

TT No. 122: Mike Latham - Sat 9 March 2013: Athium Midland Football Combination Division One; **Cadbury Athletic** 1-1 Fairfield Villa; Attendance: 80 (h/c); Admission: £3; No programme; FGIF Match rating: 3*.

The English Heritage series of books, 'Played in...' is a magnificent series that celebrates Britain's rich and diverse sporting landscape. Simon Inglis is heavily involved in the project and is the joint author of the fifth book in the series 'Played in Birmingham' alongside Steve Beauchampe. On the cover of the book published in 2006 is a superb photograph of the pavilion at the Cadbury Recreation Ground on Bournville Lane taken shortly after its opening in 1902.

One hundred and eleven years on the pavilion has barely altered and forms an impressive backdrop to a simply wonderful football ground. One that should be on the 'must see' list of any groundhopper. I had been meaning to visit for ages and finally plucked up the courage to brave the M6 southbound on a busy March Saturday. I'm glad I made the effort.

Bournville is a model village on the south side of Birmingham; I approached via J4 of the M5 but there may be more direct routes through the city centre. The village is known throughout the world for its connections with the Cadbury family and chocolate and even has its own brand named after it - a dark chocolate bar 'Bournville.'

The history of the site dates back to the late Victorian period. The brothers George and Richard Cadbury took over the expanding business set up by their father John in the 1860s and soon realised that in order to expand they needed to re-locate the cocoa and chocolate factory from the middle of Birmingham to a site that gave more room for growth. The business required easy access for milk and cocoa deliveries- milk came via the canal network, cocoa by rail from the ports of London and Southampton.

A new site was developed at Bournbrook Hall, a few miles south of the city centre and the area was named 'Bournville', partly after the Bourn Brook which still bubbles along behind the far goal at the football ground with 'ville' being the French word for town. A new factory was developed in the area which survives to this day and as part of the development the far-sighted Cadbury family developed sports facilities for use by the employees. George Cadbury also developed a 'model village' of cottages and houses for the employees, all designed by a resident architect.

As a Quaker family the Cadburys were committed to providing for the health and well-being of their workforce and they incorporated recreational facilities within the village. Part of these plans incorporated the magnificent cricket and football ground which exists to this day, its picture made famous by adorning boxes of Milk Tray chocolates throughout the 1950s and early 1960s.

Bournville remains a desirable area of Birmingham and Cadbury remains a major employer in the city. It has set up a visitor's centre known as Cadbury's World which attracts thousands of tourists each year. Tickets for the attraction had been sold out on this, a chilly but dry Saturday in early March. Thankfully there was plenty of room for the visiting groundhopper at the adjoining Cadbury Recreation Ground, home of Cadbury Athletic FC.

Cadbury Athletic FC was formed relatively recently, in 1994, and the club gained entry into the Midland Combination. The club incorporates the Cadbury logo as its badge and plays in the corporate colours of purple and white. But the ground has no floodlights and so when the club plays in the Premier Division, as it did last season it has to make arrangements to ground-share elsewhere to fulfil ground grading requirements. With Athletic top of the first division I decided this was a good time to visit, especially as the match against fourth-placed Fairfield Villa promised much.

The Cadbury family had a vision of establishing a 'factory in a garden' and a visit here shows that has been fulfilled. While the factory dominates the far side of the ground, the wonderful pavilion is the magnificent backdrop to the football and cricket ground. Club officials are friendly, hot drinks are served in the room next to the dressing rooms and a fine view of play is to be had, sat upon a wooden bench on the first floor. To the right of the pavilion is a deep terrace, another along the far side adjoining the factory. The cricket ground, which staged two Warwickshire first-class games before the First World War looks in fine condition- a bowling club complete with its own pavilion is squeezed in at the far corner.

The magnificent book co-written by Beauchampe and Inglis details the history behind the Cadbury sporting paradise far more effectively than I can muster here- if you haven't read the 'Played in' series may I respectfully suggest you add them to your reading list.

As for the game itself, well it was all a bit of an anti-climax to be honest. For reasons best known to himself the referee only got the game underway at eight minutes after three o'clock and several lengthy delays in play added to the tedium. The game never really got going, although the home side looked by far the better outfit in the first-half and deservedly went in leading 1-0 at the break.

I watched the second half sat on a fine wooden bench from the first floor of the pavilion. The visitors came back strongly and deservedly equalised midway through the half. The game tailed off towards the end and it was after five o'clock before the final whistle was blown.

In summary, a simply wonderful place to watch football and it's worth researching a little bit of the history before you visit. On this occasion the standard of the play didn't match the magnificent surroundings but you can't have everything. I really enjoyed my visit to this friendly and historic club and suggest that if you haven't been you add it to your list. Programmes, I was informed are usually issued but the man taking the gate told me the programme compiler had been ill and so this game was paper-free.

