

TT No.31: *Andy Gallon* - Wed 25th August 2010; **Ripon City** v Boroughbridge; West Yorkshire League Prem Division; Res: 2-3; Att: 103 (h/c); Admission: Free; Programme: None; FGIF Match Rating: ****.

You'd have thought, after my scathing remarks about a recent game at Sherburn White Rose, I'd be giving the West Yorkshire League a wide berth for a little while. That might well have been the case had work assignments in Wensleydale and Dentedale not offered the opportunity of catching Ripon City's Premier Division derby with Boroughbridge on the way home to York. I'm so glad I took it. Credit where it's due; this was a cracking contest which had everything last week's Sherburn-Whitkirk Wanderers game lacked. From the first kick, both teams, seeking to entertain a very good crowd, went full tilt in search of victory. There was passion, skill, guts - and glory, at least for the visitors, who recovered from the shock of conceding a goal inside the opening two minutes to make off across the Ure with the three points. It was Bridge's first win of the season, and saw them climb from the foot of the table. No wonder they were pleased.

More of that later. Ripon's Mallorie Park ground is unusual, at least in a West Yorkshire League context, because it is more than merely an enclosed pitch. City (there's a cathedral in Ripon; by any secular measure, it's a small town) have a stand! What a thing of beauty it is, too. It may be showing its age, but they certainly don't make them like this anymore. The stand, 25 yards long by six yards deep, straddles the halfway line on the north side of the ground, part of a spacious complex adjacent to the Pateley Bridge road shared with Ripon's rugby union and cricket clubs. City are keen to sell up and leave for somewhere with more footballing elbow room where they can establish a sports complex for shared use with the community. So, the stand is on borrowed time. It has six columns supporting a roof with the club's name on the fascia. Metal sheeting over a steel frame, it shelters five rows of bench seats and is flanked to each side by whitewashed breeze block dugouts. The main pitch (and that's all it is) of the rugby union club is immediately behind, beyond a line of trees.

The rest of Mallorie Park is about what you'd expect at this level. Access is shared with the rugby union and cricket clubs. There is a small car park behind the goal at the east end and a prefabricated social club whose walls are covered in newspaper cuttings and old team photographs. The dressing rooms are hidden behind this low structure, and the players reach the pitch in the north-east corner via a passageway between the social club and the groundsman's hut. Netting on poles is positioned behind each goal, with lights (used only for training) mounted on those at the near (east) end. There isn't any hardstanding and no floodlights, hence an 18.15 kick-off. A post and rail fence painted white surrounds the pitch, which seemed on the large size to me. There is some spare turf, hence a little room to expand, between the south touchline and the Pateley Bridge road, and behind the goal at the west end. If you stand there, you get a great view of the cathedral's

west front, which is fully lit by the sun on clement summer evenings. Which, surprisingly, this was. The storms which had raged all day across southern England before rolling ominously north had run out of energy (and rain) somewhere in a line linking Hull, Manchester and Liverpool. It's about time we had some luck with the weather in this neck of the woods.

Ripon were ahead inside two minutes. Languid striker Tom Leeming was allowed to cut in from the dead ball line and beat two defenders before slipping a low shot past keeper Paul Diamond. Team-mate Dan Metcalfe found the side netting (and really should have done better) when leaping on another defensive lapse from the visitors. Leeming then had a free header at a corner, but his downward effort lacked the power to trouble Diamond. Boroughbridge turned the game on its head by scoring twice in the last nine minutes of the half. Skipper Paul Eagling found Chris Hastings unmarked 20 yards from goal in the 36th minute, and the winger swept a first-time drive with his right foot into the bottom corner. Two minutes before the break, Michael Mullenger dinked a free-kick into the box, the ball was knocked towards the back post and Fraser Lancaster looped a header over helpless City keeper Josh Donnelly.

There were chances at both ends in an exciting second half. Eagling rolled a shot inches wide with Donnelly beaten before Leeming got Ripon level 10 minutes in. A cross flew over from the right, and the lanky frontrunner beat his marker and poked a close-range shot into the net. Now, it was anyone's game. Bridge created the more clear-cut openings. Hastings (clearly a good player, but with an unfortunate propensity to 'go missing') brought a full-length dive out of the City keeper with a volley which drifted narrowly wide, and a powerful Lancaster run into the box ended with a defender blocking his shot. The winner arrived with 12 minutes to go. Eagling glided over a free-kick from the left flank, and an unmarked Ben Clayton got the faintest of touches with his forehead to help the ball across the keeper and into the far corner. Eagling rounded off a great passing move by shooting wide and Ripon's Metcalfe, with just two minutes remaining, finished wildly when presented with an acutely-angled opportunity. In stoppage time, Eagling should have made it 3-1, but was again off target when left all alone in the penalty area.

One (or rather several) things puzzled me. I didn't expect a programme, and therefore wasn't surprised when none was forthcoming. But Ripon, who can't take a gate because Mallorie Park isn't enclosed, didn't even attempt a collection. Neither, booze in the bar notwithstanding, were any refreshments available. Not even a cup of tea. It seemed a shame, with a three-figure crowd present, that City, who run four men's teams, couldn't profit in any way. Perhaps things will be different if and when they find a new home.