

**TT No.118: Mike Latham** - Sat 12 December 2009: NCEL Premier Division: **Lincoln Moorlands Railway** 0-6 Rainworth M W; Attendance: 62; Admission: £4; 28pp Programme: £1; FGIF Match Rating: 3\*.

The day dawned bright and sunny and the overnight frost had barely touched the surface; after a check telephone call to the club house in mid-morning I decided to complete a personal clean sweep of the NCEL and 'tick off' a club I had long intended to visit.

Lincoln Moorlands Railway FC are a comparatively new club, formed as recently as 1989. Beginning life in the Central Midlands League, they lost their place in that organisation due to ground grading regulations after three seasons and re-grouped in local football, re-joining the CML in 1998 from the Lincolnshire League. They joined the NCEL in 2001 and are now in their third season in the Premier Division.

Originally known as Lincoln Moorlands, they merged with Lincoln League outfit Lincoln Railway FC in 2007 and the re-named side took their place in the top division when Sutton Town resigned due to financial problems.

They are a friendly and family orientated club whose original manager, Stan Dye is still a member of the committee and also first-team and match day secretary. Stan's son Darren is now the manager and chairman Nick Robinson turns out in midfield.

Nicknamed the Moors, the club's ground is easy to find especially if approaching Lincoln from the A1 to the west. Located on the Newark Road out of the city, in a quiet and affluent-looking residential area, the entrance is well-signposted and there is plenty of parking in the vicinity of the grounds.

The well-appointed Lincoln Moorlands & Railway Social club is the focal point for what looks a splendid community asset with the surroundings of the football ground very similar to those of Unibond League rivals Lincoln United FC.

The first impression that greets the newcomer is one of space and pride in the place. The ground is superbly maintained, its immaculate appearance enhanced by a lovely flat and well-grassed pitch.

The club's programme editor, Ken Rooney, is also the gateman and he greets visitors with a cheery smile. His programme, *The Moorlands Review*, is a classic for this level of football- with up-to-date statistics and comment and good historical articles about the home club as well as the visitors. Importantly he gives pen pictures of the home team as well as the away side, an invaluable service for visiting fans and neutrals such as myself. This game, he informs, is Rainworth's first visit to the Moors' ground and the travelling supporters, a good humoured and knowledgeable bunch are clearly enjoying their trip to Lincoln.

In such pleasant, leafy surroundings the sports ground is another example of the many fine facilities that exist within the 38 clubs that make up the NCEL. Personally, I find the league is superbly administered and has a website that is second to none in terms of information, accessibility and accuracy. There are some surprises among the grounds to be visited and many contrasts to be found. My personal favourites are Winterton Rovers and Barton Town Old Boys but I can honestly say that very few of the visits to this league that I have made in the last five years or so have been disappointing.

Rainworth, today's visitors are a case in point. Their Kirklington Road ground is a pleasure to visit and it's no surprise to learn from reading Ken's programme that it has passed the ground grading requirements for the Unibond League should they maintain their lofty league position.

Under their management team of Rudy Funk and Billy Millar the Wrens have already achieved two promotions in five years and the way they played here suggests they are the team to beat this season, though Scarborough Athletic, Bridlington Town and Armthorpe Welfare will doubtless push them all the way.

There are three covered stands at the Moorlands ground, one on the near (Newark Road) side being a peculiar construction that wouldn't look out of place at a fence at a national hunt racing track. It has two rows of neat bucket-type plastic seats and an elegant appearance. On the far side, where the dug-outs are located, is a standard new seated stand that is to be seen across the length and breadth of the country while there is also a small covered standing area. The dressing rooms and committee room is behind the nearside goal where a tea bar is also to be found. The rest of the ground is open standing.

With Moorlands starting the game second bottom of the league, despite a recent unbeaten run of five games, the top-of-the-table Wrens were clear favourites. The home side never stopped trying to play constructively but once the impressive midfielder Brendan Sweeney opened the scoring in the 29th minute this game had only one winner. Ant Lynam added two more goals before half-time and the visitors doubled their tally in a one-sided second half of a game superbly controlled by Notts referee Christopher Ward.

So, I have now seen all 38 NCEL clubs stage a home game, enough in the opinion of one highly respected groundhopper friend of mine to open the champagne. But, wait for it, I have yet to see a game at Arnold Town's new ground, an omission I may seek to rectify next Saturday. The champagne will remain on ice a little bit longer.

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