

Attendance at Football Matches
with special reference to Stoke-on-Trent and
Port Vale FC



An analysis of attendance at League One foot ball matches and the factors that may influence them

by

KVM Research

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Attendance at Port Vale FC

A note on the latest trends on attendance at matches in the football league with special reference to Port Vale FC (PVFC) and the external factors that may influence them.

Introduction

The following note is a by-product of an assignment with PVFC who has been keen to increase their support base, but seems unclear as to why support is waning and where and amongst which groups of the population new support might be found. The note is a socio-economic analysis of the latest trends. Much of the information has been downloaded from The Football Leagues website especially the three reports published by the football league 2006-2010 (Nagle, John, Dodd, Andrew, Downer, Jon, et al, *Supporters Survey 2006, 2008 and 2010*, The Football League and Sportswise, London). This information has in some instances been compared to information from the 2011 Census.

The note does not purport to be a conclusive investigation into the issue of who attend and why they attend football matches. More work and in depth analysis is needed in particular using a larger sample of clubs and a more rigorous statistical analysis and also analysis of the attendance at individual clubs. However, it seems to the writer that even on the basis of this limited research there is an urgent need to address the issue of falling attendance, the reasons behind it and what may be done about it.

General Trends

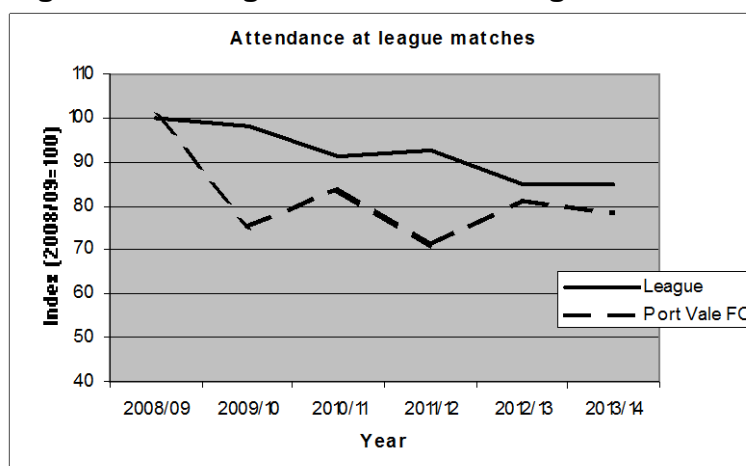
Table 1: Average attendance at football matches 2008-2014 at a sample of League 1 and other clubs.

Club\Year	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	%
Preston North End	13,481	13,013	11,771	11,829	9,272	10,534	-21.86
Swindon Town	7,511	8,358	8,460	8,372	8,536	8,130	+8.24
Bristol City	16,946	14,709	14,692	13,889	13,276	11,741	-30.71
Shrewsbury Town	5,664	5,481	5,848	5,746	5,734	5,581	-1.47
Peterborough United	7,599	8,912	6,455	9,119	8,178	6,289	-17.24
Crewe Alexandra	4,622	4,075	4,115	4,140	4,906	4,818	+4.24
Oldham Athletic	6,261	5,373	4,798	5,007	5,255	4,278	-31.67
Colchester United	5,031	5,518	4,242	3,860	3,529	3,614	-28.17
Carlisle United	6,267	5,228	5,207	5,249	4,302	4,195	-33.07
Preston North End	13,481	13,013	11,771	11,829	9,272	10,534	-21.86
Walsall	4,578	4,019	4,033	4,277	4,177	4,807	+5.00
Notts County	4,446	7,353	6,586	6,805	5,517	3,331	-25.08
Bradford City	12,674	11,420	11,121	10,491	10,323	14,121	+11.42
	8,351	8,190	7,623	7,739	7,098	7,075	-15.28
	100	98	91	93	85	85	
Port Vale FC	7,624	5,742	6,398	5,406	6,183	5,969	-21.71
	100	75	84	71	81	78	

Source: Attendances extracted from the League website and the websites of individual clubs.

It is seen from the above table that this sample of clubs has seen their average attendance fall by just over 15% in the six-year period. The average attendance at PVFC matches has fallen by nearly 22%. Out of the 14 clubs (including PVFC) only four have had an increase, the biggest increase being at Bradford City (11.42%). The biggest fall has been at Carlisle United (33.07%) followed by Oldham Athletic (31.67%).

Figure 1: Average attendance at league matches



Source: See table 1.

