

TT No.81: *Andy Gallon* - Tue 4th November 2008; **Appleby Frodingham** v Barton Town Old Boys; Wilkinson Sword Trophy 2; Res: 2-3; Att: 39; Admission: £4; Programme: £1 (22pp); FGIF Match Rating: ****.

Nothing signals the unwelcome arrival of winter quite so decisively as fog. A teatime ham and pea-souper rolled across the flatlands of North Lincolnshire to leave this cup derby in doubt until 15 minutes before kick-off. The referee, to his credit, opted to give it a go, with fans advised to retain their admission tickets to gain free entry to the restaging in the event of a disgracefully early abandonment before half-time. The opening 20 minutes was completed in an ethereal atmosphere. Play on the far side of the pitch was all but invisible, and any loss of concentration on the part of the onlooker meant the ball disappeared into the shimmering haze, only to re-emerge seconds later in an unexpectedly different part of the field. Reminiscent of searching for mislaid soap in murky bathwater. Happily, the fog began to clear steadily and 'normal' conditions returned for the whole of the second half. This would have been a relief to the home officials, who had witnessed the previous Saturday's game, against Staveley Miners' Welfare, abandoned after 82 minutes owing to floodlight failure.

Appleby Frodingham (sometimes hyphenated; often not) are one of several go-ahead clubs in this far corner of Lincolnshire. Former founder members of the Lincolnshire League, they progressed via the Midland League to the Northern Counties (East) League but in 1986, the year of the steel strike, the management and team decamped to nearby Winterton Rangers. App-Frod reformed to contest local football and described a circuitous route via the Lincolnshire and Central Midlands Leagues to win back NCEL status at the end of last season. Their home ground, located midway between Scunthorpe and its satellite village of Ashby, is part of the impressive 36-acre Brumby Hall sports complex owned by Corus, a subsidiary of the India-based multi-national Tata Steel Group, whose awesome plant dominates the area. The Steelmen, as they're known, are run by the Appleby Frodingham Works Athletic Club. In addition to the senior team's ground, App-Frod have three other full-size pitches. Their junior section extends to a staggering 26 teams, including several for girls, and caters for players aged eight to 16. The club won the county's FA Charter Standard Community Club Award in 2005 and 2007. It makes you wonder what the national award winners get up to.

So, there's some pedigree here - and the set-up is a good one. Scunthorpe, an intriguing melange of green and grey, describes itself as an industrial garden town, and the area around Brumby Hall is one of several hereabouts to boast dazzling floral displays. By this time of year, they, along with the summer, are a fading memory, though the beds are visible when pulling into the complex's wide access road. The ground is to the right as you swing round past tennis courts and football pitches, and drive behind a large social club to a commodious metalled car park. The 'turnstile', to the left side of the social club building, brings you out on the

west touchline, which contains virtually all the facilities. The social club is of a typically 1960s design. It gets the job done without causing any heart-stopping responses. The upper floor houses a well-appointed bar and the lower the changing rooms for players and officials, a kitchen/refreshment hatch and a hospitality room for directors and their guests. Seven broad steps of terracing are sheltered by the second-floor overhang, with bench seats at the back. The NCEL website says App-Frod have seats for 15. That sounds about right. The dugouts, very tidy in red brick and steel, and featuring Corus's logo on their roofs, are positioned either side of the halfway line and set back from the white painted post and rail barrier which surrounds the pitch. A low wall of red-brick at the front of the terracing is punctured by an ornate metal gate, complete with AFFC motif, between the dugouts. Three plaques at the rear of the cover commemorate the opening of the new changing rooms (December 1991), the switching on of the floodlights (November 2000) and former player Kevin Stentaford, who died tragically in 2001 at the age of 20. He is described poignantly as "our team-mate and our friend". A broad strip of hardstanding, either side of the social club building and closer to the pitch, runs down to each corner flag.

This appears, unless I'm being insufferably presumptuous, the limit of Brumby Hall's spectator accommodation. There isn't any room at either end even for a path, effectively ruling out access to the west touchline, which is bounded by a hedge and a wooden fence. The ground was fully enclosed during the summer to meet the grading requirements of the NCEL overlords, though the fence at the north end is a temporary canvas affair which is removed after every game. A tree-lined cricket ground lies beyond it. The lights are of a mast pattern, with one in each corner.

I'd seen these two rivals meet at Barton's Marsh Lane ground (aka the Euronics Stadium) less than a month ago, with the home side rather fortunate to win an exciting league match 2-1. This second-round tie in the Wilkinson Sword Trophy was rather more, clear cut. Barton bossed the bulk of the play, hit the post twice; and App-Frod's second goal in the 85th minute meant the final score did not truly reflect the balance of power.

Lee Everitt, found unmarked 12 yards out by a James Hare cross in the third minute, volleyed wide a great chance to give App-Frod an early lead. And it was Barton who went ahead on 23 minutes when Lee Geraghty rammed the ball into the net off Gavin Chapman after the recently-signed home keeper had blocked a Matty McKay effort. As the fog began to clear, the game became less of a squinting ordeal to watch, and there was a better view of the Steelmen's 29th-minute equaliser. Cane Mawer picked up the ball 20 yards from goal, and, with Barton slow to close him down, cracked a low drive wide of Craig Turner's full-length dive and into the bottom corner of the net. Callum Dransfield should have given App-Frod the lead seven minutes later, but prodded tamely at Turner from close range with only the Swans keeper to beat.

Geraghty, picked out by a Roy Raspin cross in the 57th minute, saw his 12-yard shot come back off an upright but Barton went 2-1 up 10 minutes later when

skipper Carl Giblin crashed home a shot from the edge of the box after slacking by the Steelmen saw them fail to cope with a sustained spell of pressure. Geraghty, sent through by former App-Frod striker Gareth Barlow, again hit a post after outwitting Chapman in a 70th-minute one-on-one and, six minutes later, Chris Edmond cleared a McKay volley off the goal-line. Barton were cruising now and went further ahead in the 80th minute when another fabulously sexy Barlow pass put Geraghty racing away down the middle of the penalty area. This time he opted to dribble round Chapman and just had time to side-foot into the empty net before backtracking defenders closed in. App-Frod got a barely deserved second with five minutes left. Hare's in-swinging corner ended up deceiving Turner after home substitute Johnny Nicholls had provided some nuisance value by jumping in front of him.

Appleby Frodingham would, doubtless, like to see more fans at their games. The attendance for this fixture was close to their average but the gate wasn't helped by the counter attraction of Scunthorpe United and Rochdale clashing in the Johnstone's Paint Trophy northern quarter-finals at Glanford Park, a mile away. When the Steelmen and the Swans met at Barton in the league recently, the crowd was in excess of 100. Better weather, and a night off for the local professional team, might have resulted in something similar at Brumby Hall. But at least the match survived the fog - something which looked most unlikely at seven o'clock.

I can't finish without mentioning App-Frod secretary-chairman Steve Lumley-Holmes, one of the unsung heroes at this level of football whose (often unseen) hard work many of those who turn up just before kick-off take for granted entirely. While the rest of us were concentrating on the real business of the evening, Steve, having stapled the programmes, sorted out the team sheets and dealt with the match officials' expense claims immediately before the game, was announcing the line-ups, dashing to and from his microphone point to relay the goal details to the crowd, ensuring the dressing rooms of players and officials were supplied with juice and tea for half-time, carting trays of sandwiches into the hospitality rooms, and then meeting and greeting fans and acquaintances with any leftovers during the second half. I suspect he watched a mere fraction of the action. Where would non-league football be without selfless enthusiasts such as he?