

TT No. 161: Mike Latham - Sat 18 February 2012: Shropshire County Challenge Cup Q-F; **Morda United** v Newport Town; Result: 1-0; Admission: None; Programme: 24pp, £1; Attendance: 70 (h/c); FGIF Rating: 4*.

It was another Saturday morning that dawned unpromisingly- after Jack Frost mercifully departed this time heavy rain, sweeping in overnight from the west, was the problem. I had spent a couple of days perusing the estimable Football Traveller, still the most valuable subscription around; it flagged up this game. Without Bill Berry's publication I would have been unaware of this intriguing quarter-final; moreover, there was a 1-30pm kick-off, so there was plenty of time to re-route if necessary.

Those that say they can do without the Football Traveller in the days of the internet are deluding themselves. From arrival in the post on a Wednesday morning it is an essential part of the groundhopper's week.

Despite Bill's publication some reassurance was needed, with fixtures in the area falling like nine-pins. Club Secretary Rob Drury kindly returned my call to say a pitch inspection has given the green light to the game and then kindly saved me a programme on arrival. Rob played for the old Oswestry Town club in their Northern Premier League days and is now a stalwart of the Morda club, the type of person without which football at this level simply would not function.

Located just south of Oswestry off the A483 Morda is an old colliery village and their Weston Road Ground, a few paces from the village centre with its pub and corner shop is splendidly appointed. There is a large social club, which doubles up as a valuable community resource, an elevated view from banking behind the goal at the entrance and a good tea bar. There is a lovely, distinctive green painted stand with bench seats and post and rail fencing around the tree-lined ground.

A club veteran lady is in charge of the tea bar and is obviously well-known by the locals. A comedy script writer could have filled his notebook with some of the banter in the tea queue. She has a double, apparently who looks after the post-match catering in the adjoining club. Morda United, I was reassured fully appreciate the value of these two club stalwarts, the most important members of the club without doubt.

Newport Town, league leaders of the Shropshire County Premier League were pre-match favourites and had won here in the league earlier in the season. But Morda seem on the up and Rob explained to me they have plans to further develop the ground by installing floodlights and hope to join the West Midlands Regional League.

Without doubt the home side deserved their win. The game was closely fought, with several meaty challenges and goal-scoring opportunities at a premium. At half-time I chatted again with Rob and we agreed that a single goal was likely to

settle the contest. It duly arrived when the home left-back, earlier the victim of a horrible challenge that rightly earned the perpetrator a yellow card had his revenge. He delivered an in-swinging right-wing corner left-footed early in the second half which eluded everyone in a crowded six-yard box and the ball crept over the goal-line. Walking behind the goal later in the half I was assured by the spectators at that end that the ball had indeed crossed the line- no need for goal-line technology at Morda.

The pitch stood up well to the overnight deluge and the sun made a welcome appearance during the second half. The referee obviously enjoyed himself, adding on nine minutes at the end but Morda hung on for a win that they looked as if would be celebrated long and hard in the social club afterwards. They are a lovely club this one, a visit here comes highly recommended.

Morda United FC, I later discovered, is a club with a long history- first founded in the late 1880s, when they were known as Morda FC they folded and then re-built in the late 1970's and early 1980's. They decided to join the Mid Wales League and were champions in 1991 with several runners-up positions following. But, being located in England they were denied entering the Cymru Alliance and so decided to revert to the English non-league pyramid. They joined the West Midlands (Regional) League and spent a decade in that competition before joining the Shropshire County League in 2004.

The benefit of the early kick-off meant there was still football around at the final whistle. I journeyed 20 minutes southwards and took in the last half-hour of the Spar Mid Wales League Division Two game between Meifod and Abermule. I had visited the ground, located behind the King's Head previously but had omitted to take along my camera. So, it was a good opportunity to take some photographs while Abermule, 2-0 up on my arrival added another goal to run out convincing winners.

07/20