

TT No.90: Mike Latham - Saturday 14 November 2009: John Walker East of Scotland Cup Second Round; **Bo'ness United** 8-1 Kirkcaldy YMCA; Attendance: 300 (h/c); Admission: £5 plus £1 raffle ticket; No Programme.

There's no finer feeling for a groundhopper than visiting an old ground that not only once hosted league football but is still largely recognisable from the time. I had longed to visit Bo'ness United's Newtown Park for many years and a rainy day in Scotland provided an opportunity that I'm glad was taken.

The original intention was to visit another tie in the compelling Scottish Junior Cup but the rain poured down on the journey north, the M74 was awash and then closed just north of Moffat after an accident. A detour here, several 'phone calls there and it was evident that much of the programme in the West Region had been decimated by the rain. A man far more expert in Scottish junior football circles than me told me once that Bo'ness could generally be relied upon to play whatever the weather - a quick 'phone call confirmed the game was on and I particularly admired the home club secretary's no-nonsense style- the re-route to Bo'ness was on.

The town's proper name is Borrowstounness, though this is rarely used. An old coal-mining town on the south bank of the Firth of Forth, heavily industrialised and close to the petrochemical facility at Grangemouth, Bo'ness is largely recognised as a home for commuters into Glasgow and Edinburgh these days with many of its traditional industries having disappeared.

Bo'ness United FC were formed as a merger between the old Bo'ness club and Bo'ness Cadora in 1945 and have functioned as one of the leading sides in the East Region juniors. But the history of football in the town goes back much further and Newtown Park, the club's present home, was inaugurated as a ground way back in 1886. Situated in a residential area at the highest point of the town and enjoying simply stunning views across the Forth the ground has the kind of brooding, almost mystical presence that mark it out as one of the best.

For twelve seasons between 1921 and 1933 Newtown Park staged Scottish League football, including one memorable campaign in 1927-28 when Bo'ness played in the first division and entertained the likes of Celtic and Rangers to the town.

The ground is simply stunning and should be preserved for evermore as a panacea against the sanitised and anonymous new grounds that spring up with boring and depressing rapidity. Apart from the smart cover above the popular side terrace on the north side of the ground, that bears the legend 'Bo'ness United Football Club' the venue seems virtually unchanged from the Football League days, though the upkeep is of the highest order.

The main feature is an elevated main stand above the dressing rooms on the north side, neatly painted in blue but sadly out of bounds these days due to being largely

made from wood. It's a wonderful throwback to days of old and it's easy to imagine days when Bo'ness played the might of Scottish League clubs at their homely enclosure.

The area behind the goal at the east side is grassed with a few stanchions, the terraces to the west side behind the other goal look virtually unchanged from the 1920s. There's a well-stocked tea bar with Scotch pies and sausage rolls warming nicely in the oven and several superb vantage points. The old stone building in one corner is apparently the home of the town's brass band that dates back to colliery days.

With Bo'ness United leading the way at the top of the East Super League and also determined to mount a challenge in the Junior Cup, this East of Scotland Cup-tie may have been fairly low on their list of priorities. But there was no evidence of that as they tore into the visitors from the off on a pitch that had borne up surprisingly well to the downpours in the morning.

Against the run of play Kirkcaldy scrambled an opening goal from a free-kick and they competed well in the opening 20 minutes. But the game turned on a 23rd minute incident when the visiting goalkeeper, sold short by a back pass, upended a Bo'ness striker to concede a penalty and was red-carded. An outfield player went in goal and was powerless to stop the resultant spot-kick.

By half-time it was 3-1 and the second half became a case of wondering just how many Bo'ness would score against apparently disheartened opposition. They managed another five, could easily have doubled their score and a one-sided tie ended 8-1.

In truth it was rather a low-key game but nevertheless the opportunity to visit the ground was not one to be missed and I was grateful to see any football at all after the morning rain.

As a Bolton Wanderers fan in my youth I was brought up by my dad on tales of Wanderers' redoubtable full-backs of the 195-0s, Roy Hartle and Tommy Banks, dumping their opposing wingers on the shale running track around Burnden Park. Few wingers apparently came back for a second attempt to dribble around the pair.

Newtown Park has a red gravel track around the playing area and early in the game the home winger was dumped unceremoniously as he attempted to round the full-back. Banks and Hartle would have been proud of the Kirkcaldy full-back's efforts.

It goes without saying that a visit to Newtown Park comes with my firmest recommendation.