

TT No. 169: Mike Latham - Sunday 13 Jan 2008: League Two - **Hereford United 3-1** Shrewsbury Town. Attendance: 4,707; Admission: £16; 40pp programme: £2.50; FGIF Match Rating: 3*.

With games falling left, right and centre to the weather it was great to get a definite 'yes' that Hereford United's home game would definitely take place, with a 2pm kick-off despite all the recent rain.

The Edgar Street playing pitch, the largest apparently in the top five divisions, looked in near perfect condition, too, and reflects huge credit on the ground-staff. The journey from Worcester was marked by flooded fields either side of the main road and so it was remarkable that the pitch had survived the worst of the elements.

I had visited Hereford's atmospheric ground before but for a Conference game and so was pleased to 'tick' it properly as a Football League venue. I just need Dagenham & Redbridge now to re-complete the 92 but have been enjoying non-league football so much this season, particularly at levels 5, 6 and below that I don't feel any huge urge to rush down to East London.

Easily found, literally next door to the A49 just north of the centre, Edgar Street is an old-style football ground, crumbling a little around the edges maybe but a simply wonderful arena. After visiting so many of the sanitised 'off the shelf' new grounds lately, of which Shrewsbury's New Meadow is one, it was great to return.

The best view in the ground in my opinion, and just about the best view to be had on any football ground, is in the Floors-2-Go stand that backs onto the A49. There are only five rows of steeply tiered seats here but the spectator is literally right on top of the action. Apart from the seats marked 'reserved' you can sit where you like and I found a perfect vantage point on the front row right above the touchline. The only comparison I can remember for being so close to the action was the Hutchings stand behind the posts at Oldham RL club's old and lamented Watersheddings ground.

The visiting fans have half this stand and half the terrace underneath and it was later announced that 928 had travelled down the A49 from Shrewsbury. On the far side is the fairly shallow main stand with offices underneath and both ends are terraced, with the most vociferous home fans packed into the terrace to my left. The attendance of 4,707 was Hereford's highest home league crowd of the season.

Car parking was easy in the vicinity and it was noticeable just how many families, often three generations, were spending their afternoon watching the Bulls. Hereford offer low prices for children and senior citizens and clearly it a move that is paying off.

The PA announcer was excellent, clearly giving out the team line-ups several times and though the programme was a rather basic production, with a disappointing

lack of editorial when compared to many in this league, at least it gave all the basic information.

Though Hereford fell behind, they came back strongly to run out deserved winners of a well-fought contest and maintain their pursuit of league leaders MK Dons. Shrewsbury's goalkeeper never throws the ball, instead electing (presumably under orders) to launch high kicks downfield. Consequently, virtually every Shrewsbury attack begins by players contesting a 50-50 ball somewhere inside their opponents' half.

Ironically Shrewsbury scored off one of their few passing moves, Briggs finishing with a fierce angled shot from Cooke's clever lay-off. But after Hereford had what looked to be a stonewall penalty turned down, they equalised from the spot for what appeared to be a far more innocuous offence, Benjamin finding the bottom corner.

Second half goals by Beckwith, a glancing header from an angled free-kick, and Johnson, with a superb curling shot into the far corner, confirmed their growing superiority though my new-found friends in the Floors-2-Go stand assured me they were far less fluent than usual.

If you haven't been to Edgar Street, I would recommend it. It's a superb atmosphere, a lovely old-fashioned ground and the locals are friendly. The ground must have changed little since that famous Ronnie Radford rocket shot knocked out Newcastle United from the FA Cup in 1972 and launched rookie commentator John Motson on the road to stardom but it's none the worse for that. And with plans for a ground move in the offing it may not be around too much longer. Recommended.

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