Home Support

Table 2 below also shows that during the season that finished this May average attendance by home supporters also fell by more than a quarter from 5,961 in August of 2013 to 4,323 by April 2014. Rather than being a reflection of a long-term trend this may just reflect the view that there was no prospect of any dramatic change in PVFC's position within the league during the season and therefore home supporters were likely to lose interest – or to put it more brutally: they got bored. However, it could also reflect a need for the

Table 2: Average home support at PVFC

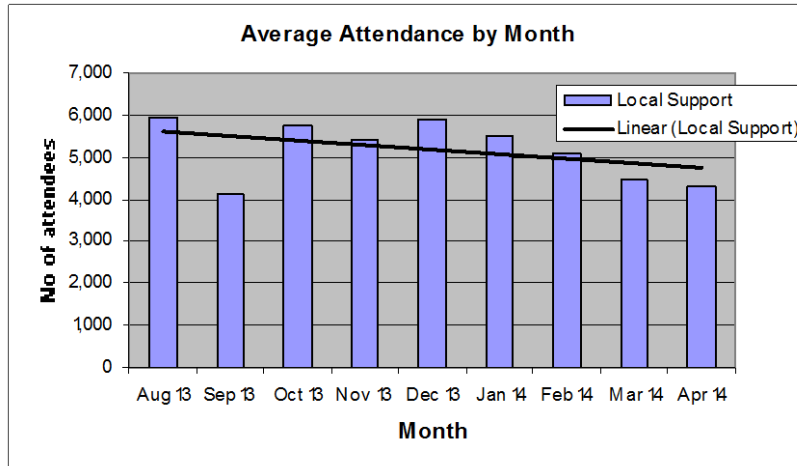
Date	Local Support
Aug 13	5,961
Sep 13	4,120
Oct 13	5,756
Nov 13	5,409
Dec 13	5,875
Jan 14	5,535
Feb 14	5,102
Mar 14	4,474
Apr 14	4,323

Source: www.port-vale.co.uk/fixtures

Club to get more actively involved with the supporters and to do something to attract new supporters.

The falling trend in home support is graphically illustrated in figure 2, below.

Figure 2: Average home support during 2013/14 season



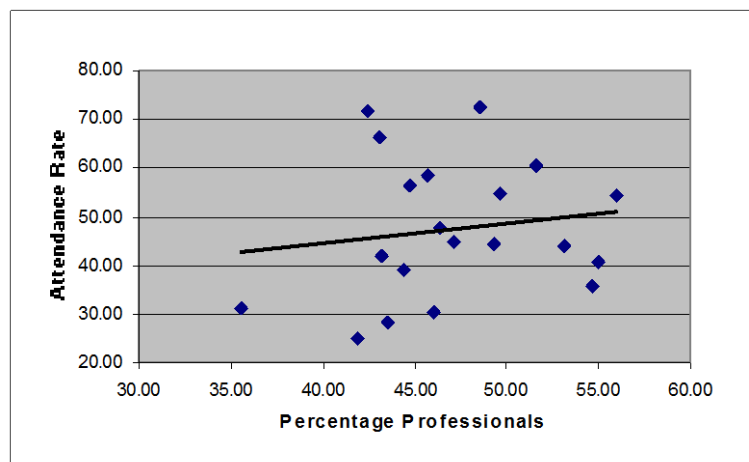
Source: See table 2.

Above we have explored attendance at football matches in terms of numbers and how attendance has fallen or risen over time. In the following sections we will explore some socio-economic aspects of attendance. We will try to explain why some clubs are faring better than others and some matches are better attended than others.

Occupation

The first issue to be explored is the connection between occupation of people in employment in the local area and attendance.

Figure 3: Attendance rate and percentage of professionals.



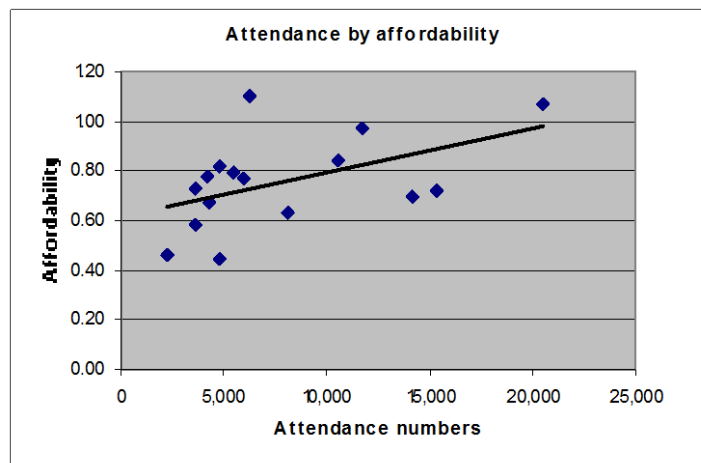
Source: See appendix 1.

