

TT No.12: *Mike Latham* - Sat 3 October 2015: **Hexham** v Spittal Rovers; Northumberland FA Minor Cup Round 2; Result: 2-1; Attendance: 30 (h/c).

It had been a glorious week weather wise, warm, sunny and dry and a trip to Northumberland seemed the ideal way spend the first Saturday of October and the first since my cricket commitments had ended for the summer.

Hexham is a market town on the A69 road between Carlisle and Newcastle, ideally situated for me as my wife wished to spend the day at nearby Vindolanda and the Roman Army Museum as part of her studies into Hadrian's Wall.

Unfortunately, Saturday dawned misty and chilly and the mist never really lifted all day, but even so we persevered with Plan A and were rewarded with a good day. Incidentally I must pay passing mention to Hayton Farm Shop and Cafe on the A69 near Brampton where the food is really excellent- I shall be calling again on my visits across to the North East. The home-made cottage pie and beetroot is fantastic.

This was an intriguing cup-tie even though the Northumberland FA seriously need to re-think their marketing strategy. It's very hard to enthuse about a competition entitled the Minor Cup- winning it even would not be a major achievement surely, merely a minor one.

Hexham FC play in the centre of town at the Wentworth Leisure Centre. It's conveniently situated next to the railway station and a major retail park and is an imposing ground for the level at which Hexham FC play- the second tier of the Northern Football Alliance.

I liked the ground; it had a more enclosed feel than many pitches that adjoin leisure centres, the pitch was well grassed and in good nick and a grassed bank on the far side backed by the imposing Station Inn gave the ground a feeling of grandeur. The leisure centre looks superbly maintained and there is a small seated stand, though all the spectators chose to watch the game standing around the pitch surround. The views to historic Hexham Abbey add to the atmosphere.

Visitors Spittal Rovers had travelled down for the tie from Berwick-on-Tweed. Their club, initially formed in 1884 has happily been reformed this year and they are starting off again on the footballing ladder, currently playing in Division 2 of the North Northumberland League. They certainly seem a club with drive, enthusiasm and ambition to regain their former place in the Northern Alliance and I wish them every success. They have a very informative Facebook page and some enthusiastic followers and it is great to see a famous old name being revived at a time when the pages of the weekly Football Traveller record the depressing toll of clubs falling by the wayside.

The 1-30pm kick-off suited me just fine and a very competitive and enjoyable game helped spectators forget the autumnal chill. Hexham looked the better side

in the opening stages, took an early lead and the visitors took a while to shed the lethargy of the long journey from their limbs. They had just about got into the game by half-time but then conceded a second just after the re-start.

But in the last half hour Hexham were hanging on at times as Rovers, after pulling back a goal thanks to a deflection piled forward in an ultimately unavailing search for an equaliser.

I really enjoyed my visit to Hexham which though being just 25 miles or so west of Newcastle is a relative outpost of the game in a beautiful and historic part of the country. And I shall also follow Spittal Rovers' progress with interest- they gave every impression of being a club on the up.

04/20