

TT No.114: *Mike Latham* - Sat 2 March 2013: Northern Football Alliance Premier Division; **Amble United** 0-2 Blyth Town; Attendance: 42 (h/c); No admission or programme; FGIF Match Rating: 3*.

A glorious early Spring day on the Northumberland coast and a bracing morning walk along Alnmouth beach while I pondered the possibilities for the afternoon's football. There were so many games from which to choose, all within half-an-hour's drive. I elected to visit the Welfare Ground in Amble where the home side, top of the Premier Division, were entertaining unbeaten Blyth Town. I've seen several games in this league and always been impressed by the competitiveness of the football- and I was not to be disappointed.

Amble is a small seaside town on the North Sea coast, 30 miles or so north from Newcastle-upon-Tyne. It lies at the mouth of the River Coquet, and Coquet Island is visible from its beaches and harbour, especially on a day as clear and bright as this one. Amble grew in the nineteenth century as collieries were opened and railway links established to the Northumberland coalfields; the town became a centre for the sea transport and export of coal. These days it has a population of six thousand or so.

There are two fine fish and chip shops on the harbour, both come highly recommended and a distinctive main street with many independent shops. The beaches are superb for walkers and the historic village of Warkworth with its magnificent castle is a mile or so to the north. In Amble there is a substantial harbour and marina and a large caravan park along the shore to the south. To the north is an area known as the Braid where many fishing vessels are anchored. It is a lovely place to spend a few days, the people are friendly and there is so much to explore.

The football team play at the Welfare Ground on Acklington Road, adjoining Coquet High School. The entrance to the ground is not sign-posted, being a dirt track down by the side of a skateboard park. The pitch is well grassed, flat and in good condition, surrounded by a huge oval running track that includes a water jump for the steeplechase. The running track is surrounded by a metal barrier and there is a small banking along the near-side where two dug-outs are situated. The dressing rooms are some distance away behind a distinctive mound, at the top of which are some spectacular views of the play.

Surprisingly, no attempt was made to take any admission money and no programmes are issued. There are no refreshment facilities and the two teams stay on the pitch for a brief half-time interval. On a fine day that is no problem, but on a wet afternoon watching football here may be a less than comfortable experience with the lack of cover.

Amble United was formed by a merger between Amble Town and Amble Vikings in 2001. They had several seasons in the North Northumberland League before re-

joining the Northern Alliance and last season were division one champions. Their predominantly young side has adapted remarkably well to the Premier Division and began this game on top of the table despite last week's reverse at second placed Carlisle City.

But Blyth Town, playing only their twelfth league game of the season, looked the more accomplished side and took the lead five minutes before half-time, doubling their lead with a late second goal. It was a fiercely fought, highly competitive game that was well refereed.

On days such as this there are few better places to watch football than in such glorious locations as the Northumberland Coast. The Welfare Park could hardly be claimed to be a place of beauty but it is an unusual and interesting location that obviously caters well for the town. I enjoyed my visit here and found the standard of football, level seven of the pyramid to be at least on a par with similar leagues in Lancashire and Yorkshire.

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