

TT No. 185: *Mike Latham* - Sat 26 February 2011: South of Scotland Challenge Cup Quarter-Final: **Heston Rovers** 1-3 Edinburgh City; Attendance: 60 (h/c); Admission: by donation; no programme.

On Saturday 6th November 2010 I attempted to 'tick' off the new Heston Rovers ground at Maryfield in Dumfries. The referee decided the pitch was unplayable, just half an hour or so before kick-off and, suitably chastened I managed to rescue the day by squeezing in a re-visit to nearby Crichton.

Since that date, being pig-headed and stubborn, I have been determined to re-visit the club that made me so welcome on my brief visit. Amazingly it took until the last Saturday in February, after countless call-offs due to snow, ice and water-logging before Heston Rovers could play again at home.

Club official Richard Osborne has become a more used mobile number than some of my nearest and dearest as I sought out news on an almost weekly basis on the state of the Maryfield playing surface. At long last, after a thorough perusal of the weather forecast, I spied an opportunity. Though it had rained long and hard overnight in Lancashire, causing a near decimation of the Vodkat League programme, the weather had for once been kinder north of the border and Richard assured me that I wouldn't be wasting my time if I ventured north.

Sure enough, the weather was mild and calm, the sun eventually persuaded to make a welcome appearance from behind glowering skies as I arrived at Maryfield. But it was a close-run thing. Despite Edinburgh City having travelled south in an impressive coach and the referee having made the journey from Glasgow the playing surface was still very wet in parts. Fortunately, sanity prevailed, the game went ahead despite some initial reservations from the officials and at long last, three months after their last home game Heston Rovers were back up and running.

The club's excellent website reveals that Heston Rovers was founded in the Lochside area of Dumfries by local joiner Frankie Harris and his friend Eddie McCormack in 1978. The first sponsor of the club was the owner of the Cairndale Hotel in Dumfries; he had a boat moored at the island of Hestan in the Solway Firth called The Hestan Rover and suggested that this would be a good name for the club but changed this to Heston.

The club played in Lochside (which coincidentally had a bus route called Heston Avenue) before re-locating to Locharbriggs, then Kingholm and again to Parkhead (Noblehill) in Dumfries before moving to Maryfield in Georgetown (its current base) in the mid-1990s. A hard-working committee worked to improve the club and membership increased. The committee decided to integrate all the teams operating under the club name and a universal black-and-white striped jersey was introduced around the Millennium.

In September 2007 the club took delivery of three portable buildings which linked together to provide changing facilities, toilets, storage and a meeting room and the official opening was made in May 2008 with the current Aberdeen and former Scotland manager Craig Brown CBE the guest of honour.

Until 2008 the club was only a youth football club, but that summer the club merged with Dumfries FC to form its first ever adult team who play in the Southern Counties League in South West Scotland (known as the South of Scotland League) under the name of Heston Rovers FC.

The ground is easily found, close to a housing estate and the railway and located to the south-east of town. On arrival it's not difficult to imagine the hard work and expertise that has taken place to make the ground capable of staging games in the South of Scotland League. The main pitch has been enclosed by a sturdy wooden fence replete in many places with advertising boards and the portable buildings referred to earlier are a hive of activity, especially as they house an excellent tea bar. Over 300 youngsters, boys and girls, turn out in Heston Rovers FC colours each week, weather permitting and there is a lovely community feel to this most friendly and accommodating of clubs.

Edinburgh City, from the Premier Division of the East of Scotland League provided the opposition for this cup-tie. They were expected to prevail especially considering the lack of football that Heston Rovers players had played in this most dreadful of winters. But Heston, playing neat, constructive football more than held their own and took the lead with a superb 27th minute goal lobbed in from the left-hand side of the area.

Heston more than held their own for an hour whereupon the visitors equalised, then added another within a minute. Only the heroics of the home goalkeeper kept the score-line down though the game was sealed with a third goal ten minutes from time. The pitch held up well and any fears about the conditions proved unfounded. Referee Scott Jamieson enjoyed a splendid game, confirming my long-held belief that Scottish officials are streets ahead of their English counterparts.

It goes without saying that a visit to this friendly and progressive club comes with my highest recommendation- of all the trips I have made this season this was my most enjoyable and that is indeed high praise.

07/20