

TT No.171: Bob Davies - Sat 5th February 2011; **Elstow Abbey** v Cranfield United Res; Beds F.A. Junior Cup QF; Result: 1-3(aet); Att: 30-40ish; Admission: None; Programme: £1 (vg - 20 pp); Refreshments: None available; Rating: 3*.

The village of Elstow lies to the South of Bedford and is just off the A6 that runs down to Luton. A little bit of rummaging revealed some of the more well-known facts regarding the history of the village.

The village is famous for Elstow Abbey founded in 1078 by the Countess Judith, niece of William the Conqueror. It became one of the richest of the 106 Benedictine nunneries existing at the time and in its hey-day, in the fourteenth century, the building was twice its present size. The end of the Abbey came in 1539, as part of the dissolution of the monasteries.

At the time Queen-Elizabeth I reigned, the church itself had been reduced to its present dimensions, becoming the parish church of the village. The six Norman arches that still remain from the original building remind us of the Abbey's long history of Christian worship.

Elstow is also famous as the home of John Bunyan. He was baptised in the font in 1628 and as a child and young man he worshipped regularly in this abbey church.

Elstow have played their football at The Warren since being founded in 1920. Apart from a period in the 1950's, when the club had a six-year spell in South Midlands League, they have always competed in the local Bedfordshire Leagues. The club has been disbanded a few times over the years but a football club has never been dormant for long in the village. After the latest disbandment at the end of the 2004-5 season the club were reformed again in 2006. It has been a struggle on the pitch and the team were relegated into Division Two of the Bedfordshire County League, where they are currently playing today.

Elstow are occupying sixth place in the League this season and could well move higher as they have games in hand. They are also making progress in both the County and League cups, so silverware may be on the horizon for the club. One notable former player with the club is that of Barry Fry who has gone on to be one of the characters of the game today.

The Bedfordshire Junior Cup dates back to 1911 and Elstow have lifted the trophy on two occasions in 1937 and 1992. They also finished runners-up in 1961. Current holders of the competition are Potton Wanderers who defeated Renhold Village 4-2 in last season's final.

On arrival at the ground there was no trouble parking with a large well-maintained car park set out in front of the main complex. A friendly welcome awaited me and the other hoppers who had made their way to the ground today from club chairman Roland Simmonds. Elstow are one of the few clubs to issue regularly in the League, the only others that I am aware of are Renhold and Dunton with the

possibility of AFC Kempston Town as well. This particular issue was a 20 pager containing columns from Chairman, Roland Simmonds and Manager Wesley Matthews. Full stats, match reports, player profile and of course the team line ups are also included in every issue. This is a super production for a team at Elstow's level and they must be applauded for producing one for every home game this season.

Elstow Abbey play their League football in the Beds County League Division 2 and occupy sixth place. The visitors Cranfield United reserves are in the Division 3 and also occupy sixth place. With the pitch looking in fine condition and apparently, they've not had to call off game for a waterlogged pitch in a number of years, not many teams can claim that record.

The ground at Elstow is shared with the cricket, no cover but today the trees and some outbuildings gave a little respite to strong wind that blew across the pitch for most of the game. Both teams had trouble with the stormy conditions and the first half an hour was a real struggle. On forty-one minutes, both sides were reduced to 10 men with a double sending off for nothing more than a bit of handbags. The second half picked up a little, the home side having large amounts of possession and creating a few openings to break the deadlock. As things went it was the visitors the broke away against the run of play and scored after 76 minutes through Adam Kerr. One could be forgiven into thinking that was that but the home side pushed forward with renewed determination and equalised eight minutes later when Craig Cameron fired home a low shot from outside the area. Into extra time and with it went my planned second half at Bedford Town! On 98 minutes Abbey took the lead from the penalty spot after the Cranfield goalkeeper brought down an oncoming forward in the box. Jason Harrison making no mistake with his spot kick. Two minutes later and it was game over as substitute Ashley Windridge struck a rasping effort into the top corner for 3-1. No more goals but credit to both sides who showed no tiredness through the extra time period that maintained a fair pace throughout.

A nice venue to visit and the home side officials were very friendly and helpful. Certainly, worth a visit if you haven't been before.

07/20