

TT No.221: Mike Latham - Thursday 12 April 2007: Westmorland League Division One. **Appleby** 1-4 Keswick. Attendance: 40 (h/c); No admission price or programme; FGIF Match Rating: 3*.

Another gloriously sunny spring evening gives another chance to dip a toe into the Westmorland League. The website of that league is an object lesson for others to follow- simple, easy to navigate and full of information, the Appleby-Keswick game a clear highlight.

Just to make sure a 'phone call is made to the home secretary to check the fixture. He's just back from holiday so suggests contacting Jock the manager and gives out his number. A cheery lady answers- 'I'm one of those sad people who collects grounds,' is my opening line. 'And I'm one of those sad people married to a football manger,' is her reply before confirming the game's definitely on, with a 6-30pm kick-off.

Appleby-in-Westmorland is a beautiful small town, cut in two by the meandering River Eden. The journey northwards from J38 of the M6 motorway through the village of Orton is simply stunning. Appleby has a population of about 2,500 and only really comes to life once a year, when the annual horse fair is held every June. With its broad main street and host of interesting shops and pubs it makes an ideal tourist destination.

The football ground is situated at the lowest part of town next to the banks of the Eden, next door to the memorial swimming baths and a picture postcard cricket ground. With a row of neatly whitewashed stone terraced houses and a plumbers' merchant on one side and the river banks on the other, the football ground is centrally located and there are some changing rooms situated in a riverside building behind the far side goal with a car park and recycling point behind the nearside goal.

There are no facilities as such, just a small fence on the river side and a stone wall on the far side. A few locals gather in time for kick-off and when the corner flags are put out and the nets fastened into the goals the ground gradually takes the shape of an authentic football ground.

Jock turns out to be an engaging fellow, and a man of boundless energy. As well as organising the team, giving the pre-match talk, retrieving the ball from the river by aid of a net on the end of a long pole and dealing with all other matters he also has time to talk about the Westmorland League and how the season has gone. He also recalls the time when attendances at the ground were far greater than today's. He explains his team is in the middle of a re-building process after losing several long-serving players.

Appleby are struggling for senior players tonight with a handful unavailable against a Keswick side that Jock rates as one of the best in the league and he has to field a

number of reserves. The youngsters cope well in the first-half but fade in the second as the impressive visitors deservedly seal a 4-1 win. Jock's son, an athletically built young man wearing the number 7 shirt for the home side is clearly one of the best players on the field and capable of playing at a higher level.

With one club official from each side doing the honours on the line the referee, clearly an experienced official, controls the game effortlessly and a sporting and good-tempered contest unfolds on a well grassed though hard pitch.

The Westmorland League is a players' league and if you venture into its waters don't expect the trappings of higher leagues like programmes, team-sheets, tea-bars etc. But on a sunny spring evening in a picturesque part of the country it helps to provide some good entertainment.

Dusk falls but the game is easily finished in the light and the journey home along darkening roads is easily negotiated, broken by a brief stop-over at the GBG recommended New Inn at Hoff where a warm welcome awaits.

06/20