

TT No.189: Mike Latham - Saturday 20 March 2010: Emirates Airlines Scottish Junior Cup Quarter-Final: **Clydebank** 2-1 Hill of Beath Hawthorn; Attendance: 623; Admission: £5; Programme: £1; FGIF Match Rating: 4*.

Every so often a book is published that simply blows you away with its astonishing depth of research and mind-blowing collection of historical photographs. Simon Inglis's football grounds books fell into that category, so too did the Geoff Wilde/Michael Braham history of Southport FC in the Football League, the Sandgrounders; and Gary James's history of football in Manchester.

Another book has just been published that falls into that august listing- Played in Glasgow by Ged O'Brien, part of the sporting heritage series involving the iconoclastic Inglis is a simply wonderfully researched, written and designed piece of work. On a gloriously sunny afternoon there's time to potter around Glasgow and visit some of the historic sites in the book before making one's way along the north bank of the Clyde towards the old ship-building town of Clydebank. Hamilton Crescent, home to the West of Scotland cricket club, staged the first ever soccer international between Scotland and England in 1872 and is well worth a visit. It's only a few minutes' drive from Yoker.

Clydebank isn't mentioned in the book for one simple reason- as you venture along the A814 out of Glasgow you exit greater Glasgow and enter Dunbartonshire and before too long the home of Yoker Athletic JFC, Holm Park, can be spotted on the left-hand side close to where the ferry connects the north side of the Clyde to Renfrew and the south.

Yoker are an old club, formed back in 1886, their ground adjacent to the Clyde in an area once heavily industrialised and famous the world over for its shipyards. It's here that Clydebank groundshare and with such an important game in prospect the atmosphere is building as supporters gather excitedly for an eagerly awaited game.

The history of football in Clydebank, the adjoining town to Yoker, is worthy of a serious historical study in its own right- perhaps when the estimable Mr O'Brien has drawn breath from his four years of serious research, he may set it as part of his next project. There was a senior club in Clydebank from 1888 to 1902 and Clydebank Juniors formed in 1899 won the Scottish Junior Cup in 1942 before controversially 'merging' with East Stirlingshire in the early 1960s, a saga far too complicated to go into here. Another senior club, Clydebank FC played in the Scottish League between 1914 and 1931 at Clydeholm Park, virtually opposite the Yoker ground, the site now covered by a shopping centre.

In 1966 a reincarnated Clydebank FC, formed a year earlier gained entry into the Scottish League and played there for a period of 35 seasons, three of them in the Premier League. But they lost their ground New Kilbowie Park in 1996 and spent six years in exile at Dumbarton and Greenock before the newly-formed Airdrie United took over their place in the league.

Happily, there was sufficient will and resolve among the football supporters in the town to keep the flag flying and a new junior side was formed in 2003, initially playing home games at Drumchapel Amateurs before entering into a ground-share agreement with Yoker in 2008. After two promotions Clydebank are now in the second tier of the West Juniors and their home games regularly attract 500-plus crowds. Last season they reached the Junior Cup Final, losing narrowly to Auchinleck Talbot before a crowd of over 8,000 at Kilmarnock.

The club website (<http://www.clydebankfc.co.uk/>) is simply outstanding and match highlights of Clydebank games are regularly available on YouTube. The impression you get is of a club very much on the rise and that is confirmed on entering the ground. Club officials and supporters have been there since early morning, tidying the terraces, preparing the pitch, erecting banners around the side and generally applying a bit of 'TLC' to the place.

There's a club shop and supporters are bedecked in club scarves, hats and jerseys and the upstairs room of the Yoker clubhouse has been converted into a bar area. The club produces an excellent programme, one of the best I've seen north of the border and team news is relayed over the PA system. I'd visited Yoker several years ago and my photograph of the iconic barrel-shaped covered terrace on the Clyde side of the ground adorned the home page of this very site for a long time. The ground has been substantially improved since then and looked a picture in the bright sunshine.

The match offered an intriguing clash of west and east with the visitors beaten just once this season and still having an amazing 16 of their scheduled 22 league matches to play. They won each of their previous ten games and clearly provided a huge test of the Bankies' cup ambitions.

The early stages confirmed that view, Stewart firing the Haws into an early lead as the home side struggled to impose themselves on the tie. Their frustrations grew with the yellow card count and as the teams trooped off at the break Clydebank could consider themselves fortunate still to be in the game.

But the second half brought an amazing change with several away players seemingly struggling with the pace of the game, perhaps a reflection of how little football the sides have played in a weather-ravaged winter. Clydebank equalised when their full-back Campbell stole upfield to head home a superbly flighted free-kick six minutes after the interval and took the lead just before the hour-mark. Again, the danger came from a set-piece with a visiting player deflecting a fiercely-driven free-kick past his own 'keeper in a crowded penalty area.

Now the visitors looked rattled and their bookings tally mounted (the final count was 5-4). With 20 minutes to go the Haws were awarded a stonewall penalty but Bathgate's shot was superbly parried away by Gonet in the Bankies' goal. With that the visitors' challenge faded and Clydebank could look forward to the semi-finals.

Last season they were unable to play the home leg of their semi-final at Holm Park as the ground was not deemed up to scratch for a game of that importance. It

would be interesting to see if they get permission this season. Effectively a three-sided ground, with the end towards Clydebank out of bounds, Holm Park is an atmospheric and historic venue and a visit to this friendly and go-ahead club comes highly recommended.

Excuse me but now I must get back to my book.

06/20