

TT No.25: Andrew Gallon - Tues, 21st August 2007; **Scarborough Athletic v Rainworth MW**; Wilkinson Sword Trophy; Res: 0-1 (aet); Att: 401; Admission: £5; Prog: (32pp): £1.50; FGIF Match rating: **.

I had to remind myself this was mid-afternoon at the back end of August. The weather down by the harbour on Bridlington's bleak sea front was distinctly autumnal: chill breeze, low cloud, persistent drizzle. Through the murk, what remains of the resort's fishing fleet tilted listlessly in the cloying harbour mud. Tide out. Everyone out. Bedraggled knots of visitors, wrapped in fleeces and scarves, chewed on chips and gazed blankly into the middle distance. Morrissey's song about the coastal town they forgot to close down popped into my head. Come, Armageddon! Come!

Scarborough Athletic, formed by fans earlier in the summer from the twisted wreckage of liquidated Scarborough FC, have just begun their new life in the Northern Counties (East) League First Division. Unable to play at the old club's empty and increasingly vandalised McCain Stadium, they are sharing Queensgate with UniBond Leaguers Bridlington Town. Tonight, it's Athletic's first competitive home game. At least, I consoled myself, there will be something with a semblance of life to watch in this dreadful place.

Sadly, the footballers took their cue from the prevailing atmosphere and served up a dismal cup tie. It was the sort of game which left you praying someone - anyone - would score just to be spared the ordeal of extra-time. The proceedings stumbled into the additional 30 minutes and the spurious excitement of a penalty shootout was avoided only by Richard Smith's 109th-minute goal. Adam Fletcher's pass found Craig Wilson wide on the right and he beat his marker deftly, got to the dead-ball line and crossed low for Smith to sweep a close-range shot past Glenn Powley. Hallelujah!

The right team won. Rainworth had the best of what few chances there were. In the first half, Matt Draper struck the underside of the crossbar with a header and skipper Ian Wilkinson rapped a 20-yard free-kick against the outside of a post. On the hour, Mark Shaw squandered the clearest opening created by the Wrens, somehow slicing wide from 12 yards with only Powley to beat. Athletic, whose side comprises players drawn from local football and the Hull area (including a shedload of North Ferriby United old boys), struggled to provide any real cheer for an excellent opening night crowd of 401. A good effort, particularly in the light of a former Scarborough chairman once describing the club's spectator catchment area as being made up half of fish and half of sheep.

I'd seen Brid play at Queensgate a couple of times in the past, and this visit did little to change my rather jaundiced opinion of the ground, which is located between the harbour and the old town. The latter, a few streets of handsome Georgian buildings and the wonderful priory and its grassed close, is just 10

minutes' walk from the football and well worth a look. The ground is bedded into a rather grim council estate and is adjacent to the Dukes Park home of the town's rugby union club. A large, metal car park leads to the adequate social club (attractive logos on the windows) and the turnstiles. Through those and the main stand is on the right. This a modern, pitch-length structure but viewing from it is badly affected by the number of roof supports, floodlight masts and the unwieldy glazed boxes of the executive element. These boxes, positioned on the halfway line, extend beyond the front row of the red, plastic, tip-up seats and make it difficult to see into the corners. Other than failing in the basic function of providing a good view of the pitch, it's a decent stand.

The far end is dominated by a green giant of a gasometer to the rear of the perimeter fence, with a low covered area to the right of the goal as you look towards the sea. The only other cover provided is on the side opposite the main stand and consists of bus shelters joined together. Cheap and cheerful. Behind this is the rugby union ground, with the sole stand turning its breeze block back on the football. Open hard standing fills in the gaps, though the near end is an ugly hotchpotch of clashing huts and sheds, all, no doubt, with key roles to play in staging football at this level. A steeply angled fence of metal sheeting surrounds a pitch which, though in good condition now, may deteriorate with the punishment ahead. The landscape is flat, with a couple of church spires reaching for the sky to break the monotony.

Programmes, I find, are generally a handy litmus test of a club's overall health. Athletic score highly with their glossy, full-colour production. There is loads to read, it's well designed and good value for money. I'll leave the last word to columnist Steve Adamson, who explained thus the demise after 128 years of the old Scarborough club: "The reason is financial mismanagement of epic proportions over a number of years, coupled with disastrous public relations, by a succession of regimes at the helm. For several years the club struggled along under the shadow of CVAs and insolvency threats, and with new owners and chairmen coming and going on a regular basis, many previously loyal fans became disillusioned with the way the club was being run, while local businesses also lost faith. The glory days of our fantastic Wembley triumphs in the 1970s seemed an age away as the club lurched from one crisis to another." It's a salutary warning to all.