

TT No.23: Mike Latham - Wednesday 15 October 2014: Scottish League 2: **Berwick Rangers** 2-2 Montrose; Attendance: 347; Admission: £12; 32pp programme: £2; Team-sheet: 20-pence.

On a mild and still October evening I had the good fortune to be at the only senior game in the country. I say good fortune because it was a pleasure to re-visit Shielfield Park which has undergone a major smartening up since my last visit over a decade ago.

The floodlights are superb and the playing pitch immaculate, and the terraces and stands have also benefitted from some 'TLC.' You soon forget about the speedway track around the pitch, especially given the good standard of football. It's a classic, oval shaped football pitch, fantastic.

Berwick is in Border country- technically part of Northumberland but with many links with Scotland. It's an interesting town to visit, especially the pier area with its links with LS Lowry who painted here and spent time in the area.

And we are in Scotland for football purposes, so that means that we'll see good football. The difference between the way teams approach the game north and south of the border is marked. The composition of the Berwick team proved the point- several players around 5ft6 in height who would struggle to get a place in the physicality of the English game, dominated so often by long ball.

The game had been rearranged due to Montrose having a cup replay. It seems ridiculous that teams have to travel such long distances, especially on midweek evenings, to play before a few hundred spectators. But this was a splendid game- both sides tried and largely succeeded to play neat, constructive football and the game was easy on the eye.

Berwick took a 2-0 lead and looked good value for a win but just before half-time conceded a sloppy goal. Montrose improved in the second half and their persistence paid off with an injury time equaliser.

Parking is easy on the approach to Shielfield, which is in Tweedmouth of course and not Berwick. There's an excellent catering van inside the ground and a well-produced programme, albeit one that doubled up for Saturday's visit of Elgin City. Once inside you can choose to go in the stand or watch from the covered terrace opposite. Team-sheets are available from the club shop which is a nice touch often over-looked.

The locals seem a well-balanced bunch, long suffering perhaps. They were friendly and chatty and were very proud of the traditions of their side who have enjoyed occasional moments of success over the years.

Roadworks on the A1 made the journey home difficult. The stretch south of Berwick is closed at nights for the next few weeks and requires a tortuous re-route

along dark B roads accompanied by huge wagons. I think this stretch is also closed at weekends so allow extra time for your journey if coming up this way.

My previous visit here was for a pre-season friendly versus Sunderland so I was pleased to come back for a 'proper' game. It is just a shame that the Borderers struggle for support as they are a friendly and welcoming club and a trip here is an enjoyable one.

04/20