

TT No.196: Mike Latham - Sat 4 April 2009: West Lancs League Division 1; **Hesketh Bank** 1-1 Lostock St. Gerard's. Attendance: 50 (h/c); No admission; 16pp programme by donation. FGIF Match Rating: 2*.

It's always wise at this time of year, I find, to attempt to choose a match with something at stake, especially the further down the pyramid the game.

This West Lancashire League Division One game looked promising. Preston based Lostock St Gerard's had gone to the top of the first division by virtue of a 2-1 win at Tempest United the week before; Hesketh Bank had recorded successive home wins to ward off relegation fears in this highly competitive league. On the face of it this match-up looked a decent prospect.

Hesketh Bank is a small, rural village situated close to the Ribble estuary between Preston and Southport. Football was played here, the excellent programme informs, in the late 19th century though the present club was formed in 1922. Until joining the West Lancashire League in 1987 they played mostly in the Southport & District League.

The ground is easily found, down Station Road, next to the village institute. It's a flat landscape and a fierce breeze is blowing off the river. The ground is impressive, and will shortly be even more so when a new club house is erected. Though still at the foundations stage the aim is to get it fully operational in time for the start of the next season. They've obviously not employed the same builders I used for my house extension a few years ago.

The ground has an interesting history. After the carnage of the first world war the footballers of Hesketh Bank found themselves with nowhere to play. Fortunately, a group of local people banded together and purchased a plot of land to be used exclusively for sporting purposes. Those pioneers would be proud of their descendants 90 years on: with a cricket club, bowling club and smart newly-constructed all weather floodlit football pitch as well as the main football pitch this is an enviable village facility.

The football ground is flat and well grassed with a neat post-and-rail fence and a cover on the far side with dug-outs on the opposite side. The players currently use the cricket pavilion for changing from where refreshments and an outstanding 16 page programme are available.

Hesketh Bank, who also have an impressive website and an extensive junior set-up are neatly kitted out in gold and black quartered- jerseys. As the visitors are also impressively attired in a neat black and white strip the game has a pleasing visual look to it.

After their fine win at Tempest, Lostock went into this game shorn of several key players through a combination of suspensions, injuries and unavailability (ie. stag

'do's'). They looked far from a top-of-the-table outfit and the home side deservedly held an interval lead courtesy of a Burns goal on 24 minutes.

But the visitors looked a different side after the interval and Waddicker's fierce cross-shot five minutes after the resumption restored parity. On the balance of the second half play they were unfortunate not to go away with the three points. As it was Tempest went back to the top of the league after a home victory.

Hesketh Bank FC are kept alive by a dedicated group of club officials who ensure that this fine facility can continue to be enjoyed by the current generation of players and hopefully future generations to come. It's a classic village club, the kind of which is the bedrock of the English game, and hopefully they will continue to flourish.

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