

TT No.174: Mike Latham - Sat 12 February 2011: Wearside League; **Coxhoe Athletic** v Darlington Cleveland Bridge; Result: 0-1; Att: 45 (h/c); Admission: £2; Programmes: None (club usually issue -50p); FGIF Match Rating: 3*.

It was mild and the sun was shining, the wind had dropped and traffic was light going up the A1 but heavy overnight rain had put paid to several fixtures in the Northern League and the Wearside League. At times like this you remember things said in passing by fellow groundhoppers, stored somewhere in the back of your memory and brought out when required: 'Coxhoe is a good draining ground,' I recalled, as if by magic. With plenty of time to re-route if necessary, I decided to chance it and arrived in Coxhoe, a village in County Durham just off the A1 to be greeted with the glorious sight of a match about to start.

Coxhoe is a small village, situated between Bowburn and Cornforth, a few miles south of Durham. It's only a mile or so from J61 of the A1 and the football ground is to be found by taking the first major left turn upon entering the village that leads up to Quarrington Hill.

There is a large amount of new housing in Coxhoe and another new development is taking shape next to the splendidly appointed Beechfield Park ground where Coxfield Athletic FC play.

It's hard to imagine nowadays but Coxhoe was once a colliery village, coal mining being first recorded here in 1750. Coxhoe Colliery was sunk in 1827 and the village once had two railway stations, a pottery and its own gasworks.

The present club was founded in 1950 but the roots of association football in the village can be traced back long before that; in the early 1900s three teams carried the village name: Coxhoe Pottery, Coxhoe St Mary's and Coxhoe United.

The present day Coxhoe Athletic started off as a works team known as Steetley FC. The Steetley Lime Company, a large Derbyshire based limestone quarrying firm had a base for their operations in the village. The company encouraged its employees to participate in sport and there was once a thriving sports and social club in Coxhoe with football and cricket playing a large part. When the company closed down its Coxhoe operation in the 1970s a group of local enthusiasts formed a committee and took over the running of the football club; sadly, though, the cricket club closed down and the former cricket ground now lies derelict, overgrown and forlorn behind the far goal.

Coxhoe Athletic played in the Auckland and District league and the Durham Alliance before joining the Wearside League. Like all clubs at this level, they have a small but enthusiastic management committee who work tirelessly to keep the club at this level of football.

One such committee-man, who I had the pleasure of meeting is Stan Reed who has a long association with Coxhoe Athletic FC, following on from its days as Steetley

FC. A former player, club official and now groundsman, Stan recently received an award for his work as groundsman with his pitch being recognised as one of the best kept pitches in local football. Looking at the superb playing surface it was hard to believe that only a few weeks ago the pitch was covered by 18 inches of snow.

The playing area is elevated above most of the village, drains well and enjoys wonderful sweeping views across to distant hills. The ground is immaculately maintained and looked a picture in the strong sunshine of a glorious winter's afternoon. On the near-side, where the entrance gate is situated, there is a distinctive small covered structure with a padded bench; on the far side is a small seated stand, dedicated to the memory of John Purves, a former player, manager and secretary and another covered stand. The ground is neatly railed and fenced, there is a superb tea bar and, if you ask nicely, the committee room houses boxes of old programmes of north-east clubs, many now defunct, selections of which can be purchased in exchange for a donation to club funds.

The visitors occupied a higher standing in the league and earned the three points with a goal five minutes before half-time. Coxhoe certainly looked a better side than their lowly position suggested but seemed to lack confidence in front of goal. Their approach play was good but though they created several chances were unable to break through. For the second week running I was impressed by the quality of football on display in what is a Step 7 league, and again the game was played in a good spirit and officiated well.

The locals were friendly and Coxhoe obviously attract a hard core following from the village; they clearly enjoy their football. It was a wonderful way to spend such a glorious afternoon, a good match in good company in an immaculately kept ground with not a thing out of place and with lovely, sweeping views all around. It goes without saying that a visit to Coxhoe Athletic comes with my highest recommendation.

07/20