had happened to them."

Gillingham fan Sharon Bishop, of Chatham, Kent, said 39 fans hired a coach from a Grey Green Coaches in Strood.

They went to The Angel in Pauls Row, at lunchtime on Saturday. "We were a bit boisterous but there was no problem," she said. Robert Wing, assistant manager at the pub said: "We had no complaints about the fans. There was a good atmosphere."

The servicemen met their friend and were offered a lift to Adams Park. Police were waiting when the fans came out of the pub at 2.15pm. Sharon said they were told they were being escorted to the ground.

But the coach was taken to Handy Cross. Police escorted the coach as far as the M25 and threatened the driver with arrest if he turned back.

"We were told we were being taken home. I have been going to matches for 18 years and I have never seen anything like this before," said Sharon.

Inspector Roger Doe said police received a complaint about the fans but did not know where it came from.

"When my officers arrived there was broken glass outside the pub and the supporters were intoxicated. It is an offence to go to a game having consumed alcohol. They were escorted out of town to prevent a breach of the peace."

He said of the servicemen: "It was one of those things. I wasn't aware that they had shown warrant cards. The driver said everyone was from Gillingham."

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Police were too strict

THE police have an extremely difficult job to do on Wycombe Wanderers' match days. The thin line between firm control of supporters and heavy-handedness is one that needs to be trodden carefully.

That mark was overstepped on Saturday when a coachload of Gillingham supporters was sent back to Kent by police because they were considered to be too intoxicated to go to Adams Park.

Unfortunately four of those on board were servicemen from RAF Strike Command at Naphill. Friends say their pleas to be let off the coach fell on deaf ears and even their warrant cards were not considered proof enough that they were stationed in the area.

This is extremely bad PR for Wycombe as a town and as a high profile home of league football. The club and the police must work together to make sure this does not happen again.

It is true that the coach was not an official supporters' coach, but the supporters who went away aggrieved will pass on an embittered tale of being thrown out of Buckinghamshire.

Wycombe Wanderers should warn all its opponents immediately that the police have now made the town centre a no-go zone for away supporters before the club, and the town's, reputation is tarnished completely.

IMPROVED attendances at this year's Wycombe Show might have been even better, if Wycombe Wanderers had not had a home match on Saturday, organisers say.

But town mayor David Morris thinks he may be able to solve the problem and make sure the show does not clash with another home match next year.

Cllr Morris, appreciating the dent made in Saturday's show attendance by unbeaten Wycombe's appearance at Adams Park in front of more than 6,000 people, is enlisting the help of Wanderers' chairman Ivor Beeks.

"Bearing in mind Wycombe

Pictures:
MARKUS KINCH and
MATT FOWLER
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DAVID CLOUGH

Wanderers were playing at home, I was discussing with Ivor Beeks whether, if we let him know previously, he can arrange fixtures to be away.

"What he did say was, give him a date, and he will see what he can do," Cllr Morris explained.

This weekend's show, blessed eventually with some September sunshine, nonetheless attracted more people than last year, football match or not.