

**TT No.249: Andrew Gallon** - Sat May 10th 2008; **Knaresborough Town v Beeston St Anthony's**; West Yorkshire League Prem Division; Res: 0-2; Att: 80 (h/c); Admission: £2 (incl. 40pp prog); FGIF Match Rating: \*\*.

Ambitious Knaresborough Town have big plans. They are keen to develop their neat, tidy Manse Lane ground with an eye eventually on winning a place in the Northern Counties (East) League. Construction work on a new clubhouse is to start shortly, a planning application for floodlights has been submitted to the appropriate local authority and the club hope also to get the go-ahead to build a second stand. NCEL officials have inspected the ground, so Boro now have a clear idea of exactly what they need to put in place before they can be given the green light to make the big step up.

The club, whose present stint in the West Yorkshire League began in 1993, have every right to feel buoyant. Since the arrival of manager Brian Davey in the second half of last season, they haven't looked back. Davey, who came with a good record in local football and a remarkable collection of tattoos, masterminded an astonishing run of results which transformed Boro from apparent relegation certainties to hardy survivors. And that form spilled over into the present campaign. Boro will finish the season third in the Premier Division behind runaway champions Carlton Athletic and second-placed Bardsey, and two days before this fixture they lifted the Whitworth Cup for the 20th time, beating Harrogate & District League giantkillers Spa Athletic 3-1 in the final at Harrogate Town's Wetherby Road ground. Average gates have climbed to the 100 mark and, as editor Paul Howard noted in an impressive programme, there is a "happier, healthier atmosphere" about the club than in past years when on-field struggles affected everyone's morale.

Trust me, then, to catch Knaresborough Town on an off day. Neither they nor south Leeds-based Beeston St Anthony's played particularly well. Not that you could blame the players. It was way too hot for football, or doing anything but collapsing in the shade, and there was nothing at stake. As one Town official - who had better remain nameless - remarked to me as the referee blew to end an opening 45 minutes almost entirely devoid of incident: "That's a shocking half. You couldn't have picked a worse game." The second period was better though, in truth, it could scarcely have been worse. Most of the chances, however, were created by the visitors who, with steadier finishing and a more composed final ball, would have won at a canter.

Boro almost broke the deadlock in the 56th minute from their best move of the match. A fast break upfield ended with Matty Thompson putting Liam Gray through but the Boro skipper's shot was blocked by the legs of advancing keeper Brendan Wood. From that point, it was nearly all Beeston. Boro keeper Gareth Dight turned a Liam Young (58) effort on to the inside of a post and then scrambled back to make a save having got a hand to a lob from Lee Parker (60). Team-mate Andrew

Sharp (80) was inches wide with a lofted effort with Dight hopelessly stranded before Boro's Thompson (84) slid a low shot past an upright when put in the clear by Gray, the hosts' most effective player. Parker (85) was denied a certain goal when defender Mark Baranovsky got in the way of his close-range blast but the Saints midfielder was not to be thwarted for much longer. With four minutes to go, Parker rammed the ball into the roof of the net from six yards after Dight had used one hand to turn aside his initial shot. In stoppage time, he picked up a loose ball in the box following another Dight block, this time from big Tony Garth, and kept his head to fire a low effort between two backtracking defenders on the goal-line. Game over. It was only Boro's second defeat in 15 games. No wonder Beeston, gaining revenge for a home loss at the hands of Boro earlier in the season, looked so pleased.

Knaresborough is one of the jewels in North Yorkshire's glittering crown. The view into the wooded gorge of the River Nidd from the ramparts of the town's 14th Century castle surpasses anything better-known neighbours York and Harrogate can offer. It's a classical scene. Rowing boats, waterside cottages, trees bursting gloriously into leaf, trains rumbling slowly across an ornate four-arch viaduct high above a lazy S-bend in the river and, gazing down reverentially from the rear of the canvas, the squat tower of the parish church of St John the Baptist. Stunning, and an experience not to be missed - even if your ultimate destination is the football ground.

It (almost) goes without saying that Manse Lane is a little removed from Knaresborough's numerous visitor attractions. It's on the eastern fringe of the town and handy for the A59 route in from the A1. The ground is adjacent to an industrial estate, as uninspiring as only these places can be. The signs on the York and Wetherby roads into town refer to a 'technology park' but don't be fooled - it's an industrial estate. Access to the ground is through iron gates painted red with the club's name picked out in white lettering. They lead into an unmade car park on the near side of a pitch surrounded by a post and rail fence painted white. To the left, a modern single-storey brick building with a pitched roof houses the dressing rooms. Behind the near goal, and at a slightly lower level than the pitch, is a venerable clubhouse. This, accessed via steps from the only bit of hardstanding in the ground, has a pitched roof with a flat-roofed extension and within its cramped, dark but blessedly cool confines manages to cram a bar, a stage and an ample supply of tables, chairs and affable company. There are team photographs from yesteryear on the walls but, in appearance and atmosphere, it's akin to a village scout hut. Its days are numbered. The new clubhouse - or pavilion, as the plans on display describe it - will be tacked on to the dressing rooms, with the ground's access gate moving further down Manse Lane towards the Wetherby road. The old clubhouse will be demolished and the proposed new stand built at this end, where there is plenty of spare turf leading up to detached homes on Crestholme Close.

The sole stand, about 25 yards along, straddles the halfway line on the far side. This, apparently, is at least 50 years old and has a roof of corrugated iron sheeting propped by three columns over a brick superstructure. Inside, an unterraced layer

of concrete slopes gently up towards the rear. In front is a breeze block dugout, painted white and with UPVC glazing, used by the away team. To the rear of the stand, beyond another generous expanse of turf and a line of mature trees, is the isolated Hosby House and its expansive gardens. There is more grass and another bank of trees behind the far goal. In the corner, near-right as you enter the ground, is an ugly brick box which served time as a health club. Its blank walls and bleak metal slat fence adjoin the pitch perimeter and, beyond the car park, leave room only for a two-yard sliver of grass. The home dugout, rather larger than the visitors' version, is positioned on the halfway line on this side. On the plans in the clubhouse, the health club is denoted as squash courts. According to the estate agent's sign, the building is 'under offer'. Summat's up, clearly.

So, the chances are that by the time the 2008-09 season kicks off Manse Lane's appearance will have changed. But Boro are determined to do things at a sensible pace. They don't, in the words of one official, want to try running before they have learned to walk. The West Yorkshire League, which began life as the Leeds League, is pushing to be re-designated as a step six competition, which would make its clubs eligible for the grants available to Northern Counties (East) League members. And that would ease considerably the financial burden of improving Boro's facilities. With careful planning and good husbandry, allied to potentially decent support, there seems to be no reason why they cannot follow local rivals Harrogate Town and Harrogate Railway Athletic in marching purposefully up the pyramid.

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