

TT No.204: *Justin Holmes* - Sat 19th March 2011; **Sheffield** v Leek Town; Evo Stik League Division 1 South; Venue: Coach and Horses Ground, Dronfield; Score: 4-3; Admission: £6.00; Prog: £1.50; Att: 335; Match Rating: 4.

Since purchasing my bargain £2 return coach ticket from London to Sheffield a couple of months in advance, my original plan of visiting Chesterfield's new stadium was scuppered when their game was brought forward to the Friday night. An alternative under serious consideration was to watch the stand-out team and runaway leaders in the Championship, Queen's Park Rangers, at Doncaster Rovers, a reduced admission charge of £15 making it even more worthy of consideration. However, ultimately the prospect of visiting another dull, characterless identikit stadium at the Keepmoat didn't appeal sufficiently, and instead I chose to pay a visit to the world's oldest football club, Sheffield FC. Upon learning that QPR claimed a routine 1-0 win at Doncaster, it turned out to be absolutely the right decision.

Considering that Sheffield is as famous a Yorkshire town as there is, it does seem slightly strange to head over into Derbyshire to visit Sheffield FC's home stadium, the Coach and Horses Ground, also slightly surprising is that this is the first ground the world's oldest football club has ever owned, and only since 2001. The ground is located on the outskirts of the small and very sleepy town of Dronfield, roughly half way between Sheffield and Chesterfield, with the ground about a ten-minute walk from the train station. The Coach and Horses ground is pleasant and has plenty of character. The stadium's name (if one ignores the current sponsored title) is taken from the adjoining pub, the rear of which backs onto the ground and its stone wall adds some nice character to the ground. Between the back wall of the pub and the turnstiles is a stand offering covered standing, and behind one of the goals is a modern all-seater stand - the only seats on offer at the ground. The rest of the ground just has hard standing, Trees lining much of the ground and countryside in the near distance gives the ground a nice rural feel, as well as it being neat and very well maintained. All in all, one of the better grounds at this level. The admission charge, certainly came as a pleasant surprise to me, a Southerner, used to paying, £8.00 or even more for matches in the equivalent Ryman League Division 1, The programme was a very good effort if slightly loaded with adverts. The cover is very attractive and reflects the club's heritage, and the contents offers an abundance of information on the two teams and the league, and full respect should go to the programme editor of Sheffield FC for producing such an interesting and informative programme, considering today was Sheffield's fourth home game in just nine days.

After reaching the play-offs last season, this season has been rather more difficult for Sheffield, having lost their manager and many of their players before Christmas and now find themselves down in 16th place in the 22-team league. Leek Town are two places below them, although both teams have no real fear of a relegation

scrap thanks to the two teams currently occupying the relegation places, Shepshed Dynamo and Spalding United, cast well adrift at the foot of the table. I noted from the programme a truly bizarre sequence of games for Sheffield earlier in the season, when twelve out of thirteen games played were in cup competitions! When the two teams met earlier in the season, Sheffield triumphed by two goals to nil in Staffordshire.

On a pleasant sunny although occasionally cloudy afternoon, the match turned out to be a real roller-coaster, with the lead swinging between both teams, all of the goals coming in rapid clusters before a last gasp winner sealed the points. Leek took the lead on 14 minutes through Dan Cope with a quick shot on the turn from just inside the area that the keeper really should have done better, and celebrated with an extravagant backward somersault. Sheffield were soon back on level terms though, Ant Lynam scoring on 17 minutes, and just two minutes later, the home side took the lead through James Gregory, a lead they held onto fairly comfortably at half time. For much of the second half, the home side looked to be cruising to victory as the game was played out at a fairly pedestrian pace, but on 76 minutes, Leek equalised through Anthony Malbon with a firm header from a free kick floated into the box, and the game was turned on its head again with ten minutes remaining when Dan Cope scored his second of the game with a cool lob after the keeper inexplicably rushed off of his line to give Leek's pocket of support, who had been commendably vociferous throughout, something to really shout about. However, just as it was looking like the points would go back to Staffordshire, in the 89th minute, Sheffield scored an equaliser with a bullet header from a corner by Andrew Gascoigne. The drama wasn't finished there however, as deep into stoppage time at the end of the match, another corner spilled out to Gascoigne near the edge of the box, and he drove home powerfully into the bottom corner to give Sheffield a remarkable victory. This was a strange game that for long periods was rather dull, yet had seven goals and a dramatic finish, witnessed by Sheffield's highest league attendance of the season.

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