

TT No.181: Mike Latham - Sat 21 March 2009: West Lancashire League First Division. **Crooklands Casuals** 2-0 Fleetwood Hesketh; Att: 30 (h/c); No admission or programme; FGIF Match Rating: 3*.

Crooklands Casuals are one of the many former Furness Premier League clubs that now play in the West Lancashire League and a visit to this friendly club had been heartily recommended by several groundhopping friends of mine.

There was plenty of choice in the Furness area this afternoon with Furness Cavaliers, Askam United and Hawcoat Park all at home but I plumped for the Casuals' game with Southport based Fleetwood Hesketh and was rewarded with a good afternoon's entertainment.

Crooklands Casuals were founded in 1970 and take their name from Crooklands Brow (hill) in Dalton in Furness, the area from which the club originated. In 1977 the opportunity came to move to an elevated piece of land one mile or so out of town in a rural location.

This site has now been developed and encompasses two full size football pitches with dug-outs than run side-by-side, with the first team pitch also having a small cover on the road side. There is also a small junior-sized pitch, a car park and a club house with dressing rooms.

The ground name is Longlands Park on Greystone Lane. It is not far from Dalton United's ground on Railway Meadow which has a far more sheltered location and is another good ground to visit.

Casuals run two senior teams and several junior teams and are yet another example of the kind of superbly run community clubs that are the heart and soul of grassroots football.

Hot drinks were available in the clubhouse before the game and the home officials were happy to run through the club history. After working their way up through the local leagues, the Casuals joined the West Lancashire League in 2000 and won promotion from the second division at the first attempt. Photographs of past teams adorn the walls and everyone is friendly and keen to chat about football to a stranger.

Morning mist gradually gives way to clear blue skies and a noticeable increase in temperature as a hard-fought game unfolds.

The visitors, from Southport, look all at sea in the opening minutes and before they have adjusted, they fall behind. The home no9 is left unmarked to tuck away a right-wing cross. But gradually the game swings in favour of the away side and only some solid work by the home rear-guard preserves the advantage to the break.

The second half is equally hard-fought on an undulating pitch and just 13 minutes remain when the home no10 peels off his marker to connect with another right-wing cross and seal the game.

Superbly controlled by an experienced referee, whose communication skills and demeanour earn top marks, the game is another fine advert for this excellent league.

A visit to this friendly club comes highly recommended and for dog walkers there is an added bonus- within ten minutes of the final whistle you can be strolling through the sand dunes at nearby Roanhead with stunning views across the Duddon estuary. Sure, beats Premier League football in my opinion.

06/20