

TT No.211: Mike Latham - Sat 8 Apr 2006. Northern League Division 2: **Crook Town** 0-0 Northallerton Town. Attendance: 120 (headcount). Admission: £3. Programme: None(!). FGIF Match Rating: 1*.

We all have our 'target' grounds that we want to tick off and Crook Town's historic and atmospheric Millfield ground was high on my list. Situated west of the County Durham market town the ground is easy to find and there is ample car parking outside. The club house is located by the entrance and has many old photographs on its walls, including many of Crook's great deeds of days gone by in the FA Amateur Cup.

Northallerton had won 11-1 at Peterlee in the Craven Cup in midweek and came to Millfield in second place in the league. My fellow traveller remarked that it was a certain 0-0 after such a runaway score. Sadly, his words were prophetic.

The first disappointment on receiving a rather gruff 'welcome' at the turnstile was that no programmes were on sale. 'The woman who did them hasn't got the time now,' was the explanation proffered from one onlooker. So, a club reeking with history and tradition can't produce a programme for its participation in, as the sign outside says, is: 'the second oldest football league in the world.' Pathetic.

My fellow traveller wanted to abandon ship straightaway so unimpressed was he and head a few miles up the road to Tow Law Town (they won 3-0, to add to our later chagrin). But as it was already 2:45pm after a less than easy journey up the M6 to J38 and through Barnard Castle behind a never-ending litany of slow-moving trailer-pulling, road-hogging vehicles, an executive decision was taken to stay.

Many a reference book describes Millfield as wonderfully atmospheric and historic. There is an old seated stand on the halfway line full of character and a strangely designed standing covered terrace to its right. The rest of the ground is open standing with old fashioned grass banks on two sides. At least the teams were written up on a whiteboard by the tunnel and the small refreshment hut was spotlessly clean and cheerfully dispensed hot drinks on such a bitterly cold day.

The weather was dreadful, the game starting in a blizzard with Northallerton failing to take advantage of the elements as they seemed to have left their shooting boots in Peterlee. After struggling to get out of their own half for the first half-hour Crook enjoyed the better of the game thereafter as the conditions eased. The second half was actually played in bright sunshine and we were lucky that the torrential rain, snow and hail ceased otherwise we could have suffered a similar fate to the nearby games at Sunderland and Consett which were abandoned during the first-half.

The football fare on offer was dire. This was a simply dreadful game with skill levels at a premium. Crook actually seemed to play better when reduced to ten men by injuries having already used all three subs. It was all very poor stuff.

Despite their good run in the FA Vase Crook did not give the impression of being a vibrant club and many of the crowd, numbering around 120 on a first-half headcount mostly comprised gentlemen aged 50 and considerably older.

With the prevailing weather conditions, it maybe wasn't the best day to visit Millfield but the afternoon was not one to savour. For a groundhopper a 0-0 draw on a visit to a new ground with no programme issued was a nightmare. No wonder that my travelling companion, who has to see a goal and get a programme of the game for a new ground to register as a visit, was positively suicidal by the end.

A detour around a few County Durham grounds now bathed in late evening sunshine at least raised his spirits- Tow Law Town, Esh Winning, Brandon United, Willington and Cockfield were all visited before undertaking the homeward journey.

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