

**TT No.85: *Mike Latham*** - Sun 9 Nov 2008; Scottish FA Youth Cup Rd 3 - **Queen's Park** 3-2 St Johnstone (at Lesser Hampden); Att: 90 (h/c); No admission or programme; FGIF Match Rating: 4\*.

Every so often the chance comes along to sample a real piece of football history and the third round draw of the Scottish FA Youth Cup provided just that- Queen's Park youth team play at Lesser Hampden in the shadow of Hampden Park and the opportunity to sample a competitive match in the historic stadium was simply too good to miss.

Queen's Park FC are, as every schoolboy knows, the oldest football club in the world out-with England and Wales. In the 1920s they had the chance to develop further their Hampden Park home and purchased an adjoining farm situated at the western end of the ground. They quickly built a pitch and stands and by 1924 had an impressive 12,000 capacity stadium used for youth and reserve team games.

The original farmhouse was converted into a pavilion and changing rooms- it is reckoned by historians to be the oldest football building in the world. It's a distinctive building, painted white with a black painted overhang roof and distinctive terracing in front. Behind it lie a church and sandstone Victorian buildings. The view from here is outstanding and, with Hampden just across the way, there is a tangible sense that you are attending a ground of real historical importance.

Queen's Park played Scottish League games here while Hampden was being re-developed but the Lesser Hampden ground's future was imperilled in 2002 when it was found the ground was tainted by chromium. But a £40,000 clean-up operation saved the ground and the recent installation of a modern 3G pitch, or 'Astro-grass' as it is known in some quarters has transformed Lesser Hampden into a superb community asset.

On a rainy cold November Sunday afternoon, the tie was the second of three youth team games staged by the club. By the 1-30pm kick-off time a decent crowd had assembled, most huddled for warmth in the small seated stand in front of the farmhouse but a few brave souls stood opposite on the grass banks. The Queen's Park clubhouse was open for business, serving hot drinks and Scotch pies - welcome on such a cold day.

The pitch played superbly, easily coping with the downpour and the two sides put on a fine exhibition of football, marred only by an injury to a St Johnstone player just before half-time. After a considerable delay, while the youngster was treated for concussion after an accidental collision and taken to hospital by ambulance as a precaution the referee blew to send players to the dressing rooms. The few remaining minutes of the first-half were then played and the teams turned round immediately to commence the second half.

I had emailed the Queen's Park secretary in advance to check the kick-off time and he helpfully replied as well as asking me to make myself known. That I did and I was rewarded with splendid Scottish hospitality with introductions to the club president and website administrator (the Queen's Park website is simply outstanding by the way) as well as the opportunity to watch the second half from the top storey room of the farmhouse.

Queen's Park FC staunchly retain their amateur policy; 'Ludere Causa Ludendi' is the club motto which translated means 'to play for the sake of playing.' An equally fitting testimonial would be 'Great facilities run by nice, civilised people' - a historic club proud of their past but looking forward to the future. If you get an opportunity to watch football at Lesser Hampden then grasp it- it is an experience not to be missed.

06/20