

TT No.127: *Mike Latham* - Sat 26th December 2009; Football League Division 2; **Morecambe** 1-2 Accrington Stanley; Attendance: 3,478; Admission: £12 to Car Wash Terrace; Programme: £3.

With pitch inspections almost everywhere and virtually every non-league game north of Oxford falling to the weather it was a day for playing safe. When I learned that Morecambe's ground had passed a mid-morning pitch inspection thanks to the efforts of volunteers clearing the pitch of snow my mind was made up.

With this being the last season at Christie Park, Morecambe's home since 1921, it was a good chance to re-visit for the umpteenth time. I was just glad to get a game and decided to avoid Lancaster City Centre by carrying on to J35 of the M6 and then heading south from Carnforth on the A6 before taking the coast road- slightly longer in miles but an easy way into Morecambe.

Morecambe's first senior game at the ground saw them entertain Fleetwood with nearly one thousand visiting supporters making a stylish journey to north Lancashire after hiring the steamship Greyhound and completing the journey by electric tram and charabancs.

Around 3,500 were in attendance that day and a similar number braved the icy roads and chilly temperatures to get in their Boxing Day football fix. With both sides being very much in-form, a terrific game was in prospect and for once no one was to be disappointed.

The two sides have a healthy respect for one another after many years of competing in non-league circles before realising their dreams of a place in the Football League. Of the two teams, I was very impressed with Accrington, whose manager John Coleman is a former Morecambe favourite. Coleman is regarded as one of the all-time Morecambe legends and scored 201 goals for the club in 273 games. It must have been a strange occasion for him as he lined up on the touchline, knowing that unless the sides meet in the play-off's he was probably making his last appearance at the ground he graced with his style and opportunism.

Stanley were easily the best team and forced home 'keeper Roche into several fine saves before taking a decisive hold on the game. Edwards struck twice with six minutes in the second half- a firm header and then a penalty, but Hunter pulled one back for the Shrimps midway through the second half. Morecambe did not give up their nine-match unbeaten run easily but Stanley- backed a noisy and impressive travelling army- deservedly got the points. It was a good game, played on a heavy but perfectly playable pitch and a great effort by the home side to get the match played.

Most grounds awaiting demolition look their age but Christie Park is a good, atmospheric venue that is well maintained. The view from the uncovered Car Wash

terrace was excellent and the home covered terrace behind the goals looks impressive when full, which it nearly was. The Shrimps move to their new ground at Westgate next season so if you've not been there are not too many chances left.

Christie Park is named after Mr Joseph Barnes Christie, a retired businessman who was president of the Morecambe Supporters' Club. It was Mr Christie who masterminded the move to the ground after Morecambe originally shared with the cricket club at Woodhill Lane following their formation in 1920. In 1928 Mr Christie bought the ground and gave it to the Corporation of Morecambe with a condition it should be used by Morecambe FC.

A new era starts for the Shrimps next season and if they can continue their fine recent form, they could begin life at their new home in League One. But on this occasion, it was Stanley, whose fans were on tenterhooks earlier in the season as the club came days from closure, who looked the likelier team to make progress.

Christie Park is a friendly, stress-free place to visit with plenty of parking close-by and an excellent fish and chip shop next door. The main stand, constructed as recently as 1962, looks dated and cramped but the two covered ends give fine views of the action and, if it doesn't rain the uncovered shallow terrace where I stood is an excellent vantage point. Morecambe have made great strides in recent years and their new ground one mile or so away at Westgate will be high on many groundhoppers' lists come next season.

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