

24/10/05 TT No.85: Mick Burt - Monk FC (Mid-Cheshire League)

I rarely have the urge to relay a blow by blow account of my Saturday adventures as soon as Monday morning, but I feel it may benefit my fellow travellers to hear tell of my abortive attempt to visit Curzon Ashton on Saturday 22 October for their North West Counties League game against Bacup Borough.

Now my wife Gloria needs no second asking when it comes to a weekend break, so with Curzon at home on the Saturday, we booked a nice hotel in the Cheshire Plains for our stay over. I was a bit perturbed when I called the Curzon secretary on Friday evening to check things out (as you do) only to be told that the game could be in jeopardy as a large "wet patch" was giving cause for concern. I was told to call back after 11am on Saturday morning which would obviously give us time (well Gloria actually as she is the driver) to get somewhere else should the need arise.

We headed off to Ashton-under-Lyne on Saturday morning as planned as Gloria fancied a stroll round the 150-stall open market. Fair enough, on arrival I called the secretary who told me that the game was on providing there was no more heavy rain and that the match referee would arrive early at 1pm to give the final nod of approval, having first seen the pitch at 10.00am. Deciding to head for the ground around 12.45pm I was a bit concerned on arrival that the nets weren't up and sure enough, the groundsman told me that the ref (who I assume had arrived earlier than the scheduled 1pm) wasn't happy with the state of the pitch and postponed the game. There had NOT been any rain for the duration of our stay in Ashton thus adding to the mystery.

Clutching copious sheets of paper giving directions to Manchester League and Mid Cheshire League grounds together with all the relevant telephone numbers, I ushered Gloria (by now delighted with the new handbag I had bought her) back into the car and directed her to head back west along the M60 which we duly did, running into two incredibly heavy showers with a possible sighting of a mini-tornado thrown in as well. Both Wythenshawe Amateurs and Styal confirmed that their games were on but I couldn't get confirmation of a programme being issued. Next throw of the dice was Mid Cheshire League Second Division new-comers Monk FC who were entertaining Malpas in a clash of two of the division's strugglers. Monk are based at Woolston just east of Warrington and no more than a five-minute drive from Junction 21 on the M6. Thank heavens for mobile phones with club secretary Dominic McAlinden confirming mobile to mobile that the game was definitely on and that programmes would be available from 1pm. With kick-off at 3pm that presented no problems and we drove into the car park at 1.35pm - piece of gâteau! The Malpas team arrived soon after as did the referee and we were on our way.

What was a real bonus was the fact that the set-up is really very good for this level with plenty of car parking, an excellent clubhouse and most importantly a good pitch in an attractive tree-fringed setting that is railed-off along the sides with a dugout positioned by the halfway line on both sides of the pitch. There is no covered accommodation for spectators though. Admission was £2 including a very well-produced 12-page full colour programme - quite remarkable. Both teams were out warming up by 2.15 pm, and during the lead up to the game I found out that Monk's game at Curzon Ashton (Reserves) the previous Saturday had also been postponed and they ended up playing on the adjacent astroturf, unaware (not surprisingly) that they had the right to refuse!

The game itself saw Malpas take the lead midway through the first half but Monk levelled five minutes before the break before taking the lead twenty minutes into the second half. Malpas squared things up in the 77th minute and a 2-2 draw was just about the right result to an open, well contested and generally sporting encounter so the 16 spectators present could go home satisfied with what they had seen. Gloria asked me tentatively whether this had been a disaster to which I replied "Oh no dear, au contraire, a disaster is a Saturday without a match!". After nearly 25 years of wedded bliss I think she really knew that was the case!

As we tucked into our evening meal after a few celebratory drinks, Gloria and Monk F.C. (in that order) had certainly saved me from drowning my sorrows on a fairly large scale!

04/20