From figure 3 it would appear that the higher the percentage of professionals the better the attendance rate during a season. This corresponds neatly with the statement in the Football League's survey of 2006 that "The backbone of Football League supporters are drawn from the professional and clerical ranks" (p 13).

Earnings and ticket prices

In the following we have analysed the relationship between attendance and earnings and ticket prices using an index of 'affordability', a measure of ticket price relative to average pay. An index of more than 1.00 means that ticket prices are high relative to pay while the opposite is true for an index of less than 1.00. (For details see Appendix 2.)

Fig 4: Affordability and attendance numbers



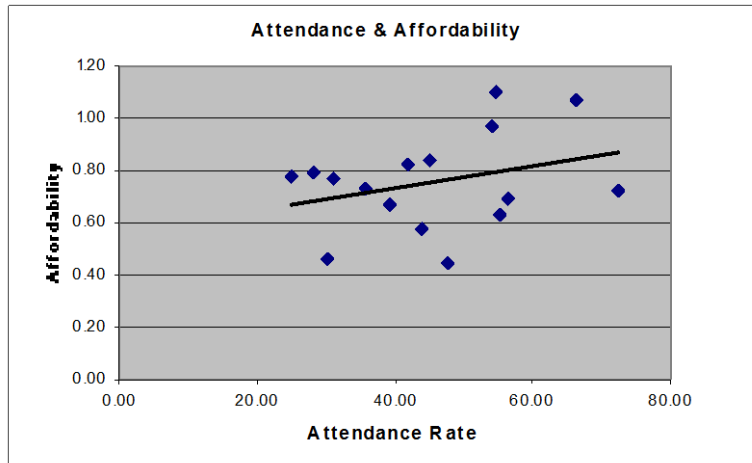
Source: See appendix 2.

Figure 4 shows an apparent paradox in that the least affordable clubs seems to have the best attendance in terms of numbers while the more affordable clubs are doing less well.

Football clubs with their grounds are institutions of entertainment, community activities and leisure pursuits, but they are also commercial businesses, which need a regular income and one source is the sale of tickets. One interpretation of the said paradox may therefore be that clubs with a good attendance and strong following can afford to set a relatively high price for their tickets while clubs with a more fluent following have to be more cautious.

Figure 4 shows affordability and attendance numbers. However, a similar result is found when affordability is related to the average rate at which stadiums are filled as shown in figure 5.

Fig 5: Affordability and attendance rates.



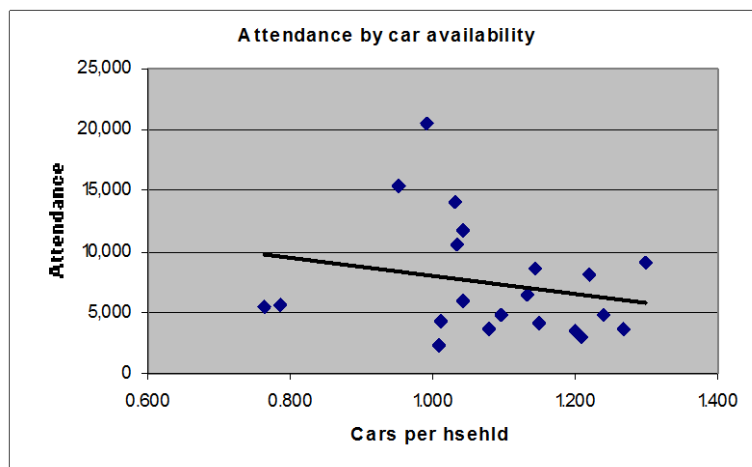
Source: See Appendix 2.

Travel Mode

The mode of travel people have available to them may be a factor in determining whether or not to attend any particular match. They can travel by personal transport in which case the availability of cars and vans will be important. They may also use public transport.

There does not seem to be any published statistics available on how people get to events such as football matches. However, it may be surmised that in areas where public transport is readily available and where people are used to use this as a means of getting to work they will also use public transport as a means of getting to a football match.

