

TT No.61: *Mike Latham* - Sat 11 October: NCEL Division One: **Hemsworth MW 2-2** Barton Town Old Boys; Attendance: 175; Admission: £4; Programme: 60pp, £1.50; FGIF Match Rating: 4*.

Hemsworth Miners Welfare are newcomers to the NCEL this season and, even though it's early in the season, they have acquitted themselves remarkably well at level six of the non-league pyramid.

Since leaving behind the West Riding County Amateur League they began this game against unbeaten league leaders Barton Town Old Boys in second place, albeit having played several more games than many rival sides.

Hemsworth Miners Welfare play at the grandly named Fitzwilliam Stadium, adjoining the cricket ground in the village of Fitzwilliam, near to Pontefract, Featherstone and Ackworth. Fitzwilliam, the home village of Geoff Boycott and the footballing brothers Cyril and Peter Knowles, was built in the early 20th century to house colliery workers and suffered drastically from the closure of the mines 20 years or so ago.

But signs of regeneration abound, not least in the transformation of the welfare ground with the help of grant aid. The complex is a credit to the area, with a smart, clean, new club house and an immaculate playing area. Though there is still much work to do - not least completing the floodlighting installation that was deemed necessary for the club to join this level of football, it's a vibrant venue with obvious potential and the locals make the stranger extremely welcome.

Hemsworth MW have enjoyed a remarkable rise since their formation in 1981 after the demise of the old Hemsworth Colliery FC. Playing originally in the Barnsley Nelson League, the club rose through the ranks and joined the West Riding set-up in 1995.

There is a spacious car park and a warm welcome at the gate, where a simply outstanding 60-page programme is dispensed. Containing historical background, up-to-date team news, fixture information, comment and analysis it is as good a programme as can be found anywhere on the non-league circuit. Several teams use the complex, which has another neatly railed full size pitch at right-angles to the main pitch and the club is a huge community asset.

The club hope to stage their first floodlit home game on Tuesday week and have gone two-thirds towards that goal with the installation of the floodlight towers. It is the aim to install the light this coming week. The club house runs along the near side touchline and has an overhanging roof while a small covered shelter is positioned behind the dug-outs on the far side. But presumably there is still much other work to do, including the provision of a seated stand and hard standing areas on the far side to meet the requirements of the league.

A good crowd has assembled on a mild autumnal afternoon and they are royally entertained, the game ending in a 2-2 draw that is just about right on the balance of play.

A neighbour, a season ticket holder, has set up a PA system in an elevated wooden hut in his garden and splendidly sets the scene with his choice of pre-match music.

Season tickets here are just £20 for the season, £25 for families while children under 13 years-old are admitted free. The club has clearly worked hard to involve the local community in the club and their efforts have paid off royally. The club house is immaculate and the standard of the catering way above the norm for this level of football. Everywhere you look there are friendly faces, clearly bursting with pride at the facilities on offer.

Hemsworth Miners Welfare are a friendly, progressive club with excellent facilities and obvious potential and a visit here comes highly recommended.

It was an afternoon to lift the spirits.

06/20