

TT No.246: *Andy Gallon* - Sat 16th April 2011; **Grimsby Borough** v Handsworth; NCEL Division One; Res: 3-4; Att: 51; Admission: £4; Programme: £1 (24pp); FGIF Match Rating: ***.

THE GROUND: Having heard several favourable reactions to the Bradley Football Development Centre, I expected to like Grimsby Borough's £3m home rather more than I did. There is nothing to get excited about. It's bog-standard new stadium stuff. Part of a vast North East Lincolnshire Council-owned complex, the main stadium, which boasts loads of free parking, is separated from acre upon acre of kick-about pitches by two fences - one wood, one green plastic mesh. The bar, offices, hospitality rooms, toilets and dressing rooms are housed in a low red-brick structure running most of the length of the north touchline. A raised section of charcoal-hued cladding and tinted glazing prevents it from being as uninteresting as the similar building at Arnold Town. The bar, granted, is furnished tastefully enough, albeit with strong IKEA references.

Outside, Perspex dug-outs are positioned either side of the players' tunnel, which concertinas out over a broad area of flagged hard-standing. There is a small kit stand sheltering four steps of terracing behind the goal at the east (seaward) end and a larger kit stand, with four rows of black plastic tip-up seats, straddling the halfway line on the south touchline. The remainder of the spectator accommodation consists of uncovered tarmac. The place is almost sterile in its dullness. The pitch (whose threadbare condition delayed until late November the opening of the stadium) looks particularly wide. It is flat, grassy and was in excellent condition for this game, which the groundsman watched from the shady sanctuary of his garage on the north touchline. The floodlights are mounted on masts.

Behind the clubhouse is a state-of-the-art floodlit plastic pitch, on which Borough's reserve team were playing a Lincolnshire League fixture against Lincoln United's 'Stiffs'. Whatever I might think of the Bradley Football Development Centre, Borough are only too obviously thrilled with its undeniably spotless facilities. Cinderella gets to go to the ball! Mind you, after several years in exile at distant Brigg, the club will be overjoyed simply to be back in Grimsby. Which is more than I was.

THE CLUB: Born (as I remember the scenario) out of the wreckage of Louth United in 2003. Borough began life in the Lincolnshire League and, having won promotion from that, worked their way through the Central Midlands League, reaching the Northern Counties East League in 2008. Quite an achievement, given they didn't have a proper home ground and attracted dismally low crowds. This is probably about as far up the pyramid as they can reasonably expect to climb. With Louth now back in business, and the Mariners of Blundell Park the only show in town as far as most football fans on this miserable coastal strip are concerned, I'm struggling to see the point of Grimsby Borough. Or am I too cynical? Perhaps they

run loads of kiddie teams I don't know about, and may be hand-in-glove with the community.

THE GAME: Don't be fooled by the score. This wasn't an end-to-end thriller. Much of the couldn't-care-less defending from two teams with nothing to play for was distinctly end-of-season quality. It was, however, vastly more entertaining than a goalless draw! Handsworth, unbeaten in eight before kick-off and who climbed to fourth in the table with this victory, were always ahead and never looked like collecting anything other than three points against a pedestrian Borough side.

Scott Bates (10min) was allowed to turn on the edge of the box and fire in a low shot to put the visitors ahead. Andrew Taylor equalised four minutes later having run on to a great through ball, only for Alex Torr (26min) to restore Handsworth's lead, forcing the ball in from close range following a determined run and cross by Bates. Bates (57min) made it 3-1 when he got the jump on his marker to meet a free-kick from the left flank, but Freddie Cass (70min) kept Borough in it with a stunning finish, lobbing the keeper having been picked out with a tremendous cross-field pass. Sloppy work by the Borough defence saw David Cockerill (79min) turn in the box and angle home a low shot to restore the Sheffield club's two-goal cushion. An infringement in the box (I didn't see it because I was talking to the Borough chairwoman) in the 81st minute gave Matthew Oswin the chance to close the gap from the spot. We didn't get a grandstand finish. The hosts were unable to muster another telling effort on goal.

THE PLACE: It's always nice to see Grimsby - receding from sight in one's rear view mirror. In a previous TT this season covering a day out at Grimsby Town, I had my say about the place (and the even ghastlier neighbouring Cleethorpes), therefore I won't labour the point. Reaching Bradley via the Great Coates junction on the A180 allowed us to avoid the grotty shops and docks area of Grimsby. No bad thing - and at least it proved this most woebegone of towns possesses what could justifiably be described as leafy suburbs.

THE PROGRAMME: If the Northern Counties East League's rules didn't demand a programme, I suspect Grimsby Borough wouldn't bother. Despite an attractive cover, this was a dire effort. Handsworth hadn't sent either their pen pictures or a likely line-up, but rather than source them himself, Blue Day's editor left those sections blank. Imagine if you were editing a paper in a slow news week. Would you expect your readers to shell out for pages without stories or photographs? Of course not!

THE VERDICT: Those with a completist mentality (sadly, I appear to be afflicted) will feel compelled to visit this ground. If you can bear leaving the Bradley Football Development Centre 'unticked', I'd advise you to do exactly that. It's not worth the effort involved in travelling to this far-flung and largely forgotten corner of Britain. Reminding me forcibly that I've better things to do on such gloriously sunny afternoons, this was a hop that left me yearning for the end of the season.

07/20

