

**TT No.237: Richard Panter** - Sat 8th May 2010; **Morecambe** v Aldershot Town; Football League 2 (aka Fourth Division). Entry: £12; Score: 1-0; Attendance: 5,268; Programme: £8; Match rating: \*\*\*.

A couple of months ago I sent a cheque for £12 and a letter to the club asking for a terrace ticket for last month's match against the Daggers. Inexplicably, they sent a £12 'concession' ticket for the main stand for this, their final league match at Christie Park. So, this is how I ended up at what I had expected to be the last ever match at this fine venue.

Thanks to Route Planer, on this excellent web site, I learned that the ground was some 146 miles distant from my house and the projected travelling time was under three hours, so I set off at 9.45. I pulled up outside the ground at 12.07 and parked in a nearby side street. Plan A was to get some snaps of the outside of the ground while things were relatively quiet. I wandered into the car park and noticed a large gate in the middle of the Car Park terrace was gaping, was unattended and beckoning me inside. Never one to spurn such an opportunity at a football ground, I was in and soon cheerfully snapping away. I spent ten gloriously unchallenged minutes inside with my little Japanese digital pal. A good start to the day. A lengthily wander around the perimeter was then performed prior to a goodly walk up to the emerging Globe Arena.

Morecambe's new ground is due to open at the start of next season, at present viewed distantly through metal security fencing this looks a tough deadline, although the car park is ready for the tarmac to be laid! What I could make out was a large main stand and two side terraces similar to Burton Albion's Eton Park. The first impression, especially compared to Christie Park is not good, in a word it could most kindly be described as functional. That said, if it affords the same views as the Brewers home it will be a comfortable, if somewhat bland place to watch football.

Anyway, it's back to Christie Park, a venue on my 'to do' list for over a decade when the Shrimps were floundering in the Northern Premier League. However, rapid progression through the Conference culminating in victory in the first Conference play-off final at the New Wembley three years ago saw the club battle determinedly for their league status.

The main stand spans just over half of one touchline and has a paddock in front of it. Built in the mid-sixties this is everything you could reasonably want at a good old-fashioned venue. The players run onto the pitch from the very bowels of this wooden beauty and restricting stand supports are there in abundance. To either side there is a bit of flat standing, where I chose to watch the match. There is also a small covered stand with plenty of room for those physically less able to utilise the ground fully. The North stand is where the noisier element congregated and rather aptly for a coastal town, these punters were packed in like sardines! The

area was a mass of red and white, and it was delightful to see how many families were squeezed under the unrestricted roof of this modern terrace. The far side features the Car Wash terrace. A long shallow area of open standing. A television gantry is central on this side. The far goal line is bounded by the away terrace. Spacious and covered it was good to see a large contingent of fans from Hampshire present along with inflatable sharks and beach balls. Sadly, I was too far away to hear if they sang their 'Apache' anthem though! (Sun) hats off to those from the south adding to the atmosphere. I had travelled to Christie Park with high hopes and expectations and gladly these were fulfilled.

The attendance of 5,268 was a league high for the club. Indeed, it was announced that this was their third highest crowd ever, and it was back in 1948 that the crowd was greater at Christie Park.

The 'Official Souvenir Programme' has clearly helped the ailing UK economy move a little further out of recession as it was a whopping £8. However, it was a gigantic 132, A4 pages long. As one would expect it concentrated on the clubs past and is crammed full of old photographs, kit colours and most appreciatively in my view programme covers. I have as yet only glanced at it but as a memento for days past it is a well-produced and designed document. Churlish as this may seem there are only three pages relevant to the days contest, there are no up to date results, league tables and news. An insert would have been a good idea.

Perversely, as is often the case, this will not be the last match at Christie Park as Morecambe, after a hard fought one nil victory, finished a creditable third in the league to leapfrog their opponents, who finished fifth. This means that Morecambe face Dagenham & Redbridge in the play-offs and Aldershot Town take on the displaced Millers of Rotherham United. Therefore, it is not beyond the realms of possibility that Morecambe could kick off life in their new home in what in Christie Park days was known as the Third Division of the Football League.