

**TT No.230: Mike Latham** - Saturday 16 May 2009: Cumberland County League Ken Glover Memorial Trophy Q-F; **St Margaret Mary's FC** 1-3 Cockermouth FC; Attendance: 20 (h/c); No admission or programme.

The Cumberland County League runs five knock-out competitions with the Ken Glover Memorial Trophy staged at the end of the season. It seemed strange to find that four quarter-final ties were being staged as late as 16th May but the choice was whittled down to St Margaret Mary's FC, based in Carlisle.

It proved to be something of an inspired decision for never have I witnessed a game played in such an unusual setting as this one.

St Margaret Mary's is a church with social club attached on Scalegate Road in Carlisle. Their ground venue is stated as Hammond's Park, an address that does not really give the unsuspecting groundhopper what he will find upon arrival.

Hammond's Park was first set up by a market gardening entrepreneur by the name of Archie Hammond who saw the potential for an amusement facility on the site of old clay and brick pits. Water had formed in the disused pits and created an artificial lake and Hammond's vision came to reality in the form of 'Pleasureland' in the early 1920s, a grand facility that included pleasure boats, tennis courts, a café and small zoo.

Sadly, Hammond died in 1928 but the City Fathers purchased the site three years later with the aim of preserving his heritage. A small gauge railway track was constructed as a tribute to the engineering history of the city.

Over time the park, renamed Upperby Park, sadly fell into disrepair and suffered from vandalism. But the award of lottery funding in the late 1990s helped bring about a remarkable transformation. The site was re-named Hammond's Park in tribute to the founder and is now a superb facility for the people of Carlisle.

On a bright but showery afternoon many people were out and about enjoying the magnificent lake, railway tracks and gardens and there was an added bonus of a football match.

The park is situated to the south of Carlisle and the city centre can be avoided if travelling past the racecourse through Durdar from J42 of the M6 motorway. The park entrance is to be found through an ornate gateway in the middle of a housing estate and opens up to reveal the full extent of the facility.

My heart sank though when the two football pitches closest to the changing blocks were devoid of goal-nets and I feared the game had been re-arranged elsewhere. But just as I was about to investigate, I spied a line of players and officials making their way down a track by the side of the boating lake where swans basked in the sunshine. I followed them past the lake and the café to a sheltered clearing in the middle of a clump of trees. Here was the home ground of St Margaret Mary's FC.

OK, it's a basic setting but its highly unusual location makes this a ground well worth visiting.

The playing pitch, built on an old ash tip drains well and apart from undulating part on the nearside touchline is fairly flat and well grassed. The game was entertaining and sportingly contested, the pivotal moment coming when the home goalkeeper had to leave the field after suffering the after-effects of an earlier collision.

With one of the outfield players pressed into service as stand-in Cockermonth took full advantage wrapping up the tie with three second half goals. But the home side kept trying to play constructive football throughout and on chances created deserved more than their late consolation penalty.

Around 20 spectators watched this game and I appeared to be the only one present not connected with either side. This after all is primarily a players' league rather than a spectators' league. A visit to Hammond's Park comes recommended.

06/20