

TT No.67: *Andy Gallon* - Sat 11th September 2010; **Ely City** v S&L Corby; FA Cup 1QR; Res: 0-1; Att: 102; Admission: £6; Programme: £1 (24pp); FGIF Match Rating: **.

THE PLACE: The impressive cathedral and its grassy, tree-lined close aside, Ely is disappointingly ordinary. Even the cathedral, nicknamed the Ship of the Fens, appears grubby at close quarters. Seen from a distance, however, this triumph of medieval ingenuity rises majestically over a pancake flat landscape. Its bulk must have been an awesome sight in God-fearing times. Ely's dreary main street, a mere one hundred yards from the cathedral, could be anywhere in the UK. The depressing homogenisation of these islands continues.

THE GROUND: City's previous home, the Paradise Ground, was near the town centre. Their new place since 1986, anchored amid a sea of playing fields, would never merit such an evocative description. Beyond the town limits and part of a multi-sport complex shared with rugby union, golf, tennis and hockey, the Unwin Ground (named after a club stalwart) is unremarkable. A view to the south-east of Ely Cathedral at least gives it a sense of place, though. The spectator facilities are ranged along the north touchline. The main stand - tall, narrow, boxy and set back from the pitch - is the eye-catching feature. Its raised tier of seats provides a great view of the action. The dressing rooms are beneath the seating tier. A rickety wooden cover alongside the main stand is the ground's real delight. The social club/bar is gloomy and rather uninviting. The old guys who seem to make up most of the club's corps of helpers said more volunteers were desperately needed to provide extra hands and fresh ideas. I imagine the same goes for every football club in the land.

THE GAME: S&L Corby, impressive when breaking quickly, should have won by a country mile. With steadier finishing, they would have. The pace of their front two caused Ely anxiety attacks throughout a scrappy tie played on a lovely late summer afternoon. The hosts, by contrast, were laboured and predictable. Too much hit and hope stuff into the penalty area. Judging by the reaction of the locals, the Robins' dire performance was anything but a one-off. Defeat completed a financially disastrous four days for City in the wake of their shock midweek FA Vase replay culling by Gorleston. Michael Byrne, coolly rounding off a route one move, got the winner in the 10th minute. Ely missed a penalty two minutes later. David Smith's tame spot-kick was saved comfortably by Richard Lavin. After that, a City goal never looked likely.

THE PROGRAMME: Barnes Print job. Need I say more? That's probably being a bit unkind. I'm sure Barnes Print offer an invaluable service to small clubs looking to produce a programme which doesn't lose money. I just don't like a 'dead hand' approach which denies a club the chance to issue a uniquely distinctive programme bursting with originality and flair.

THE VERDICT: Thanks to the magnificent cathedral, Ely is a better than average place to visit. Precious little to excite either in the ground or in the programme, though. Paradise very much lost, I'd suggest.

07/20