

TT No. 10: *Andy Gallon* - Tues August 19th 2008; **Glapwell** v Stamford; UniBond League Division One South; Res: 2-1; Att: 101; Admission: £6; Programme: £1.50 (40pp); FGIF Match Rating: ****.

Tight and tidy, Hall Corner is a smashing football enclosure. It's good to see a small club such as Glapwell making progress up the pyramid, with this fixture marking their home debut as a UniBond League member. Their promotion from the Northern Counties (East) League may encourage more groundhoppers to visit this appealing north-east Derbyshire venue, located in a tiny hilltop village boasting a coal mining pedigree. With the colliers in nearby Bramley Vale a distant memory, Glapwell, though just a couple of miles from the fume-laden roar of the M1, is now marooned in a rural wilderness of crop fields and farms. A left turning off the Mansfield road at the Young Vanish pub (named after a race horse) gives the visitor, so recently battling for road room with juggernauts on the motorway, the feeling of entering a different - and altogether better - time and place.

There is some history in this small community of 1500 souls. The ornamental gate posts beneath mighty oaks once led not to the football ground but to Glapwell Hall, which was where the dressing rooms and clubhouse now stand. The hall was demolished about 1950 after the demise of the (presumably infertile) Jackson family and the pitch laid out in the grounds for Glapwell Rangers, a forerunner of the modern club, who were not formed until 1985. Hall Corner's main entrance is a little further down the road towards Bolsover, opposite a farm. Utilitarian gates lead into a tiny - mostly unmade - car park, with twin turnstiles to the right. Once through, the spectator is behind the goal and surrounded by a gaggle of low buildings which provide hospitality rooms for directors, a resolutely closed souvenir shop, a club house and a cubby hole for the tannoy announcer, who has helpfully gummed the team line-ups to his window. The club house is cosy and contains a bar, refreshment hatch and several comfortable armchairs. They must be very hard to leave on a cold day. A barbecue under a gazebo just inside the turnstiles does a roaring trade with an impressive number of Stamford fans, who swell the gate to three figures and add a bit of noise and colour to the scene. But many miss out on a match programme because Glapwell's supply is woefully incapable of meeting demand. I strongly suspect I bought the last two copies a full 55 minutes before kick-off.

Beyond the clubhouse is a brick-built single storey pitched roof block, clearly extended, housing the dressing rooms. It is about 40 yards from the pitch, with a 'tunnel' formed of railings mounted on breeze block giving access to the playing area, which slopes downhill slightly towards this end. Every surface is painted in Glapwell's colours of black and white. This lends a neat sense of uniformity to a lovingly tended ground which has developed steadily from humble beginnings, but without losing that 'village' atmosphere. Sharp eyes will notice that even a sawn-off tree stump in one corner has been given a daubing of white paint. The four

stands are of the same simple design, with corrugated metal sheeting mounted on breeze block rear walls and supported by rows of thin metal columns. They are a mere couple of yards wide because of the compact nature of the site. The stand on the right-side shelters two steps of terracing, with breeze block dugouts, looking extremely spick and span in black and white livery, set back to leave space for technical areas. Uncovered hardstanding takes over from the halfway line. Mown grass leads to the boundary wall, behind which is a footpath heading for corn fields and the back gardens of red-brick semis on adjacent Park Avenue.

A corrugated metal sheeting fence, painted white save for a black section immediately behind the goal, is a little taller than the crossbar and gives an enclosed feel to the top end. There is just room for a narrow strip of hardstanding between Hall Corner's perimeter and the white painted metal post and rail fence which surrounds the pitch. The pleasant, tree-fringed ground, about 10 feet higher, of Glapwell Colliery Cricket Club is behind this end. The three stands on the left side are squeezed into the cricket ground portion beyond the halfway line and contain a mixture of seats on two steps of terracing. The space between the halfway line and the portable buildings at the farm end is occupied by more hardstanding. Five-a-side pitches, covered with green netting, are shoehorned into the rectangular sliver of land between the perimeter wall and a nursery (that's for plants, not children). The floodlights, which struck me as exceptionally poor, are mounted on masts. There are four per side, with two large lamps on each. But coverage wasn't good and there were areas of shadow on the pitch. Now you see me, now you don't.

Visitors Stamford are in a rebuilding phase after relegation last season. Just three members of their 2007-08 UniBond Premier squad survive, with seven players on view in this game being younger than 21. But they were unlucky not to get a point having pressed hard, down the slope, throughout the second half. If only the Daniels' finishing had been steadier against a Glapwell side recording their second straight victory after a shoe-in success at perennial strugglers Spalding United three days previously. It was end-to-end stuff from the first whistle, though my enjoyment of the opening 45 minutes was tempered by the middle-aged chap next to me relating, with unusual and excruciating frankness, the full story of his prostate cancer diagnosis. My toes curled when he got to the intimate descriptions of the MRI scan and, worse, the biopsy. It's a timely reminder, chaps - get that prostate checked out! 'Forty-somethings', like me, don't care to dwell on the fact their future consists of inevitable and inexorable physical and mental decline. I had the greatest sympathy for this chap but, in the interests of not having the edge taken off my evening entirely, swapped sides at half-time.

Back to the footy, and the hosts were ahead by the 11th minute. Michael Fox played a neat one-two with Colin Cockerill on the edge of the box and beat Martin Davies from 16 yards, despite the keeper getting something on the shot. Matt Varley's clumsy challenge on Phil Stebbing gave Dom Hallows the chance to equalise with a crisply-struck penalty into the bottom corner with 36 minutes on the clock. Golden oldie Neil Grayson (more clubs than Barney Rubble) acrobatically

slid in Glapwell's second from close range six minutes later after Danny Reet had nodded a deep Fox delivery back across goal. As happens so often, both teams tightened up considerably in the second half. Stamford's Ross Watson (56) blazed over wildly from in front of goal and, for 'Glappy', Reet (57) watched a clever opportunist effort trickle agonisingly wide with Davies beaten and the evergreen Grayson's 16-yard snap shot (62) on the turn brought a superb one-handed tip over from the Daniels keeper.

This is just the start of a big adventure for a little club but Glapwell, slap bang in the middle of a real non-league football hotbed and with the experienced Les McJannet at the helm, ought to be well equipped for the challenge ahead.

Fortunately, for those of us who have a soft spot for 'country manors', Hall Corner isn't likely to change much simply because of a lack of space.

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