

TT No.023: 12/02/05 Club/Ground Focus: *Mike Latham* - Colne (NWCL)

Holt House, Colne is one of most atmospheric and memorable Non-League grounds in the country, situated high on the bleak and windy moors overlooking the old mill town in East Lancashire with stunning views of the landscape below. Formerly home to Colne Dynamos FC, who enjoyed a meteoric rise through the pyramid in the 1980s, capped by an FA Vase Final defeat of Emley in 1989 it is now the home of Colne FC, who earned promotion to the North West Counties First Division in 2003/04. Colne's bid for a second successive FA Vase quarter-final appearance ended in disappointment when they lost 2-3 to Didcot Town (attendance: 587).

The visitors looked bemused in the first half as they defended up the steep slope and were lucky to go in trailing only 1-0. The Lancashire weather did its best to throw everything in its repertoire at the Oxfordshire side with dark glowering clouds producing squally rain showers then giving way to bright sunshine while all the time a fierce wind chilled the senses. "They'll be glad the weather isn't bad," said one terrace sage as Didcot warmed up on the rain-soaked pitch in a chill factor that would have dimmed the enthusiasm of the most intrepid Antarctic explorer.

Holt House is reached by venturing up the steep hill out of the town and is only a mile or so from the end of the M65 motorway. Next door the local rugby union club, Colne & Nelson RUFC, base their headquarters while several adjoining pitches host local amateur soccer. Admission was only £4 with a 36-page programme selling for a bargain £1. There was a well-stocked club shop and a tea bar with extremely pleasant staff did good business, selling delicious and reviving hot pies for £1 and hot drinks for 50p.

The ground is covered on all four sides with Colne's most vociferous supporters gathering behind the top goal at the rugby club end. The pitch is tightly enclosed and the views of the action excellent from any vantage point with the spectators so close to the action the atmosphere could be intimidating were not the locals so friendly. A small main stand adjoins the vice-presidents bar on one side and a small lean-to covering is situated on one part of the opposite side with the tea-bar and club shop in the corner. There is open terracing behind the dug-outs opposite the main stand and a covered end behind the lower goal.

A visit to Holt House is a must for any connoisseur of the Non-League scene and highly recommended. The writer took with him an Australian visitor who was captivated by the atmosphere and views (and the meat and potato pies). "You wouldn't find this in any Rough Guide to England but it should be," he said. "I feel like I've experienced England and Lancashire at its raw best. I'll certainly remember my visit to Colne for a long, long time."

