

TT No.24: Andy Gallon - Sat 30th August 2008; **Church Warsop MW** v Thoresby CW; CML Prem Division; Res: 4-0; Att: 57 (h/c); Admission: £2; Programme: £1 (24pp); FGIF Match Rating: ***.

You couldn't accuse Church Warsop Miners' Welfare of lacking ambition. The Central Midlands League newcomers were formed only a matter of weeks ago but already are looking at winning promotion and further developing a ground which has been transformed during the summer. The genesis of the club lay in a change of backroom personnel at neighbours Welbeck Welfare last season. A lot of local lads suddenly found themselves displaced in the team by interlopers from Worksop and decided to set up their own outfit. Use of The Alley - surely one of the great ground names - was secured, along with a place in a CML desperately seeking fresh blood having just lost 13 clubs. The rest appears to be history in the making.

With this comfortable victory, Church Warsop have won two and drawn one of their opening three games, all of which have been played on home turf. With the club backed by generous sponsorship from a small army of well-wishers, The Alley, previously a mere Sunday league pitch, became a recognisable football ground in five short weeks. One wealthy benefactor footed the lion's share of a £10,000 bill for a perimeter fence, a metal post and rail barrier were erected; dugouts constructed and hardstanding laid. Now the club are talking about adding floodlights and a stand.

Church Warsop, almost equidistant from Worksop and Mansfield, is a rural former pit village in a picturesque part of north Nottinghamshire known as The Dukeries. With the coal industry largely worked out, it's reverted to being a green and pleasant place - a dash of red brick amid rolling, wooded countryside. The Alley is close to the ancient parish church of St Peter's and St Paul's, along Wood Lane, the back road to Nether Langwith.

The north flank of the ground runs parallel to Wood Lane, on the opposite side of which red-brick semis rise up a shallow hillside. There is plenty of street parking or if you cherish your wing mirrors you can continue past the ground, swinging sharp left into the car park of the sombre miners' welfare, a dark and forbidding presence. From here, a footpath leads through a landscaped area, past a bowls club and picnic tables, to the ground entrance. A utilitarian single-storey brick building to the left houses the changing rooms for players and officials. At the far end, down an alley, appropriately enough, a large metal container has been converted into a shop selling refreshments. The bowling green is at the bottom of the alley, and you can see clearly how a back-to-back arrangement serves both sports. Wooden benches beneath a veranda overlook the green.

A concrete path affords players and spectators access to a gate in the dimpled concrete panel perimeter fence. Programmes are on sale here and once that particular craving has been satisfied you come out in the north-west corner of The

Alley. The ground is basic but immaculate. The well-grassed pitch slopes slightly down from north to south and from west to east. Concrete hardstanding, an extension of the access path, runs along the north touchline only. The remainder is tidily mown grass. The dugouts, of breeze block painted white and with metal sheeting roofs, are positioned either side of the halfway line on the north touchline. Beyond the east end is a brick hall for community use with a footpath, again in landscaped surroundings, running right round the ground boundary. Over to the south-east, the small town of Warsop (not to be confused with Church Warsop) can be glimpsed. To the west, to the rear of the welfare, a sloping field gives grazing livestock a source of food. Warsop Main colliery, sunk in 1896, used to be nearby. The spoil heap has been flattened - the physical scars of the past are healing well. A proliferation of shrubs softens the hard edges at every point of the compass. Years ago, colliery steam whistles from five miles distant could be heard in the village. Now, all is quiet.

A poor Thoresby Colliery Welfare side scarcely forced the hosts to break sweat on the sort of humid afternoon which makes even standing still leave you feeling a bit sticky. With steadier finishing, and without the brilliance of opposition keeper Simon Haynes, a youthful Church Warsop team would have rattled up a score commensurate with the cricketing weather. The visitors are a well-established CML club and to win so emphatically augurs well for the future at The Alley.

Church Warsop's front men found more space than Russian astronaut Yuri Gagarin down the middle in the first half. Head-in-hands Dean Rick had squandered two one-on-ones before team-mate Gavin Dobb (17) showed him how it should be done. He raced on to a defence splitting through-ball from the effective Jason Edwards to plant a clever shot past the advancing Haynes. Danny McLane set up the second with a strong run to the left dead-ball line in the box. When Haynes committed himself far too soon, Bryn Jones (23) was able to stab home from close range in a scramble. Edwards (26) fired a sitter over, Dobb (30) was thwarted by Haynes when clear and Rick (38) saw an angled drive strike the underside of the crossbar before bouncing down on the goalline. Shades of Geoff Hurst. Church Warsop keeper Craig Payne was finally called upon in the 40th minute and denied with one hand Josh Wallak, who was put through by a peachy Matt Worthington pass. But when the visitors failed miserably to clear an in-swinging corner, Rick (42) headed number three at the back post. So, mono-directional had the play been, my neck was aching from lack of exercise.

The second half was anti-climactic. The balance of power was more even but Thoresby never threatened to get on terms and Church Warsop struggled to kill them off. Haynes's agility foiled Rick (55) and Jordan Johnson (56) before Dobb (62) sliced wide with the net at his mercy. Eventually, the pressure told. Glenn Natriss's determination on the right wing produced space for McLane to shoot and when Haynes pushed the ball out Rick (89) reacted quickest to squeeze in the rebound. There was just time for Wallak (90) to lob fractionally over for the visitors, who were apparently doomed to becoming Church Warsop's first clean sheet victims of the season. Ample added time terrified TBNTM (The Bloke Next to

Me). He was a groundhopper who'd come all the way from Surrey by train and had to get back to Shirebrook station for 1702. Hope his dash was successful.

Despite their lofty ambitions, Church Warsop officials maintain the down-to-earth CML's appealing reputation for modesty and friendliness. The Alley looks set for bigger things but I'm sure this is a club which will always remember where the story began. It would be interesting to see their team play more demanding opposition. I'll try to catch up with them again away from home later in the season.

06/20