

**TT No.218: *Andy Gallon*** - Wed 30th March 2011; **Whitby Town** v Hucknall Town; Evo-Stik Premier; Res: 1-0; Att: 251; Admission: £7.50; Programme: £1.50 (52pp); FGIF Match Rating: \*.

THE PLACE: Only those without a trace of romance in their souls could fail to love Whitby. Yes, I know, during the height of summer, it becomes unbearably busy, but for most visitors it remains the quintessential British fishing port/resort and the pick of several lovely towns on a compelling stretch of the North Yorkshire Coast.

Most reading this will have been to Whitby, so I won't drone on about its many obvious attractions. For my money, the essence of the place is captured by the view across the outer harbour from the north side of the Esk estuary (said to have inspired Bram Stoker to set his classic novel *Dracula* in the town), climbing the 199 steps to the parish church and the abbey, wandering the narrow streets of the old town, checking out the gallery of Victorian photographer Frank Meadow Sutcliffe's remarkable and historically priceless images, and hiking south along the picturesque cliffs as far as the lighthouse. Pre-match entertainment doesn't get any better. If you're into fish and chips (I'm not - never liked batter), they say the Magpie opposite the quayside fish market is the place to fill up.

British seaside towns, in this era of cheap air travel, generally give the impression of time passing them by. But they don't help themselves, do they? I smiled at the 'Arnold Palmer Putting Course' near the Royal Crescent during my Whitby walkabout. Arnold Palmer? Is there the slightest chance of anyone under forty having heard of the guy?

THE CLUB: A "financial disaster" is how Whitby are describing this season. Numerous postponements have hit them hard in the pocket. The potentially lucrative Saturday home fixtures with FC Halifax Town and FC United of Manchester - the division's best supported clubs - were lost to the weather, leaving the Seaside to count the cost of far lower attendances when the games are rearranged in midweek.

Whitby are desperate to retain Premier Division status in the Evo-Stik League, and probably have enough about them under wily old fox Tommy Cassidy to avoid the bottom four. I feel they're batting above their average at this level, having emerged from the Northern League (not without a few emotional cuts and bruises) in 1997. Town bade farewell to that great competition by winning the title and lifting the FA Vase. Some low life then nicked the Northern League trophy from the clubhouse.

The modern club dates from 1926, when two teams in the town merged. Whitby have, down the years, been good for an FA Cup upset, though I suspect their present level is as far up the pyramid as they can realistically expect to go. Attracting players to this relatively isolated community isn't easy and the club's

spectator catchment capabilities are limited. To borrow a description once used by a former Scarborough chairman, half of Whitby's potential spectators are fish, and the other half are sheep.

Whitby do, however, boast one of the sexiest strips in non-league football. This season's variant is all royal blue, with red, black and white stripes running down the right front side of both shirts and shorts. Very stylish!

**THE GROUND:** Always one of my favourite venues, the Turnbull Ground has been modernised over the last decade at a cost of £500,000. Whitby, unlike many clubs, have managed to improve their facilities - to Conference North standard - without damaging the considerable character of the ground. A cantilever main stand, straddling the halfway line on the north side and seating 500, has dominated the Turnbull since it was built at a cost of £370,000 and opened in March 2006. Floodlights mounted on a gantry running the length of the fascia make the structure appear more imposing than otherwise would be the case. The club shop, carrying an impressive array of souvenirs and old programmes, is at the west end. The view from the back row of this stand surpasses anything possible in the two smaller wooden structures it replaced. Look right, and the rolling heather moors immediately inland are visible; look left, and the North Sea, a couple of hundred yards away, can be glimpsed through a gap between houses. This is a charming ground with a very strong sense of place.

Equally appealing is the compact nature of this enclosure. The Turnbull is hemmed in on three sides by houses, with a grand Victorian hotel looming imperiously over the south-east corner. Such is the proximity of the houses that Whitby have erected large areas of netting behind each goal. They're unsightly, but doubtless keep the neighbours happy. A new cover, between the penalty areas, shelters shallow terracing on the south side. This stand is so similar to the original version, you barely notice it has changed. Modern plastic dug-outs are located in front. Both ends feature open hardstanding. The remaining floodlight pylons are distinctively bulky, and ensure the Turnbull can be spotted from the West Cliff area of town. The social club and offices huddle behind the main stand as if trying to escape an onshore gale. There is just room (as at Borough Park, Workington) for a small, unsurfaced car park between these buildings and a cricket ground, which is adjacent to the north and allows the Turnbull some room to breathe.

For this game, sadly, the place was a dead zone. Whitby's ground really comes into its own when hosting a crowd of 500-plus. On these occasions, the atmosphere positively crackles. In short, a venue which ought to make every hopper's 'must do' list.

**THE GAME:** Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear. This six-pointer between relegation battlers, both in the bottom four at kick-off, was simply dreadful. No surprise the only goal came from the penalty spot because neither side looked capable of scoring from open play. A draw would have been the fairest outcome.

Whitby dominated the first half, and were completely on top in the first 20 minutes. The penalty was hard on Hucknall. Fabian Smith could scarcely evade

Leon Scott's well-struck volley, but Darlington referee Tom Rogers decided it was handball. Seasiders skipper Tony Hackworth squeezed his spot-kick between keeper Ross Whalin's left hand and an upright. On the subject of sometime Leeds reserve Hackworth, I cannot believe this lad played in the Football League. As a rule, ex-pros drifting about the non-league scene look a class above the journeymen around them. Not Hackworth. His first touch was poor and his lack of pace alarming.

There were two other chances for Whitby in the opening 45 minutes. Dave McTiernan sent an angled drive narrowly over the bar and Jimmy Beadle somehow headed wide from the edge of the six-yard box. Hucknall, who didn't manager a single effort on target all night, squandered their best chance on the hour when in-form Tyiesse Nightingale stroked a low shot a foot wide when through on goal. The visitors were the better team in the second half, but proved incapable of posing a threat.

Before kick-off, I had a chat with Whitby's PA announcer and, on the strength of being a neutral, was asked to pick the Hucknall man of the match for the match sponsors. What a job that was! I gave it to Nightingale, thereby earning him a bottle of bubbly, but could have selected any of his almost equally anonymous team-mates.

**THE PROGRAMME:** Full marks to Whitby for issuing a fresh programme for a game postponed on 20th November. The original cover was used, with a sticker detailing the new date. Not, I have to say, a memorable production. Its relative thickness flattered to deceive. There was little inside to get (Dracula fashion) one's teeth into. Chairman Graham Manser's notes, lacking direction, rambled aimlessly, which at least provided some colour. But filling space between adverts with chunks of the league newsletter will always result in out-of-date, flavourless copy. A disappointment, to be honest.

**THE VERDICT:** A smashing town and a thoroughly appealing ground. Neither should be missed, though the former is best visited during autumn or winter to avoid the coach-borne hordes of blue rinses. Just pray you see a better game than this one!

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