

TT No.136: Mike Latham - Sat 6 April 2013: East of Scotland League Division 1: **Kelso United** 5-0 Eyemouth United; Attendance: 70 (est.); Admission: by donation: 16pp programme: £1; FGIF Match Rating: 4*.

Two groundhopping friends joined me on the journey north but our plans were quickly thrown into disarray by a tyre blow-out on the M61. Great credit to the AA who did an excellent job in responding quickly to our plight and after repairs in Preston we continued our journey. Our intended visit to Craigmark bit the dust and instead we headed up the A7 from Carlisle, dropping off one of our group, at Longtown, where he was to witness the home side losing 4-1 at home to Netherhall (aet) in the semi-final of the Whitehaven Cup.

We continued through glorious Borders scenery through Hawick towards Kelso, a town I had visited previously for horse-racing but never for football. Woodside Park is easy to find, close to the cemetery and the cricket ground. It has been the football club's home since the late 1970s. Association football is definitely second best to the rugby code in these parts but on a gloriously sunny Spring-like afternoon a good turn-out of locals helped swell the crowd to around the 70-mark.

Those who enjoyed the welcome sunshine after weeks of desperately cold weather were rewarded with what proved to be an excellent game dominated by the home side. Kelso's ground is located in the middle of a public park, ringed by some spectacular-looking houses, but on match-days is transformed into an enclosed arena by a rope along one side and portable advertising boards along the opposite side. There is a dressing room complex with an excellent tea bar from where hot drinks in proper mugs, pies and other items are dispensed. Interesting artefacts from Kelso's history are displayed on the walls, including several old framed photographs.

To top off a visit here, club official Steve James produces a superb 16pp programme for the hosts and provides a warm welcome to those who he perceives to be groundhoppers (we were easy targets). Steve hails originally from Newport, then lived in Reading but has developed a love for the club and the friendliness of the East of Scotland League since re-locating north with his family. He's the sort of unsung club official that is the bedrock of a club, producing a programme in a league where many clubs fail to issue and regularly updating the club's website, twitter and Facebook pages. His enthusiasm is infectious and I hope he doesn't become disillusioned if, as often happens in clubs where a newcomer comes in with fresh ideas, he meets opposition or, worse still, apathetic fellow committee-members.

For the neutral the game appeared to be about the visitors consolidating their hard-won second place in the league. But Kelso, fresh from a fine midweek victory at Berwick Rangers Reserves had a shock in store. Playing some fine, attacking and inventive football they opened the scoring after only 48 seconds and were 4-0

ahead at half-time. In the end Kelso won in a canter, their centre-forward notching a hat-trick and missing several more chances. The hapless visitors were denied what appeared to be a certain goal early in the second half but goal-line technology has not yet reached the Scottish Borders.

That moment of controversy aside the visit here was well worthwhile. On a gloriously sunny afternoon several spectators watched the action from deck chairs. I really enjoyed my visit here; Kelso are a friendly club who played some fine football with the added bonus of a finely-produced programme which is clearly a labour of love. The East of Scotland League website is a wealth of information and provides an updated scores service throughout the afternoon. A visit to Woodside Park comes highly recommended.

We picked up our friend from Longtown on the journey south and made home in daylight- what a bonus after months of travelling down the M6 in darkness.

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