

TT No.32: *Rob Campion* - Tues 15th September 2009; **Sleaford Town** v Matlock Town; FA Cup 1st Qual Rd Replay; Res: 1-2; Attendance: 425; Admission: £4; Programme: £1; Match rating: 3*.

Sleaford is a town of around 15,000 inhabitants in the North Kesteven district of Lincolnshire, some 14 miles north east of Grantham and 17 miles west of Boston. The name of Sleaford comes from the Old English “esla-forde” - meaning ford over a muddy stream. Why the ground is named as such becomes apparent.

Sleaford spent 35 years in the Lincolnshire League before joining the United Counties League in 2004. The club were champions of the Lincolnshire League on two occasions, the first coming in 1981 and the last in their final season in the league. In their second season in the United Counties League they won the division 1 title and finished runners-up the following season and promotion to the premier division. On the cup front Sleaford have won the Lincolnshire Senior ‘B’ Cup on six occasions, the last being in 2006 and the Lincolnshire Junior Cup once in 1969.

The club up until 2004 played in the town which did not meet United Counties League grading requirements and spent three seasons at nearby RAF Cranwell. In 2007 they moved into the purpose built Eslaforde Park on the outskirts of town on the Boston Road. The main pitch is fully enclosed with a seated stand on the far side and a small section of covered standing behind the goal on the Boston Road side. One large single storey building houses the changing rooms, clubhouse, catering facilities and toilets. Behind the main pitch are a series of pitches that are home to the club’s junior teams.

The journey to Sleaford is about fifty miles each way and takes around 90 minutes on the A607 and A153 through Melton Mowbray and Grantham. I got a lift from a fellow ground hopper who picked me up at the local Asda, (which happens to be my place of work so no trouble leaving the car) at 5pm and we arrived back six hours later.

Admission for tonight’s game was £4 with a further £1 for a programme and the club were rewarded with an attendance of over 400 for their biggest game in their history. The first game at Matlock, who currently play two divisions higher than Sleaford in the premier division of the Northern Premier League ended in a 1-1 draw, with Sleaford unlucky not to come away with the victory when, with four minutes remaining Tom Siddons lobbed goalkeeper Adam Sollitt only for the ball to rebound off the crossbar.

The first half was an even affair with Sleaford creating the early chances through a succession of corners, from which one chance was cleared off the line. Matlock got a foothold in the game and opened the scoring on 23 minutes when James Lukic was unmarked in the area and headed past keeper Andrew Scott. Sleaford’s equaliser came twelve minutes later against the run of play when Adam Sollitt fumbled the ball in the area from which Miles Hunter scored a simple side footer

into an empty net. Two minutes later and Sleaford were close to taking the lead when Ryan Hunter headed against the bar from a corner. Matlock scored the decisive second goal from the penalty spot on 55 minutes which was dispatched by Ross Hannah. This seemed to deflate the home side and they never really threatened the Matlock goal and in the end the visitors were deserved winners. A home time against Southern League Bury Town is up next for Matlock, while Sleaford will have to concentrate on the league and FA Vase.

This was a club that had been on my hit list for several seasons now and one in a league that I am close to completing. Four clubs and three grounds are all that I need to visit in the United Counties League - Boston Town, Eynesbury Rovers, Olney Town and Rushden & Higham United.

06/20