

TT No.48: *Mike Latham* - Sat 21st December 2013: West Lancashire League Premier Division; **Fleetwood Hesketh** 0-4 Blackpool Wren Rovers; Att: 30 (h/c); No admission or programme; FGIF Match Rating: 3*.

The last Saturday before Christmas and I had to stay local today; as Sea Cop was one of the few West Lancashire grounds, I hadn't visited I decided the short journey to Southport made sense. We once bought a Beagle pup from Banks nearby, Henry was his name, what a fine dog he was. I thought about him and long walks along the canals and through the woods and forests of Lancashire as I made my way towards the coast. I passed the nursery owned by the former Bolton Wanderers and Huddersfield Town defender Dave Sutton on my way- Wanderers, captained by Sutton won at Wrexham on the last Saturday of the season to earn promotion from the old Fourth Division in the late 1980s. The following day Horwich RMI defeated mighty Weymouth in the final of the GMAC Cup at Grundy Hill. Happy days!

On paper third v second promised much but the visitors were far superior and won at a canter. Once members of the NWCL they have been in this league, effectively tier 7 of the pyramid for the past 20 years or so. Their ground runs parallel to that of Squires Gate while AFC Blackpool (formerly Blackpool Mechanics) are just across the way. There must be a keen competition for players in these parts but Wren Rovers are consistently one of the best teams in the WLL and always field good, competitive sides. One of their officials told me they were just six goals short of registering 1,000 in the WLL and they went very close to reaching the landmark on a chilly but dry afternoon.

Wren Rovers had two impressive players up front whose pace and movement completely bamboozled the home defence. Three-up after 20 minutes, Rovers added a late fourth to keep up their pursuit of Charnock Richard at the top.

The Sea Cop ground is located on Fylde Road in the northern end of Southport, easily reached from the main Preston Road by car. It's shared with cricket, the cricket team playing in the Liverpool & District Competition. The cricket pavilion is located on the halfway line and provides dressing rooms and an elevated view from the upstairs room, from where cups of tea were sold at halftime. It's effectively a one-sided ground with the spectators gathering behind a post and rail fence. There is no standing behind either of the goals, and the far side backs on the cricket square and the rest of the ground.

One gentleman spent the afternoon trimming trees around the perimeter of the cricket ground - the kind of volunteer work that often goes unnoticed once the cricket season starts. He did so quietly while in the nearby social club preparations were being made for a Christmas party.

Many games today were postponed due to waterlogged pitches in the WLL but the pitch here was fine, firm, well grassed and flat. I thought the young referee,

assisted by two senior linesmen did well, but he didn't show too much Christmas spirit by despatching a home defender for a second yellow late on.

The WLL is excellently administered and has a good website while many clubs have twitter feeds. The standard of play was better than many North West Counties League games I've seen over the years. It was a good win for Wren Rovers and a good afternoon out on the Lancashire coast.

04/20