

TT No.178: Mike Latham - Sat 26 Jan 2008: Midland Football Alliance. **Alvechurch** 0-3 Atherstone Town. Attendance: 165; Admission: £5; 40pp programme: £1; FGIF Match Rating: 3*.

The Midland Football Alliance league leaders are Atherstone Town and their trip to Alvechurch caught my eye as having the makings of a good game as well as the chance to visit a new ground (for me) in a lovely rural setting.

I wasn't to be disappointed. The afternoon was bright and mild and the recent strong winds had dried out the pitch at the Lye Meadow ground and ensured that, for once, there were no anxieties over whether the game would take place.

Alvechurch is a small village in the valley of the River Arrow in north-east Worcestershire with a population of just over 3,000. The parish was mentioned in the Domesday Book and the writer Fay Weldon and the creator of the Archers, Godfrey Basely were both born here. Alvechurch used to be known for its brick-making and the manufacture of nails and needles but these days is mostly a quiet residential village.

The football ground is easy to find for the motorist- head towards Redditch from J2 of the M42 and turn right towards Alvechurch at the first roundabout. Lye Meadow is on the right after about a mile. There is plenty of parking and the rolling green countryside provides an eye-pleasing backdrop.

The club colours are yellow and black and the ground is well maintained with lots of yellow and black painted fences, rails and so on. There is a large single storey club house on the halfway line on the far side which also houses the dressing rooms. On the near side is a small stand with bright red seats that look slightly out of place in the colour scheme of things. The rest of the ground is flat standing behind a post and rail fence though there is some shallow terracing behind the far goal. There is a catering outlet next to the club house that sells hot drinks, hot dogs, burgers and the like but, as is not uncommon in these parts, no pies.

The playing pitch apparently doesn't handle heavy rain that well despite a pronounced slope from the stand side down towards the club house and also from the far side goal down towards the car park end, where a solitary turnstile is located.

The programme comes with an apology for being produced early- all the statistics, and there are plenty of them, are only up to 12 Jan. It's got a striking cover and lots of reading material, including a detailed club history and some good background on the visitors. There are several pages of general non-league news, including a three-page feature on Welsh club Garw which I can't quite understand. But it's a very good effort and clearly a labour of love for its editor Alan Deakin.

Atherstone's travelling support has swelled the crowd to 165- the biggest gate of the season at Lye Meadow, I'm told. The earliest mention of a football club in

Alvechurch dates back to 1913 and the club has played here since 1957. The club folded in Nov 1993 but was re-formed in 1994 by a dedicated band of supporters and reached the Midland Alliance in 2003.

Alvechurch's most famous son was Alan Smith, who went on to play with distinction for Leicester City and Arsenal and there is an interesting two-page feature in the programme that details all the Alvechurch players that have gone on to play in the Football League together with a list of former League players that then played for Alvechurch.

Alvechurch start like a house on fire and could have been several goals to the good after a hectic opening ten minutes. But gradually Atherstone exert a control on an interesting game played in good spirit. The breakthrough doesn't come, though, until the 71st minute when Wells' far post header breaks the deadlock but the scorer is then booked for removing his shirt in a frenzied celebration.

After one of the home defenders gets his second yellow for a rash challenge, Atherstone sub Brown seals victory with two late goals, a scrambled effort in a packed penalty area and then a fine individual effort after cutting in from the right. It might have been a different story had Alvechurch scored in that early flurry, or when their hard-working no.10 hit the post early in the second half but in the end the Atherstone supporters are cheering another fine victory by their side.

A visit to Lye Meadow comes highly recommended, especially on a sunny afternoon such as this when the views can be appreciated at their best.