

**27/01/06 TT No. 166: *Mike Latham - Winterton Rangers (Northern Counties East League Division 1) in Wilkinson Sword Trophy***

Wed 25 Jan 2006: Wilkinson Sword Trophy, Winterton Rangers 1-0 Rossington Main. Attendance: 30 est.; Admission: £3; 36pp programme: £1; FGIF Match Rating: 5\*

There are those grounds that you warm to immediately upon arrival and those that surprise you, offering far more than you anticipated on the outward journey. Winterton Rangers comfortably fell into both categories and are a club that offers a superb welcome to travellers and make the journey into north Lincolnshire very worthwhile.

Located in the small village of Winterton (population 5,000), a few miles north east of Scunthorpe and only ten minutes' drive from the Humber Bridge Rangers have transformed their West Street ground in the last couple of years and have a facility that must be not only the pride of the village but the envy of clubs at a far higher level in the pyramid.

Club treasurer Alf Smith dispenses a cheery welcome at the turnstile and there was also the opportunity to meet club chairman Dave Crowder and treasurer Gerry Spencer during a superbly entertaining evening in such convivial company.

FGIF aficionado Martyn Girdham, a traveller supreme, was paying a visit to his local club and outlined the club history and policy. Rangers were founded in 1934 as an intermediate side and following WW2 played in the Scunthorpe & District League before moving to the Lincs League in the early 60's. They accepted an invitation to join the Yorkshire League in 1970, becoming a major force alongside Emley, and joined the NCEL Premier Division upon its formation in 1982.

After disbanding in 1984 due to financial difficulties they happily re-joined the NCEL in 1986. The club moved to West Street from Watery Lane (a basic farmer's field) in 1950 and enjoyed a record attendance of 1,200 for the visit of Sheffield United in October 1978, a game that marked the official opening of the floodlights.

The chairman explained that £150,000 had been spent on ground improvements in the last two years with a new 150-seater stand to be constructed this summer. About half of this money has come from fund raising, the rest from grant initiatives. Mr Crowder outlined that the club saw itself as a feeder club that hoped to create the opportunity for talented local players to further their careers while encouraging a good youth structure and women's football. They aim to rise to the NCEL Premier Division and possibly the Unibond League but will only go "as far as we can afford." Dave and Alf explained that their aim was to leave a legacy of a ground for the local community and a team within the pyramid structure.

Superbly maintained and equipped to a high order, there is a large car park and splendid club house with a large function room. There is also an outstanding tea bar/ canteen with tables and chairs to dine inside. There is a small seated stand

alongside the left-hand side of the ground and a small standing covered stand opposite. The pitch surrounds have been made hard standing and the playing pitch is outstanding. No one present could recall the last time a game was called off due to a waterlogged pitch. The floodlights were of enviable quality. There is an adjoining full-sized pitch and all-weather floodlit pitch.

Admission was only £3 and a lovingly produced 36-page programme sold for only £1. This contained excellent statistics, pen pictures of both teams, match reports, photographs, NCEL news and an entertaining feature on the Rangers kitchen staff, Maggie, Angie and Gill. Their former club was Brigg Town, best pie cooked was steak and kidney, preferred condiment was salt and had the superstitions of stirring the peas clockwise. Favourite film was American Pie and favourite artist Meatloaf. Great stuff!

The competition offers clubs in the NCEL Division One the opportunity for more midweek games and though both teams were lacking regulars the game was hard fought and competitive. The Rangers goalkeeper had been held up in a motorway delay and only arrived with ten minutes to go so the home side was indebted to the versatility of their centre half for keeping a clean sheet. Rangers created a bucket-load of chances and finally broke the deadlock with a well struck 69th minute free-kick that was to decide the tie.

Easily in the top two or three grounds in the NCEL and better than many in the Unibond League, West Street is a wonderful community asset and a visit to this friendly and welcoming club warms the heart, reaffirming the delights of non-league football. Highly recommended and one to savour.

04/20