Fig. 6: Attendance by Car Availability

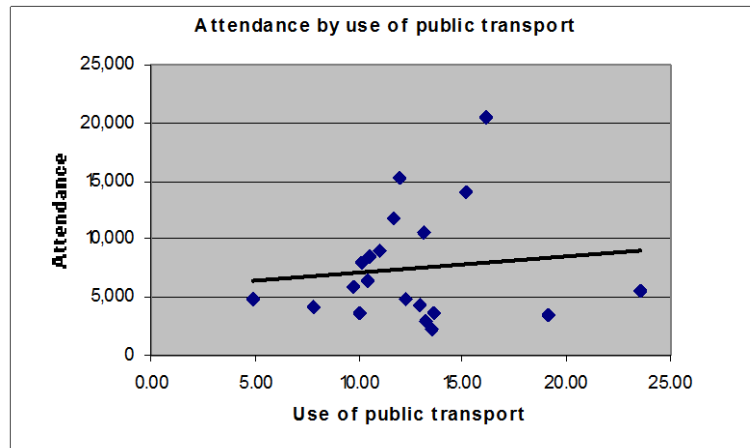


Source: See appendix 3.

Figure 6 shows attendance to be inversely related to car availability. In other words the higher the availability of cars the lower the attendance. This

apparent paradox may be better understood when we consider that in areas of high car availability there is low use of public transport and vice versa. We therefore find that in areas with high use of public transport and low car availability attendance tends to be slightly better as shown in figure 7.

Fig. 7: Attendance by Use of Public Transport.

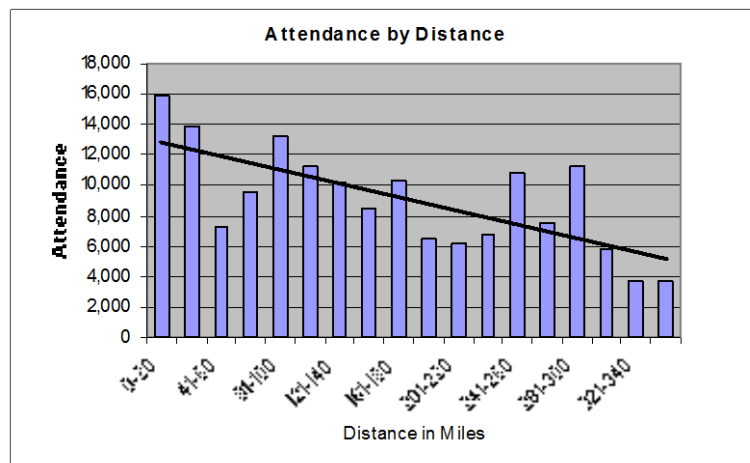


Source: See appendix 3.

Distance

An obvious factor in determining attendance at football matches is the distance between the opposing teams. Travelling cost in terms of money, time and otherwise will play a part. However, more important may be local rivalries.

Fig 8: Attendance by Distance.



Source: Distances between clubs derived from Google Maps.

For instance the interest of supporters of Walsall Town in the outcome of a match with distant Carlisle United will only stretch to how it affects the league table. By contrast the outcome of a match with nearby Wolverhampton Wanderers could affect their daily lives in as much as the two sets of

supporters live in the same area, go to the same shops, the same places of work, education etc so the outcome of any match will be felt more intensely.

Figure 8 above clearly shows how attendance decline the further apart the two opposing sides are based.

Ethnicity

The 2006 Survey of Supporters found as follows: “In total 95% of respondents were ‘white British’, this represents some improvement in the broadening of the ethnicity of the fan base, when compared to the 98% recorded when ethnicity of League supporters was last measured in 2001. This is a reflection of the work League clubs are doing in their local communities to encourage ethnic minorities to watch live football. There is still work to be done, however, as 92% of the population as a whole*) are classed as ‘white British’. Therefore this area remains an important challenge for The League and its clubs.”

It is not known what proportion of the supporters of individual clubs such as Port Vale belongs to a particular ethnic group. However, it may be assumed that it is similar to the national picture and by extrapolation therefore that the figure in 2011 would have been 92% and by 2014 91%. Noting that according to the 2011 Census 88% of the population around Vale Park classified themselves as ‘White British’ it seems that also locally there is an important challenge in trying to engage with and attracting other ethnic groups.

*)The source of this information is not stated. The 2001 Census states that within England the proportion of the population given as ‘White British’ is 87%.

