

TT No. 19: Mike Latham - Wed 27 August 2008; North Lancashire & District Football League; **Millhead** v Grange; Result: 8-2; Att: 30 (h/c, including one mysterious gentleman in a business suit); No admission or programme.

One distinguished groundhopping friend of mine agrees with me that the midweek evenings of August should be reserved for visiting clubs without lights that you wouldn't necessarily wish to waste a Saturday upon.

When I told him of my plans to visit Millhead FC he said, without hesitation, 'Go for it- it's a unique location and well worth doing, even on a Saturday.'

High praise indeed so off I rushed up the M6 towards J35 of the M6, through Carnforth and down the Silverdale road past the railway station, turning right towards the sign for the bowling club just as the hamlet of Millhead was reached.

This area has become a favourite haunt of mine these last few months and I have spent several happy afternoons amongst new found friends at Carnforth Cricket Club, a splendid location just off the A6 to the south of the town on the road to Lancaster. This old iron-works and railway town has much to commend it, a few good pubs, a good bookshop, two decent fish and chip shops, a Booths supermarket (Holts Humdinger a bargain at £1.05 a bottle) and some glorious dog-walking country- the salt marshes at Bolton-le-Sands and the hilly walks up Warton Crag especially recommended.

So imagine my surprise when entering Carnforth down the short-cut from J35 told to me by the locals that I spied the cricket team's second XI stalwart loading up his car with fishing tackle dressed in a Carnforth CC T20 shirt and then, upon arriving at Millhead FC discovered that a sub for the home side was another cricketer - we exchanged wry smiles as he walked from the changing rooms to the pitch.

Millhead FC's ground should be preserved as a national treasure. The area is noted for its limestone deposits and several quarries have been excavated. This is one-two sides of the pitch back on to the walls of the abandoned quarry with the ball frequently bouncing back off the unforgiving surface. Behind the far goal a darts board-style target has been painted several feet wide and upwards of the goal. 'Dom's Target' is scrawled the message- it turns out that the home side's no7 is indeed called Dom. He doesn't disappoint.

On the nearside is a small covered standing area bearing the legend 'Iodine Park' an ironic game given after many players over the years have incurred cuts and bruises from the rocks appearing through the surface.

This evening's game starts promptly enough at 6-15pm, the visitors from across Morecambe Bay accompanied by their mascot, the best-behaved collie dog I have ever seen (and I own three). The grass is lush and green and the dull cloudy afternoon skies have lightened somewhat.

Millhead lost their opening game of the season 1-7 at home to Bowerham, Grange drew 4-4 at Torrisholme so a goal-less draw, that scourge of groundhoppers, looks a distant prospect. The league has an outstanding website with full information on the competing teams and the Lancaster Guardian also affords the league enviable space.

Sure enough, within 11 seconds (yes, 11 seconds) the home side are ahead courtesy of a fierce cross-shot across the goalkeeper. The standard of football isn't great but the teams give it full commitment. Within eleven minutes Millhead are 3-0 up and the goals continue to flow- by half-time it's 6-1. The game finishes in the gathering gloom 8-2 to Millhead.

Iodine Park truly is a unique experience in which to watch football. Given the attractions of the area it's well worth exploring on a Saturday, too. Scenes from Brief Encounter were filmed at the nearby Carnforth railway station in 1945 and a brief encounter here is similarly recommended, especially with goals seemingly guaranteed.

Just one strange experience- a distinguished looking gentleman in a business suit appeared just before the game started and disappeared just as the final whistle was blown. Could he be a mystery man willing to pump in millions transforming Millhead into a rise up the pyramid? Hope not- this is a wonderful venue for grassroots football and should be appreciated for what it is- an essential tick on any self-respecting groundhopper's wish-list.

06/20