

TT No.135: Mike Latham - Sat 7 January 2012: Leicestershire Senior Cup Q-F: **Ashby Ivanhoe** 3-1 Thurnby Nirvana; Attendance: 50 (h/c); 4pp programme by donation; FGIF Match Rating: 4*.

There's nothing like the prospect of a double-header, especially on an unpromising early January afternoon. When I spotted the 1pm k-o time in the Football Traveller for this Leicestershire Senior Cup quarter-final I was immediately lured to Hood Park in Ashby-de-la-Zouch, a town I had never previously visited. Arriving early, I was impressed- this is an up-market town with distinctive main-street and many individual shops, the type of which have disappeared from many similar towns.

Ivanhoe's ground is located next to Ivanhoe College and the leisure centre in Ashby-de-la-Zouch. I received a warm welcome from the locals, who seemed frankly disbelieving that someone could travel from as far as Bolton to watch their side. There was a good canteen facility available from Big Pete's mobile van which cheerfully dispensed a wide range of hot drinks and food that warded off the early afternoon chill. The sausage and egg rolls and coffee were tried and tested and are recommended.

A club official dispensed free programmes, a modest four-page edition that nevertheless did the job. Spectators are invited to partake in a donation from a football card by way of admission.

Though the pitch was heavy and cloying, the game was hard fought and fluent, played at a good pace and well refereed. The visitors, from the East Midlands Counties League dominated the first-half and looked a good side. They spurned a fourth-minute penalty, the weak effort rebounding off a post, took the lead and hit the woodwork while the home 'keeper made several excellent saves. It was virtually all one-way traffic. It seemed only a matter of time before the visitors sealed their place in the last four; especially as the home side, I was informed, were missing several regulars.

But there was an amazing transformation in the second half as a weak winter's afternoon sun made a fleeting appearance. Ivanhoe came from behind to dominate the game with their experienced no9 a constant source of danger. Once they equalised after a well-worked move, they went on to dominate the game and emerged worthy winners of a thoroughly enjoyable game.

Founded in 1948, Ivanhoe are a lovely club, welcoming to the visitor and clearly with a good local following. Though an FA Charter Standard football club they are currently restricted in their ambitions. They have plans, so I was told, to move up the pyramid when they relocate to a new ground next season. Their current ground is council-owned and has post and rail perimeter fences and dug-outs with some hard standing but is limited in terms of ground development. After they completed a league and cup double by winning the Leicestershire Senior League and the

Coalville Charity Cup last season, Ivanhoe have been thwarted in moving up the pyramid by the deficiencies of their ground.

"Ashby," I also learnt, is of Anglo-Danish origin, meaning "Ash-tree farm" or "Ash-tree settlement." The Norman French addition dates from the years after the Norman conquest of England, when the town became a possession of the La Zouche family during the reign of Henry III. Ivanhoe College, for 11 to 14-year-old children, is named after the historical novel Ivanhoe by Sir Walter Scott which was set in the area of the castle. In Scott's novel the town hosts an important archery competition held by Prince John, in which Robin Hood competes and wins.

My historical research up to the brim for one day, after some superb directions from one local, I made a quick farewell from my new-found friends and journeyed through the village of Packington to Heather, where my afternoon went steeply downhill.

07/20