

TT No.84: Mike Latham - Saturday 9 October 2010, Emirates Scottish Junior Cup First Round Replay: **Benburb** 1-3 Cumnock Juniors; Attendance: 160 (h/c); Admission: £5; Programme: £1; Pie and Bovril: £2.

One of the shock results in the first round of the Scottish Junior Cup had been the achievement of Benburb, from Central District League Division Two forcing a 1-1 draw at Super League side Cumnock Juniors FC.

The replay in Glasgow offered the chance to visit one of the 'must see' grounds in junior circles with the added attraction of a much bigger crowd than usual and a match of some importance.

Benburb play virtually in the shadow of Ibrox Stadium, the grounds being only a few hundred yards apart. To say that their Tinto Park ground has obviously seen better days is something of an understatement. But this is clearly a venue of rich historical importance and its long, covered terrace should attract grant funding to be restored and preserved for generations to come as a reminder of how football grounds used to be.

An excellent programme was on sale at the gate as the spectators gathered on a sunny, autumnal afternoon, many having made the short journey from Ayrshire.

The programme explained that the name Benburb has been associated with junior football since around 1885, the team playing at Govanhill, Polmadie and then Oatlands until 1898, the latter the former ground of Scottish League side Thistle.

After losing their ground at Oatlands a new club was formed at the turn of the century, with several members of the defunct club involved. Now based in Govan, the club's first home was that of the Govandale base of former League side Linthouse. They moved several times before the present Tinto Park was opened in 1932. In 1934 and 1936 Benburb won the Scottish Junior Cup and were very successful immediately either side of the war when Tinto Park was home to some huge crowds, the highest estimated at around 20,000. Benburb made their fifth Junior Cup final appearance in 1980, losing to Bailleston.

Benburb were the team that Sir Alex Ferguson used to follow when he was brought up in Govan, and apparently, he still receives copies of the match day programme. As a teenager Sir Alex used to train with the team known as the Bens or the 'Chooky Hens' and several of his contemporaries from the neighbouring Govan High Secondary School followed him in becoming a professional player.

The ground is hard to describe but is definitely well worth a visit. Upon entering the ground, the vast covered terrace along the far side dominates the skyline. There are holes in the roof in places, the lights look perilously placed on the roof and the terrace underneath is weed-strewn and crumbling, but it is simply a magnificent, brooding structure.

A huge amount of earthwork must have taken place to build the ground. The massive nearside terrace is uncovered and is slowly but surely being taken over by nature with trees and shrubs sprouting amidst the remains of terracing. The banking behind the far goal is overgrown and desolate. By the entrance is a shallow terrace behind the goal and a changing room and committee room block that also serves as the tea bar and where photographs of the Bens' deeds of the past get pride of place on the walls. The players have to negotiate their way through the queues for pies and Bovril in order to reach their dressing rooms at half-time.

A decent sized crowd, maybe around 160 saw Cumnock survive a severe test from a home side that gave their all. It was 0-0 at half-time but the visitors opened the scoring ten minutes after the re-start and added a penalty and a goal from a free-kick. Refusing to throw in the towel Benburb pulled one back from a free-kick and then laid siege to the visitors' goal, hitting the post during their most intense spell of pressure.

Tinto Park is definitely a 'must visit' for anyone who has an interest in football grounds. There is an obvious enthusiasm and pride in the club from the committee and small band of supporters who keep the football flag flying and their dedication and commitment has only to be admired.

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