

**07/11/05 TT No.99: Mike Latham - Leigh RMI (NCN) and Mold Alexandra (in the Welsh Cup)**

Fri 4 Nov 2005, Conference North- Leigh RMI 0-1 Worksop Town (att. - 205)

It's just over ten years since Horwich RMI left their much loved and idiosyncratic ground at Grundy Hill with its vast slope and views of Rivington Pike and moved several miles away to Leigh. The trustees of Grundy Hill sold the ground for housing, with the nature of the pitch having ruled out any hope of remaining in the pyramid for much longer had RMI stayed put.

With Leigh rugby league club in financial difficulties, Grundy Hill Estates bought their Hilton Park ground and moved lock, stock and barrel in a groundshare arrangement that effectively saved the rugby club from going out of business and the ground being developed. Hilton Park, named after late rugby club chairman Jim Hilton is one of rugby league's most atmospheric and loved grounds. Built in 1947 largely due to voluntary townspeople after the rugby club was forced to leave its Mather Lane home during the war, it was formerly the site of allotments. Two of the ground's former landmarks, Parsonage colliery and a large cotton mill have now disappeared and a town centre by-pass road now runs along the former site of the Manchester-Liverpool railway line behind the far goal, one of the first to be built in this country dating back to the 1830s.

A vast atmospheric ground that once held over 31,000 for a rugby league cup-tie against St Helens, Hilton Park staged Super League rugby in 2005. Leigh remains a rugby league dominated town and despite occasional flurries of interest, such as when Kevin Keegan's Fulham visited for an FA Cup-tie Leigh RMI appear to have made little impact on the town's sporting map, though they run a vast number of junior sides.

Named after the railway mechanics institute in Horwich, the club's history can be traced back to 1896 but only a handful of the stalwarts that once lined the Grundy Hill terraces can now be seen at Hilton Park. Despite a spell in the Conference, ended by relegation last season, RMI struggle on poor gates and attracted only 205 for this Friday evening fixture despite the presence of several travellers and a number of Worksop supporters.

Despite heavy rain the pitch was in superb condition. Hilton Park has two open terraced ends and a small main stand, the framework of which dates back to the Mather Lane ground. For RMI games the crowd tends to gather on the supporters' club stand side, built in the 1950s and since named the Tommy Sale stand after the rugby club legend. With a terrace in front of neat rows of seats and further standing behind the facilities are excellent and give a great view of the play. The Mick Martyn bar underneath the stand is open to spectators and a tea bar, named Belly-busters, in the corner of the ground dispensed a good range of drinks and hot snacks.

Hilton Park still retains the feel and atmosphere of a rugby ground and it still seems strange for many people to see football played on the hallowed turf. RMI had no luck at all, striking the woodwork several times and having other goal attempts cleared off the line while a Worksop defender should clearly have been sent-off for a last man foul on a home striker in the first half, the referee doling out only a yellow card. Worksop's goal came from their only shot on target all evening- a long range strike from captain Paul Dempsey.

With plans for a new ground further down the by-pass gathering momentum as part of the Leigh Sporting Village Hilton Park's days are numbered and a visit to this historic ground is to be recommended. A well-produced 32-page programme, costing £2, was on sale but this had only 12 pages of editorial and was dominated by advertisements. Match rating: 3\*.

Sat 5 Nov 2005, Welsh Cup third round, **Mold Alexandra** 0-5 Prestatyn Town (att.-100)

Travellers can view images from this game in the MFP Album.

The Football Traveller really comes into its own on occasions such as this. With an early kick-off preferred ahead of the rugby league Tri-Nations game between GB and Australia kicking off at 6-15 at Wigan, this one o'clock kick-off in north Wales shone out like a beacon.

Mold, founder members of the Welsh Premier League in the early 1990s, now play in the third tier of Welsh football after relegation from the Cymru Alliance last season. Their opponents, who have ambitions of one day reaching the top tier, are at a similar level.

Alyn Park, Mold's ground, is situated down a narrow road just off the road to Denbigh out of the town centre. There was plenty of parking outside the gate and a pleasant club official, who later transpired to be the chairman, collected the £2 gate money. A magnificent, and I mean magnificent, 60-page programme sold for only 50p though as only 32 had been produced these were in short supply.

With tons of reading material, including histories and pen pictures of both clubs, a history of the Welsh Cup, detailed match reports and statistics, a quiz, photos, list of Welsh football websites, an explanation of the Welsh pyramid system and much more this was an outstanding effort and the best the writer has seen on his travels this season considering the status of the club.

A small seated stand straddles the halfway line at Alyn Park, offering a good elevated view with a covered standing area down the right-hand side with the rest of the ground open standing behind a post and rail fence. There is plenty of room with grassed areas behind one goal and behind the far side. The chairman explained that the ground is owned by a neighbouring manufacturing company and the club currently do not have a lease. But the club are helped by the fact there is a condition that the owners would have to find the club a new site should they wish to develop the land.

The Colonel's Cafe, run by a man known as Colonel Kev, will, the programme informs 'gladly serve you with a variety of goodies and dare I say it baddies.' A separate advert describes it as a 'twilight zone, run by Basil Fawlty but it is worth a visit.' Unfortunately, the modest shack ran out of hot dogs long before half-time but served hot drinks.

Prestatyn, marshalled superbly by their 40-year-old player manager from defence, made a terrific start and led with a second minute penalty after earlier hitting the woodwork. They were 2-0 up at half-time and ran away with things in the second half with Mold losing their goalkeeper through injury. The pace of the game fell away in the second half but the visitors impressed with their neat build-up play and the game, though one-sided, was played in a good spirit. Clearly a friendly club kept alive by an enthusiastic committee the visit to Mold was an enjoyable one on a mild afternoon. Match rating: 3\*.

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