

TT No.131: *Mike Latham* - Thurs 29 November 2007: JW Hunt Cup 1st Round. **Darlaston Town** 1-2 **Stafford Tn.** Attendance: 20 (h/c); Admission: £3; No programme; FGIF Match Rating: 3*.

The messageboard of Tony Kempster's excellent website has fast become an essential resource and alerted travellers to this little-advertised JW Hunt Cup-tie on a Thursday evening between two West Midlands League clubs, Darlaston newly promoted to the Premier Division and Stafford Town aiming to join them as they seek elevation from the first division.

The JW Hunt Cup, its origins I was informed as a charity competition for the local hospital, has its final at Molineux and that provides huge incentive for the competing teams.

Darlaston is an old industrial town close to Walsall and just a few minutes' drive from J10 of the M6. "The City Ground is a jewel and is a 'must visit' for any respected traveller," was the advice given to me by the Fylde based oracle and his words rang true. Quite simply, it is an outstanding venue.

Hemmed in by Victorian housing, the entrance is to be found in a gap two terraced houses and once inside memories flood back of the lamented Horwich RMI ground at Grundy Hill.

The slope from the club-house end of the ground towards the far goal really is something and looks like something from a distant age. On the far side is an ageing stand with bench seating and the view from here is as close as you will ever get to the action. The stand was said to have been transported from Kidderminster's Aggborough ground in the 1930s. The rest of the ground is open standing and a forlorn-looking old dressing room block is situated to the side of the main stand-used in the last war as a de-contamination and ARP unit, now replaced by a newer facility adjoining the clubhouse.

The main Dave Powers stand is named after a late long-serving official of the club and should have a preservation order placed upon it for future generations to enjoy.

The club house is warm and friendly and hot drinks and cheese rolls are cheerfully dispensed from the adjoining tea bar. In front of the club house are several tables and this would make an idyllic spot on a sunny afternoon. The ground also has a church behind both goals, the far, bottom end being surrounded by bright, orange meshing to prevent stray shots disappearing into neighbouring streets.

The ground is kept in tip-top condition with blue and white paint everywhere and, happily, there seems little sign of the types of vandalism problems that have troubled the club in the past.

Stafford take an early 2-0 lead and then fight hard to preserve their lead under a second half onslaught. They seem very happy to have moved one step closer to Molineux. In truth it's not the best game I've seen all season, not even that week to be fair, but the magnificent setting on a dark, mild evening more than makes up for that. Darlaston Town is a simply magnificent venue and a visit to this friendly club comes highly recommended.

06/20