

TT No.189: *Richard Panter* - Wed 25th March 2009; **New Mills** v Abbey Hey; North West Counties Premier Division; Score: 3 - 0; Entry: £5; Attendance: 147; Programme: 16pp 50p.; Match rating: 3 stars.

Ah the joys of being on holiday. For the third successive game I managed to tick off a new ground. Is this what retirement is going to be like? I wonder?

Anyway, on to business. New Mills are last season's North West Counties Division Two champions and as such were promoted to the recently re-named NWCL Premier Division, and they seem to be making a good fist of it. The 'Millers' are currently third and with games in hand and look good title bets, although AFC Fylde hold the slightly better hand.

New Mills play on Church Road in the town which is perched up on high in the North Derbyshire Peaks. Manchester, home to Abbey Hey, is around ten miles away. The journey of 67.7 miles from home took me across the windswept High Peaks of Derbyshire after leaving the tarmac serpent that is the M1 at Chesterfield.

The ground stands opposite St Georges Church. Just inside the two-turnstile entrance stands the match office, where Duncan Hibbert graciously handed me a team sheet. The rest of this side houses all the spectator infrastructure. This low cover runs down the entire Church road side. It begins with a fairly old area of flat standing, then a few bench and plastic seats pop up before the facilities are finished off with a narrow newer section of red plastic seating. Both dugouts are in the centre of these buildings. The spectator areas are neat and well maintained. A newish social club, snack bar and changing room complex stands in an elevated position to the rear of the eastern goal line. Hard standing and a low pitch rail span the rest of the pitch. Add the spectacular moorland views to the picture and you have as good a venue as any to watch a football match.

Before kick-off I wandered round taking some photographs and watched as a clattering of Jackdaws went about their business on the far end of the pitch. I counted thirty-two of these diminutive corvids. But, try as I might I could not think of any omens, good or bad that seeing such a flock of these birds would herald.

I paid my entry money and bought a programme. The gateman apologised for the programme Amber Scene being a reduced 16-page issue. He explained that this was because the team had four home games in a little over a week so due to pressure of time, the programme was smaller than usual. However, so was the price 50p. It had the usual colour cover with full and accurate match details on it. There was one page of adverts, on promoting forthcoming fixtures and the rest covered all the basics including a good two-page piece on the visitors, who I knew little about. I have many much poorer regular issues this season for which I have paid full price, so well done, New Mills for not taking the easier options of either not issuing or offering a combined programme for two, three or four fixtures.

I noticed that a board inside the ground advertising the fixture which informed the reader that kick off was at 7.44pm on the evening, the match officials were seemingly unaware of this as the referee started things late at 7.46. The match was all over by the 26th minute when the hosts scored their third and final goal. From then on Abbey Hey contained New Mills but posed little threat in any way, shape or form. The Millers had the odd pop at goal but were quite happy to take the three points with as little energy wasted as possible.

Halftime provided a real treat for the few of us who remained outside in the cold cool evening air. A coach was trying to teach the five home substitutes some form of artful deception regarding when they passed the ball to one of their own. The players didn't really understand the procedure and constantly passed to the right player but called the wrong thing. The coach eventually gave it up as a bad job saying that 'you lot have got to be the worst five subs I've had all year.'

The attendance on the night was a most encouraging 147 given that there were few visitors that I could see. The home supporters who I chatted to were welcoming and friendly. Given the club's support, facilities and skill on the pitch I personally feel that New Mills would be a most welcome addition to the Unibond First Division, but the question is, would they go south or north?

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