

26/08/05 TT No.26: Mike Latham - Glossop NE (NWCL1)

Tuesday 23 August 2005; NWCLD1; Glossop North End 1-1 Trafford.

Very few grounds remain that staged first division football in the years prior to the First World War so a visit to the Derbyshire Peak District is particularly recommended.

Glossop North End these days play in the first division of the North West Counties League at Surrey Street- just up the road from Tesco's supermarket off the main A57 road that runs through the town. Their home since 1952, it is typical of soccer at that level, with a clubhouse behind one goal, a small covered stand on one side and a covered terrace opposite with some bench seating. For their recent midweek game against Trafford the attendance was around the 130 mark for an entertaining 1-1 draw.

A very pleasant lady dispenses hot drinks and pies from the tea-hut and the club make plenty of effort with their programme, which is excellent. The club house is open to all and the club officials are very friendly.

Turn right out of the Surrey Street ground, however, then left and under the railway bridge and within 400 yards you find Glossop Cricket and Bowling Club's enclosure off North Road. A fine venue, North Road is a former Football League ground and it is easy to imagine the days when Glossop enjoyed a 17-year stay in the Football League.

Glossop were elected to join the second division in 1898 and earned the admiration of the football world by earning promotion at the end of their first season, as runners-up to Manchester City. So, in 1899-1900, Glossop boasted a first division side with clubs such as Everton, Liverpool, Sunderland and Newcastle United making visits to North Road.

The teams entered the ground via the ornate gates- still there today- and changed in the cricket pavilion- still an imposing structure. The pitch was laid out in the south-east corner, one touchline running parallel to the railway line and the embankment that was built to house up to 5,000 spectators can still be clearly seen. A crowd of 7,000 saw the first Football League game, against Blackpool in 1898, and the ground record was 10,736 for an FA Cup-tie against Preston North End in January 1914.

Glossop had a population of only 25,000 and it remains the smallest town in England ever to have played in the top-flight. Their stay was a brief one- they were relegated after one season but they stayed in the second division until the outbreak of the First World War. But they were the worst supported club in the League in all but one season from 1903 until 1915.

They averaged around 4,000 during their one season in the first division when Aston Villa (19,825) was the country's best supported club. But by the final season their average crowd was around the 1,400-mark.

Glossop owed its remarkable status to the patronage of a prominent local mill-owner, Samuel Hill-Wood. He was quite a sportsman, having also played for and captained the Derbyshire county cricket side, and he single-handedly funded the football club wage bill and attracted many prominent players to play for the team. In 1908 he took over as the club's manager.

Later the town's Mayor and a Member of Parliament, Hill-Wood's funding continued until the outbreak of hostilities when he decided that, with the war effort in full flow, he could no longer justify his vast outlay. When competitive soccer resumed after the war, Glossop were not re-elected to the Football League and then had to settle for playing their football at a more-humble level. Mr Hill-Wood moved on to pastures new, becoming chairman of Arsenal and a descendent, Peter Hill-Wood is the Arsenal chairman these days.

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