

**TT No.58: *Mike Latham*** - Sun 19 September 2010: FA Vase 2nd Qual Round: **AFC Emley** 3-0 Rossington Main; Attendance: 110; Admission: £4; Programme: £1.20; FGIF Match Rating: 4\*.

It's always nice to go back to a ground you've enjoyed visiting in the past, and on a rainy Sunday it was almost as if this match had been arranged for my benefit. The success of the Emley Clarence cricket team in reaching the final of the Oddfellows Cup in the Huddersfield League meant that AFC Emley, co-partners in the Welfare ground had to play this FA Vase game on a Sunday afternoon. Perfect.

I'd been to Emley several times in the past though never in the day-time. I remember going to an FA Cup first round replayed tie against Morecambe back in 1997- a terrific match that ended in a thrilling 3-3 draw before a crowd of 2,439. Emley won 3-1 on penalties, beat Lincoln City in the next round and bowed out heroically at West Ham United in round three, losing only 2-1 to a team then eighth in the Premier League.

The Welfare ground was buzzing that night and the name of Emley, perched high on the Pennine hills between Huddersfield and Wakefield became known throughout the land. For a village with a population of less than 2,000 the team's success, not only in cups but in holding their own in the Northern Premier League was remarkable.

Emley had lost its colliery during the miners' strike in 1985 and in 2000 suffered another body blow with the loss of its football team. New ground grading regulations, especially concerning three-sided grounds meant that Emley were unable to continue playing in the league at the Welfare Ground. They moved to play at Belle Vue, home of Wakefield Trinity Wildcats RL side and later moved to another rugby ground, College Grove the former home of Wakefield RU club to become a fully-fledged Wakefield side.

It was a sad end to football in Emley, or so it seemed. In 2003 the reserve side ceased to play at the Welfare ground and a tradition going back as far as 1903 was ended. Around the same time the club became known as Wakefield & Emley FC and later just Wakefield FC. Happily, in 2005 several fans and former officials banded together to form AFC Emley and after one season playing in the West Yorkshire League a successful application was made to the Northern Counties East League.

It was fitting perhaps that the game today was a Vase game- a competition in which the old Emley team enjoyed great success, reaching the semi-finals in 1987 and the final at Wembley in 1988 when they lost 1-0 to Colne Dynamos after extra-time.

Emley is reached via a somewhat winding and narrow road three miles from the main Huddersfield-Wakefield road. The huge Emley Television transmitter towers

over the village and the ground is reached via a small opening between stone houses opposite a distinctive stone cross in the village centre.

Parking was easy outside the ground and the tannoy announcer was reading the team line-ups as I arrived. The journey had been far from easy with long tail-backs on the M62 and torrential rain for most of the journey from Lancashire but here at Emley the sun was winning its struggle to break through the clouds, the cricket ground looked a picture and the football ground resplendent with plenty of evidence of tender loving care.

I'd always remembered Emley as a friendly club and sure enough that impression was reinforced on my arrival: a friendly greeting at the turnstile, an excellent programme, a number of smartly dressed club officials sharing out the match-day tasks and a fully functioning tea bar with excellent pie and peas. Within five minutes I felt at home, especially when I noticed that several groundhopping friends had also taken advantage of the rescheduled game to visit or re-visit the ground.

The main feature of the Welfare Ground is a distinctive main stand raised above the small terrace below with an excellent view of the game. There's a small cover behind the near-side goal and a shallow open terrace behind the far goal. As soon as the cricket season ends a fence is positioned along the far side in accordance with regulations to enclose the pitch fully.

The tie was a largely evenly fought contest but whereas Emley took their chances their visitors failed to take theirs. 2-0 up at half-time Emley made sure of moving into the next round with a spectacular late third goal,

It was an atmosphere far removed from the frenzied excitement of that Morecambe cup-tie 13 years ago but what a pleasure it was to see football firmly re-established back in the village. Emley clearly have a loyal and proud bunch of officials and supporters and are backed by many local businesses. Their ground is a pleasure to visit and the battle over the M62 was ultimately well worthwhile.

07/20