

TT No.60: Mike Latham - Sat 27 February 2016: NWCL Division One: **Chadderton** 1-1 Holker Old Boys; Attendance: 44.

From time to time this season I've been re-visiting grounds in the North West Counties League that I first visited 30 years or so ago.

After the rains had mercifully kept away for a few days and the forecast frost was nowhere near as intense as forecast there was a full programme of games to choose from, something of a rarity in this weather ravaged winter.

I'd last been to Chadderton in the early days of the NWCL which was founded in 1982 and my memories are of a rather ramshackle ground lacking in a bit of tender loving care.

So, you can imagine what a surprise, and a pleasant one to visit the ground in 2016. It is a credit to the club officials who battle to keep the club going and looked absolutely superb in the weak winter sunshine.

Chadderton's ground is on Andrew Street just off Broadway, the major thoroughfare from Oldham towards Manchester. Oldham Athletic's Boundary park ground is close by and there is plenty of parking, some of it inside the ground.

A large club house with smart red signs dominates the entrance. This is used as the dressing rooms, and has a tea bar and a committee room. Alongside the Broadway side of the ground is a covered terrace with three rows of bench seating straddling the halfway line. Behind the far goal is a banking that gives a great view of play and on a walk around the ground to take photographs I was in the perfect situation to see the build-up and finish of the visitors' equalising goal late in the game.

It was good to meet up again with Ian Templeman, one of the unsung volunteers who keep grass roots football going. Ian oversees the fantastic NWCL website which is a simply superb source of reference and news and together with a group of colleagues is responsible for the smooth running and operation of a league that is a favourite of many groundhoppers. The amount of hours Ian and his colleagues must put into the league over the course of a year is incalculable.

The NWCL has thrived since its formation in 1982 and these days has a premier division of 22 clubs and a second tier of 18 clubs at levels five and six, of the football pyramid. Getting the one available promotion place to step four from the highly competitive premier division must be one of the hardest tasks in football and this season the race for the championship is as tight as ever.

The second division covers a huge geographical area from Hanley, Eccleshall and Whitchurch in the south to Holker Old Boys in Furness on the outskirts of Barrow to Barnoldswick and Silsden in the east. The grounds are also vastly different ranging from Widnes Town who play on a 3g surface at the magnificent rugby league ground in the town to more homely settings like Daisy Hill. With several clubs

looking to join the league the second division may soon be up to its full complement of 22 clubs.

Chadderton have been in the top flight for eight of the 34 seasons the NWCL has operated and this season are in mid table in the second division. They shaded this competitive game until Holker's late equaliser that gave them another precious point towards their promotion aspirations.

Andrew Street looked immaculate, superbly maintained and lots of bright red paint on the pitch surrounds and the surrounds neatly kept. The playing pitch was also excellent despite the ravages of winter. I'd recommend a visit here and indeed would highly recommend a hop around the NWCL for those groundhoppers looking for new league to conquer.

04/20