Gender

On the issue of female support the findings of the 2010 Survey of Supporters were :

“In total, 3,142 female fans took part in The Football League Supporters Survey 2010.

The sample gives a clear snapshot of views from across the competition, with 58% supporting Championship clubs, 30% clubs in League 1 and 12% clubs in League 2, with the average age being 37 (virtually identical to male fans at 36).

Interestingly, 63% of the female sample indicated that they were season ticket holders (compared to 48% of male fans). This demonstrates strong levels of club loyalty but also suggests their presence among the wider pool of fans who attend occasional games might not be as strong.”

Other research has suggested that there is a high percentage of lone female parents in the area surrounding Vale Park and it is considered that many of these may belong to a group who are juggling work and career commitments

with commitments to their dependant children. It may therefore be particularly beneficial to target this group in promotional efforts.

Conclusion

Appendix 1: Occupation and Average Attendance 2013-14 season

	All Usual Residents Aged 16-74 in Employment*) Count	Manager, Professional, Technical & Admin*)		Skilled trades, Service, Process operatives & elementary*)		Average Attendance**)	
		Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Rate***)
Carlisle Utd	53,874	22,551	41.86	31,323	58.14	4,195	25.15
Port Vale	42,079	14,958	35.55	27,121	64.45	5,969	31.17
Leyton Orient	121,021	62,417	51.58	58,604	48.42	5,596	60.36
Crawley Town	55,466	25,348	45.70	30,118	54.30	3,487	58.38
Wolverhampton	104,284	44,912	43.07	59,372	56.93	20,472	66.36
Walsall	112,270	48,518	43.22	63,752	56.78	4,807	41.80
Peterborough Utd	88,044	39,370	44.72	48,674	55.28	6,472	56.37
Swindon Town	109,499	54,351	49.64	55,148	50.36	8,071	54.90
MK Dons	127,783	70,316	55.03	57,467	44.97	9,042	40.67
Notts County	123,218	53,666	43.55	69,552	56.45	5,516	28.16
Stevenage	42,738	21,081	49.33	21,657	50.67	2,981	44.35
Crewe Alex	51,654	23,922	46.31	27,732	53.69	4,818	47.66
Preston North End	64,180	30,260	47.15	33,920	52.85	10,534	45.01
Rotherham Utd	114,871	48,731	42.42	66,140	57.58	8,592	71.55
Coventry City	137,560	63,354	46.06	74,206	53.94	2,262	30.16
Bristol City	209,995	117,583	55.99	92,412	44.01	11,741	54.22
Oldham Athletic	96,300	42,791	44.44	53,509	55.56	4,278	39.23
Portsmouth	96,619	46,867	48.51	49,752	51.49	15,344	72.45
York City	98,721	52,449	53.13	46,272	46.87	3,572	44.07
Colchester Utd	85,587	46,743	54.61	38,844	45.39	3,614	35.76

*) 2011 Census, Key Statistics. **)Websites of individual clubs. ***)Percentage of the full stadium capacity occupied.

Appendix 2:

Local Authority	Club	Gross Weekly Pay 2013**)	Season Ticket 2014/15***)	Affordability
Peterborough	Peterborough Utd	£434	£480	1.10
Wolverhampton	Wolverhampton Wanderers	£506	£504	1.00
Bristol	Bristol City	£576	£559	0.97
Preston	Preston North End	£524	£440	0.84
Walsall	Walsall Town	£499	£410	0.82
Nottingham	Notts County	£492	£390	0.79
Carlisle	Carlisle Utd	£511	£399	0.78
Colchester	Colchester Utd	£616	£450	0.73
Stoke-on-Trent North*	Port Vale FC	£470	£340	0.72
Portsmouth	Portsmouth FC	£511	£370	0.72
Bradford	Bradford City	£430	£299	0.70
Oldham	Oldham Athletic	£522	£350	0.67
Swindon	Swindon Town	£595	£375	0.63
York	York City	£606	£350	0.58
Coventry	Coventry City	£555	£253	0.46
Crewe & Nantwich*	Crewe Alexandra	£556	£252	0.45

*) Parliamentary constituencies. **) Source: Nomis. ***) Highest price for a season ticket quoted on each club's website.

Note: Affordability is defined as the price of a season ticket relative to gross weekly pay; most affordable tickets are those cheapest relative to the weekly pay; least affordable tickets are those most expensive relative to the weekly pay.

Thus in the above table tickets are most affordable at Crewe Alexandra matches and least affordable at the matches of Peterborough United.