

TT No.129: Mike Latham - Sat 31 December 2011; **Studley** 1-3 Tipton Town; Midland Football Alliance; Attendance: 83; Admission: £5; Programme: £1; FGIF Match Rating: 3*.

After such a wet week games were falling left, right and centre to waterlogged pitches; huge credit to Studley for keeping supporters updated on their club website. On Friday evening they posted that there would be an inspection before the game against Tipton. On Saturday morning came the bulletin that the night had been dry and that no inspection was required- the game would definitely go ahead. What a superb service and worthy of support.

I'd been intending to visit Studley for ages but one way or another had never managed it. Groundhopping friends told me what a friendly club they were and easy to find, just a few miles south of the M42. The football club, so the informative programme tells us, were only formed in 1971, as a works team playing in the Redditch Sunday League. They only entered Saturday football in 1986, developing the ground which is known as the Beehive into the well-appointed venue it is today.

Located just north of Studley, next door to the cricket club, the football ground is on Abbeyfields Drive and there is plenty of car-parking. There's a well-appointed club-house, a small stand with five rows of bench seating, a tea bar and a friendly welcome at the gate. The programme editor apologised for making the issue a double one also used for the Alvechurch game due to Christmas printing deadlines but no one seemed to bother. Adjoining the main pitch is an enclosed 3g pitch which must get lots of use from the local community.

Though it was a chilly afternoon the rain stayed away and a good competitive game of level 5 football kept the mind focused. The game was a tale of several penalties, Tipton taking the lead through a spot-kick awarded for handball then the home side equalising before the break in identical circumstances. Tipton then had strong appeals for a second penalty turned down before conceding a second penalty themselves; but their goalkeeper made an excellent save.

Despite being reduced to ten men when a defender was dismissed for a second yellow the visitors finished the stronger, sealing a well-deserved victory with two fine goals, a curling shot from distance and emphatic strike in injury-time. Tipton were well supported with a considerable number of spectators cheering on their efforts.

I spied to opportunity to visit another ground in the build-up, albeit a fleeting visit. Feckenham, who play in the second tier of the Midland Combination are now based at the Studley Sports & Social Club about a mile or so away from the Beehive. Their game against Knowle kicked off at 2pm and I saw the first-half action, Knowle taking a 2-0 lead with two goals in quick succession midway through the half. That's how it finished. With a well-appointed club house and

grass banking along one side affording glorious distant views over sweeping countryside it was a pleasant venue. Though some groundhoppers would not deign make a visit for half a game I'd far rather take the opportunity to watch some football if the chance avails, especially having travelled 120 miles for the privilege.

For groundhoppers who like to eat well Waitrose now have an outlet at Keele Services between Junctions 16 and 15 of the M6; far superior fare than the rest. There's also a Starbucks outlet here. The George Hotel at Eccleshall is a good stopping-off point on the way home but I elected to go to the tried and tested and was enjoying a fine pint of Holts Mild at the Crown as I reflected on a good way to end my groundhopping in 2011.

07/20