

**TT No.61: Andrew Gallon** - Sat 15th September 2007; Parkhouse v Kinsley Boys; Central Midlands Premier; Res: 1-1; Att: 70 (h/c); Admission: £2 (incl. 50pp programme); FGIF Match Rating: \*\*\*\*\*.

Who are you? Have you come far? Would you like a cup of tea? Three questions - in that order - you can expect to be asked within five minutes of arriving at Parkhouse, the 'must visit' club in the Central Midlands League this season. The warmth of the welcome at Mill Lane is equalled by a determination to impress on, as well as off, the pitch which proves, happily, nice guys really can be winners.

Parkhouse, who play in the hamlet of Holmgate, a mile from the former pit village of Clay Cross, know a thing or two about success. In many ways, they are a shining example of what can be achieved in the pyramid by those with the desire to better themselves. Having begun life in the Chesterfield and District Sunday League, Parkhouse have progressed via the Hope Valley Premier League and the Midlands Regional Alliance to join the CML for 2007-08. Such was their ambition, they opted to leap from the First Division of the MRA straight into the CML, fearing a season in the Premier Division of the former would be insufficiently taxing. That confidence has been vindicated by early results - a seven-game unbeaten start came to an end only four days before this fixture with a 3-0 defeat for an absentee-hit XI at Calverton Miners' Welfare.

Mill Lane, a 3.4-acre field bought from a farmer for £8,000 in 1993 and developed steadily since, is in a lovely spot whose scenic charm is rivalled in the CML only by, in my book, Southwell City and Holbrook Miners' Welfare. This peaceful, pleasant setting comes as a big surprise because Clay Cross, shorn of the income once generated by the coal industry, is jaded and faded. Life looks anything but easy here, despite an air of cheery stoicism suggesting the locals are able to laugh off their privations - and turn a deaf ear to the remorseless pounding of traffic on the A61 which barrels noisily through the middle of town. Somewhere on the winding road to Holmgate, what is undeniably 'town' becomes something which is plainly 'country'. It feels, for those who know this part of the world, like the difference between Chesterfield and Baslow.

Give yourself a few minutes to walk around. The 'mill' in Mill Lane is a little further up the road, alongside a beck and among an attractive group of stone buildings restored sympathetically as private homes. Footpaths head over stiles and ramble off through fields of wheat and livestock, while the land rises past farms to wood-topped heights.

Parkhouse, named after the hotel in nearby Danesmoor where the club have their headquarters, boast a basic but carefully tended ground, cherished with the zeal widows reserve for their wedding crystal. How much further they can climb while playing at Mill Lane may be determined by North East Derbyshire District Council planners, who had to be wooed and flattered before allowing even the present

limited facilities. There isn't any cover and the only floodlights are those around a small training pitch to the rear of the near goal. There is hardstanding everywhere save the bottom - Clay Cross - end.

A garden shed serves as the pay box and early arrival will guarantee a position in the bijou, gravelled car park. Overspill customers are directed to the edges of the training pitch. The red-brick shed to the immediate left houses the groundsman's equipment and a recently assembled collection of adjacent portable buildings, painted dark green in a council-pleasing attempt to blend in with the foliage, provides dressing rooms, refreshments, a shop, hospitality, offices and the loos. Don't take your cat into the toilets because you won't find room to swing it. The players trot down a 30-yard concrete path to reach the pitch, which is surrounded by railings and, for a club this size, an impressive number of advertising hoardings. There is a slight downward slope in the Clay Cross direction.

To the left, on the halfway line, are a couple of benches. Opposite are substantial dugouts, painted white and roofed in green metal sheeting. All but the bottom end is fringed by trees and shrubs, with a coppice behind the near goal and a gently tilting field of oblivious sheep beyond the left side. There is plenty of room for expansion - if the killjoy council plays ball. The Clay Cross end perimeter fencing is unencumbered by greenery, allowing the tight and the skint a free view. Beyond is Coupe Lane and a bland estate of red-brick semis - the sole non-rural aspect of the ground. The shapely spire of St Bartholomew's Church in Clay Cross is visible over the rooftops.

Visitors Kinsley are, in common with Parkhouse, fancied to feature in the Premier Division promotion battle and the teams serve up an exciting, end-to-end contest. Both are guilty of wasteful finishing and a draw, which might have been 5-5 on another day, is a fair result.

Parkhouse trail 1-0 at the break - but really should be several goals up. A clumsy Ryan Williams challenge on Matthew Wright in the eighth minute gives skipper Mark Lafferty the opportunity to ram Kinsley ahead from the penalty spot. Ash Walters then squanders three clear chances for the hosts, though the second sees him denied only by a brilliant reaction save from Jonathan White, who has defied a serious thumb injury to play after an 11th hour fitness test which redefines the description 'late'. For good measure, Walters's team-mate Simon Black rattles the crossbar with an awesome first-time drive from 30 yards.

Justice, however, is seen to be done three minutes into the second half when Williams's deep, hanging corner is headed in at the back post by an unpoliced Dale Crowder. Kinsley play the more constructive football during the closing stages but are thwarted by Parkhouse's veteran keeper Ian Wall, who belies his lack of height to claw away one handed a goal-bound downward header from Sean Hammonds. The burly Hammonds, as with Walters in the first half, could have had a hat-trick. Williams is unlucky in the 87th minute when White dives to palm his 20-yard free-kick against the inside of a post - and then clutches the rebound as happily as a father would his first-born child. In stoppage time, Wall ensures a share of the

spoils with a brilliant parry after sub Carl Wilson, who played in goal for Kinsley the previous week, makes space cleverly for a rasping thrust.

Dave Clark is the man behind Parkhouse's splendid programme - a widely praised issue all the more remarkable for being thrown in with admission. Clark was among those who put up the money to buy the Mill Lane site and also fills the roles of secretary, treasurer and tote promoter. As the club have progressed, and adopted a junior team from Clay Cross, more and more help has been forthcoming - to the relief, no doubt, of Clark's wife. An experienced editor, his programme production debut dates back to the Sunday League days. In my view, Forest Town are the only club in the CML to offer anything approaching the quality of the Parkhouse issue. A great effort, helping to make a visit here one of the best value for money, hops in the country.

With my car unexpectedly in dry dock, I found myself, for the first time since student days, relying on public transport to get to this game. For those who travel around this way every week (and heaven knows how you do it), the following may be useful: if arriving in Chesterfield by train, walk up into town and catch a number 51 bus (every 10 minutes) to Clay Cross from alongside the tourist information centre, which is next to the famous crooked spire. A 40-minute run (£3.40 return) takes you into the centre of Clay Cross. Holmgate Road, a 20-minute stroll from the Parkhouse ground, is a hundred yards from the bus stop, on the other side of the busy A61.

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