

TT No.195: Andrew Gallon - Sat 31st March 2007; **Caistor Rovers** v CGB Humbertherm; Lincolnshire League; Res: 0-0; Att: 20 (h/c); Admission: Free; Programme: £1 (32pp); FGIF Match Rating: *.

Anyone with the idea Lincolnshire is as flat as an England performance under Steve McClaren would find historic Caistor startling. Its narrow streets form vertebrae in the spine of the picturesque Wolds and rise to what for this neck of the woods are dizzy heights. These days it is a sleepy market town but archaeological finds indicate the Romans were here in numbers before the first century AD. The name derives from the Latin *Castra*, meaning camp. Parts of the wall the Romans built (one of their less feted efforts) remain amid what are now mostly red-brick Georgian buildings, including several grand town houses. Strangely, the market place - by implication, the focal point of Caistor - is rather shabby; it is the lanes leading off the central hub which are the treasure chests of cherished architectural gems.

Rovers pay peanuts to play at the council-owned Sports Ground, on the north-western edge of town. The footballers are very much junior partners in a sharing arrangement with Caistor Town Cricket Club, one of the stronger teams in the county. The easiest approach is off the A1084 Brigg road. A winding lane takes you past an immaculate bowling green and into a car park to the rear of the single-storey, brick-built social club and dressing room complex, opened in 1986. Football is scarcely represented in the impressive social club, the walls of which bear testimony to the enduring success of the cricketers. A shirt, signed by man of the moment Monty Panesar, has pride of place next to windows which look out over the square. A buzzing, circling motor mower tells of changing seasons and points to the summer ahead.

The football pitch is 100 yards over to the left, beyond tennis courts and a children's playground, and is roped off. Its distance from the dressing rooms will create problems if Rovers ever look to join a higher league. Behind the left-hand touchline is a curious oblong building, made variously of brick, wood and breeze block. It's firmly padlocked. Perhaps this could be converted into more convenient changing rooms. Modern houses lurk behind wooden fencing and bushes on each side and beyond the far goal, behind which runs the minor road to North Kelsey. The rolling, rounded, chalky Wolds provide a pleasant backdrop and the tower of the parish church of St Peter and St Paul peeps over the foliage. A quintessentially English scene: everything trim, orderly and in its place.

Sadly, the game is shorter on charm. Today's visitors are neighbours CGB Humbertherm, a club named after their sponsors. Comprising mostly lads from the Grimsby area, CGB play in Fulstow, a village midway between Grimsby and Louth. A strong, chill wind blows down the pitch fiercely from the direction of the North Sea and makes anything but haphazard football virtually impossible. Some matches look like finishing goalless after 10 minutes; this has that air during the warm-up.

Rovers have the gale at their backs in the first half and struggle to tame it with all the difficulty of a saddle-sore cowboy at a rodeo. The three chances they make fall to Gary Nimmo, who manages to get only the first on target. The striker's second miss is simply astonishing. Keeper Paul Bedlow fumbles a 20-yard Chris Scott free-kick and Nimmo, no more than four yards out, somehow scoops the rebound over. CGB, inevitably, have more of the ball after the break and should have scored when Robbie Beecroft, unmarked in front of goal, lobs keeper Scott Vincent and clears the crossbar narrowly. And that's about it. An extremely poor advert for the Lincolnshire League, I'm afraid to say.

Caistor, in common with Skegness and Hykeham, issue programmes in this tiny 12-team competition. Rovers' effort is undeniably basic but, as ever, something is better than nothing. Full marks for having a go, which is what the players deserved, too.

06/20