

TT No.224: Gyles Basey-Fisher - Sat 17th April 2010; **Wokingham & Emmbrook v Thame Utd**; Hellenic League Division 1 E; Result: 2-2; Attendance 135; Admission & Programme £3.00 (16 pages).

Thanks to the Volcanic Ash, instead of sampling the delights of Porto and taking in three games involving Braga, Boavista and Porto, I found myself at Cantley Park Wokingham for their top of the table clash with Thame United. Now strange as it may seem I was not disappointed with this scenario, as it gave me an unexpected and gratefully excepted opportunity to do the ground.

Talks with the council, regarding developing Cantley Park ended, with what some saw as, a u-turn, by the council, after three years of positive talks so Wokingham & Emmbrook FC are leaving Cantley Park to groundshare at Bracknell Town. But according to one of the club officials they will keep Lowther Road, Emmbrook on as their based for reserve and youth teams. They actually have one more game scheduled for Cantley Park - Farnborough Reserves on Sat 24th April, but with a promotion party booked at Carrow Road, on that day, this was a reprieve I wasn't going to miss.

Cantley Park is set right on the edge of town and houses football pitches, of which two others were in use, Hurst FC and Ashridge Park, floodlit artificial pitch; a cricket pitch; tennis courts and there was also an archery club. On a warm, sunny April afternoon I can think of nowhere better to watch my football, natural banking down one side not only gives you an elevated view of the pitch, but unbroken views across the countryside, though it must have been hell on earth through the winter months. Along this side is a long single-story building which houses all the changing rooms and a second storey, nearer the half way line, which houses the clubhouse. I saw no evidence of a bar, but burgers were being cooked and they also had crisps, chocolate and hot and cold drinks.

I am not a great fan of ground grading, it has stopped many a good team progressing and force others to spend money they don't have, but compared to the strict criteria needed to gain entry to the Eastern Counties League this Step 6 venue is pretty basic. There is no covered accommodation, though you could get a very good view of proceedings from the clubhouse; no hard standing apart from the walkway along the front of the dressing rooms and the pitch is roped off. Admission was taken at the top of a set of steps, which led down the bank to the pitch and a 16-page programme was included in the £3.00, one nice touch was that the players came down the steps together, making for a dramatic entrance.

A competitive game saw Thame United take a 1-0 lead into half time, but this was quickly reversed in the second half when a fired-up Wokingham team scored twice. The game then became more and more bad tempered and with 10 minutes left a bad tackle resulted in a mass brawl, which saw all 22 players, substitutes, management staff and one or two supporters, who I believe were watching squad

players, having a complete free for all, which took about five minutes to defuse. This saw four sent off, two Wokingham players, a member of the management team and an unused sub for Thame United. The Wokingham mood of injustice wasn't helped when Thame United were then able to make their third substitution, thus making their sending off no punishment whatsoever. The final few minutes including 7 minutes time added on was played out with finger pointing and recriminations going back and forth between the benches. Thame United then equalised in the 5th minute of injury time and the game ended with the Wokingham goalkeeper wandering from one side of the 18-yard box to the other, no less than 4 times, unchallenged, before the referee blew for time. Thankfully this comical final event seemed to take the edge of things and both teams were applauded off, the same can't be said of the ref!

A wonderful setting accompanied with the competitive match made for a great day out, if the sun is shining on Saturday 24th April then I can thoroughly recommend a visit for their final match at Cantley Park and you too could be involved in a promotion party.

06/20