

**TT No.63: *Mike Latham*** - Sat 22 Sep 2007: North Lancashire & District League Premier Division: **Cartmel & District** 5-1 Morecambe Royals; Att: 20 (h/c); No admission or programme; FGIF Match Rating: 3\*.

It's a beautiful sunny day in the south Lakes and day-trippers are clogging the roads and making the most of the last vestiges of summer before the onset of winter. The narrow streets of Cartmel are teeming with tourists, calling in at the local pubs and tea-rooms, visiting the abbey, antique shops and bookshops and purchasing the local delicacy- sticky toffee pudding.

Those more adventurous are climbing Cartmel Fell or navigating the circular walk through the woods- the scenery is breath-taking and England is being seen at its finest. To make matters even better there is football in the village, with Cartmel & District entertaining Morecambe Royals, though there's not a poster to be seen around the place advertising the game.

On five days a year Cartmel is transformed as the racecourse stages National Hunt meetings. Crowds of 10-15,000 are the norm and the racecourse, which is situated in the park virtually in the centre of the village throngs with race-goers, tourists and families with all the fun of the fair. It's an extraordinarily vibrant scene and the atmosphere and experience not to be missed even though horse-racing enthusiasts will raise their eyebrows with indignation at what they see as the poor-quality racing on offer at this country course. It may be not for the purist but everyone else seems to enjoy it.

These days the racecourse has a permanent grand-stand and the brush fences and steeplechase fences are left to weather an English winter before the next meeting next May Bank Holiday. The public have access to the course all year round and the park is a fine local amenity.

The football club share a neat wooden pavilion with the village cricket club with both grounds being located in the centre of the racecourse. The football pitch, pretty flat, and well grassed has a touchline which borders on the far track of the racecourse and the post and rail fence helps give an enclosed feel on one side of the ground. The other three sides are open standing.

The North Lancashire League has an excellent website with up-to-date fixtures and results, league tables, goal-scorers, squad details and ground directions- a superb example of what a clear and informative website can do to publicise and inform. It's a fantastic effort and worth checking out if you dip your toes into the murky waters of this level of football.

Serious travellers will snort at the idea of attending a game in this league- the absence of programmes enough to deter many but the compensations are that the players take it seriously and the scenery of many of the grounds is fantastic. Like

the Westmorland League this is a players' league though, on the basis of the games I've seen so far this season, the standards here are not as good.

This is a league without proper linesmen so a club official from each side does the business. Here the niggles start- both have an unnerving habit of running well inside the touchlines so they are continually encroaching on the field of play. And both have the habit of continually giving advice to their players instead of concentrating on the job in hand. To make matters worse the visiting official spends much of the first half with a mobile telephone pinned to his ear, combining earnest conversations about his social life with giving offside decisions. It's rubbish.

To make matters worse a tiny tot, who looks little more than five years old is tearing around the park on a small motor bike, churning up the grass and making a fearful noise that spoils the ambience of the afternoon. And dog-walkers continually ignore the roped-off cricket square and walk all over the wicket with their hounds. It's rubbish.

The generally poor standard of play hardly adds to the enjoyment and after adjoining to the pavilion for a half-time cup of tea I am seriously questioning my choice of afternoon entertainment.

It gets worse. Tea is cheerfully dispensed by a pleasant lady in pot mugs with biscuits to hand and donations invited in an honesty box. A few of the locals, all civilised, pleasant people are chatting when the serenity is ruined. The home team have repaired to their dressing room and a loud voice starts ranting and raving in the most basic Anglo Saxon- I suppose in football terms they call it giving the team the rounds of the kitchen. The language is appalling and intrusive but probably no better or worse than similar scenes going on the length and breadth of the country.

The visitors have stayed on the pitch and an impasse has developed. League rules state the home team must provide refreshment at half-time but no-one from the visitors comes to take the trays full of tea and orange squash thoughtfully prepared by the nice lady (Monica is her name, I discover) and her hard work goes to waste. The referee, meanwhile, sits on a bench chatting to the locals before it's time to start the second half.

Cartmel had been the better side in the first half and were hard done by to go in level, 1-1, at the break. But in the second half maybe the vile ranting has done the trick- they sweep to a convincing victory with four second half goals and overtake the Royals in the table in the process. The game over, the home players take down the netting, there are handshakes all round and the referee, who did a fine job, strolls back to the pavilion.

The motorbike is still churning up the park and the tourists are still thronging the streets as daylight fades, many of them doubtless unaware that a Premier Division game has been taking place in their midst. The early (2pm) kick-off allows a head-start to beat much of the traffic back to J36 of the M6 motorway. There is much to

commend a trip to this delightful part of the Lake District but there were too many niggles to make this an enjoyable football-watching day. Maybe, I'm like one of those horse-racing snobs and a purist myself. It's back to the pyramid for a few weeks for me.

06/20