

TT No.75: *Mike Latham* - Sat 1 March 2014: Cumberland County Cup Q-Final, Keswick 4-2 Cleator Moor Celtic; Attendance: 130 (h/c); Car parking: honesty box; Admission: donation; No programme; FGIF Match Rating: 4*.

Fitz Park in Keswick is a glorious setting, no wonder that the cricket ground here, with its splendid views of Skiddaw was voted the loveliest cricket ground in England by Wisden Cricket magazine in 2001.

It's the first day of Spring and the weather alternates between glorious sunshine and glowering clouds that bring brief bursts of rain and then help produce a stunning rainbow over the mountains.

The cricket square is roped-off, the pavilion still closed-up and the sporting attention of the town has switched to the football field at the far end of the park.

Keswick FC had a nomadic existence until recently, alternating their home ground between a caravan park at Walker Park and a field on the edge of the cricket ground. But now they've got an impressive new home, an enclosed field with a splendid pavilion with changing rooms, part-funded by the Football Foundation.

Keswick is busy- there's a film festival taking place over several days and I meet up with an old friend who's just sat through four hours of *Gone with the Wind*. He's back, bleary eyed at 5-45pm sharpish for a viewing of the *Forgotten Kingdom* but has nipped out to watch an intriguing quarter-final in the county cup.

The home side are second favourites- after all, despite their consistent form they're in the Westmorland League whereas the visitors are sitting proudly third-placed in the Wearside League. I must declare an interest- the home centre-back is a cricketing friend of mine and has a List A 50 to his name after putting Warwickshire to the sword at Wormsley two years ago, batting at no11.

He lives in Borrowdale, but he's not the most famous footballer from the small and remote Lakeland village- that tag belongs to his brother who plays for Workington Reds in Conference North.

The football club are deeply rooted in the local community: they run several junior teams and also a veteran's and women's team as well as two senior sides. Their pavilion is beautifully designed and fits into the surroundings perfectly. There's a raised viewing area from where most of the spectators gather but there are plenty of vantage points around the rest of the ground. All the time the game is in progress a stream of visitors passing alongside the adjoining bank of the River Greta.

The game is fast, furious and well-contested, played on a damp but very flat playing surface that encourages the passing game and with a stunning panorama of mountains, some of their peaks frosted by snow as the back-drop.

The visitors fall behind inside the first minute after a quick passing move. Keswick are 2-0 up late in the first-half and extend their lead with a third goal early in the second half.

Though Celtic pull back a goal from the penalty-mark (my mate to blame for a handball- or was he? A push in the back is claimed) Keswick seal the tie with a well-worked fourth goal. The visitors finish strongly, pull back a goal and dominate the closing stages but Keswick's victory- and their path into the last four of a prestigious competition is fully merited.

My friend's off back to the film festival, to watch the first film ever produced in Lesotho. But he's seen plenty of real-life drama at Fitz Park. And in no time at all I'm back on the M6 south reflecting on a great day-out in Lakeland. The local newspaper, the Keswick Reminder, is a wonderful source of local news, produced in a traditional way. They'll have no problem filling their sports news pages this week.

04/20