

**TT No.28: *Mike Latham*** - Sat 28 November 2015- West Lancs. League Premier Division; **Euxton Villa** 5-0 Hesketh Bank; Attendance: 60 (h/c); Admission by donation to football card; No programme.

With torrential rain ruling out all of my options of new grounds within two hours of home and high winds forecast I decided to stay local and pay a re-visit to one of my favourite grounds.

I've been to Euxton Villa many times but each time I go I notice something has been done to improve the facilities at a beautifully appointed ground. Sure enough, the car park had been extensively expanded and improved since my last visit and the fantastic array of advertising boards had been extended, giving the ground a nice enclosed feel.

Euxton (pronounced 'Ex-ton') is a small village west of Chorley and south of Leyland. The original village settlement was near the ford over the River Yarrow alongside the route of an old Roman Road, now the A49. The village is known for its private hospital, occupying the building that was once Euxton Hall and the erstwhile manorial seat of the Molyneux and later the Anderton family. Runshaw College, a well-known and highly regarded further and higher education college has its main centre nearby and the village also has a cricket club who play in the Ribblesdale League.

Euxton was also once the site of the Royal Ordnance factory (ROF) which at one time employed over 40,000 people and was the biggest munitions filling factory in the world. The bouncing bombs used in the Dam-Busters raid were made there. In the early years of this century the site was flattened and much of the land of the old ROF site has now been transformed into the new Buckshaw Village while Bolton Wanderers built an impressive training ground there during their heady days as a Premier League club.

Euxton Villa FC is a massive part of the local community and runs around 20 teams under its umbrella including junior teams for boys and girls, and teams for veterans and those with disabilities. The club, originally formed in the early years of the 20th century, developed considerably after it bought a piece of land off Runshaw Hall Lane in 1986, developing three pitches, a junior pitch and training area. Nearly thirty years on, the ground is hugely impressive with a smart club house and a main playing pitch that drains excellently despite the torrential rain of the last few weeks.

I like the West Lancashire League; it is well organised, has a brilliant website and is well run, while the standard of play is invariably entertaining and keenly fought. A lot of clubs and players are quite content to stay at this level of the pyramid and play at a competitive and decent standard. Euxton Villa's ground, in a rural setting and tree-lined is a lovely place to watch football and the care and attention that is lavished on the ground by club committee and volunteers is readily apparent. I

spotted a couple of familiar club stalwarts leaning on the barrier behind the goals as I arrived and it reminded me just what a debt football owes to hard-working volunteers such as these who work tirelessly to maintain an amateur football club that is a huge community asset.

Known as the Jim Fowler Memorial Fields, Euxton Villa can be rightly proud of their ground and the range of well-maintained advertising boards is quite remarkable for a club at this level. The club house was busy serving hot drinks and snacks on a chilly and wet day and everyone was friendly and good humoured.

It was a decent game, too, Euxton leading 1-0 at half-time, though I thought at that stage the visitors had looked the more purposeful side. But the second half saw Euxton dominate and they went on to record a convincing victory, Daniel Morris scoring a hat-trick.

As this was a 2pm kick-off there was time to nip down the old Roman Road to Charnock Richard, who were entertaining Crooklands Casuals in the same division. Charnock is another pleasant village close to Chorley and another club to have developed their facilities at an impressive rate.

This was the first time I'd been to their Charter Lane ground since they installed floodlights, which means they can kick-off at 3pm throughout the season. They have also built an impressive changing room block incorporating a tea bar and have a seated stand of the halfway line. It's another hugely impressive facility. Leading 3-0 at half-time Charnock went on to record a thumping 10-0 victory and just as at Euxton the pitch stood up remarkably well to the deluge.

It was a brilliant afternoon of grass root football at two progressive local clubs who provide an invaluable service to their local communities.

04/20