

TT No.184: Mike Latham - Sat 2 February 2008; Midland Alliance. **Atherstone Town** 1-1 Boldmere St. Michaels; Attendance: 171; Admission: £5; 24pp programme: £1; FGIF Match Rating: 4*.

There are very few grounds featured in Kerry Miller's wonderful book '*The History of Non-League Football Grounds*', published in 1995, that look virtually the same 13 years on but Atherstone United's Sheepy Road ground probably falls into that category.

The photograph of the main stand and covered standing area on page 232 of Miller's book looks as though it could have been taken in February 2008.

Football in Atherstone has followed a somewhat turbulent history but the present club, formed as recently as 2004, could well be playing at level 4 of the non-league pyramid if they succeed in their aim of achieving their third promotion in four years.

The original Atherstone club was founded in 1887, reached two FA Amateur Cup semi-finals before the first world war and attained the heady heights of the Southern League Premier Division before folding in 1979.

Their successors built their way up through the West Midlands regional leagues before also attaining Southern League status and then going into liquidation in 2003.

The present club started in Division One of the Midland Combination and has made rapid strides since and clearly has the backing of a number of loyal and fervent supporters.

The ground is easy to find for the motorist though is some way out of the North Warwickshire town of Atherstone. If travelling along the A5 in an easterly direction take a left up the B4116 towards Sheepy Magna, right at the first roundabout and the ground is to be found on the right-hand side next to an electricity sub-station. There is a large car park and a warm welcome awaits at the turnstile. Though the programme is a rather basic effort it contains all the necessary information- league tables, fixtures and results etc and the clear tannoy system gives out the team line-ups efficiently.

The Sheepy Road ground is a wonderful antidote to those fed up of 'flat-pack' modern stadium designs and positively breathes tradition and character. The seated stand and covered terrace photographed in Miller's epic also houses a small club bar and the dressing rooms are to be found in the near-side corner. A small crowd built up at half-time outside where the team-talk of the home manager could clearly be heard through an open window.

The only other cover is a small covered terrace on the far side behind the dug-outs but the ground, which has excellent terracing on three sides gives a selection of

good vantage points and, with the grassed banks behind three ends, offers much scope for further re-development should the need arise. The pitch, which was in fine condition, has a considerable slope from right to left if sitting in the main stand. There are two other features of note- a well-stocked souvenir shop and, diagonally opposite behind the other goal, a splendid tea bar whose home-made soup, pie and peas and hot drinks found plenty of takers on a raw afternoon.

Despite going into the game as leaders of the Midland Alliance, Atherstone struggled after falling behind to a 20th minute David Waple goal that climaxed the visitors' early pressure and only rescued a point from a highly competitive and interesting game through Matt Brown's 85th minute equaliser.

A visit to Atherstone comes highly recommended.

06/20