

TT No.146: *Andy Gallon* - Sat 14th January 2012; **Huddersfield Town** v Oldham Athletic; League One; Res: 1-0; Att: 15,299 (1,579 away); Admission: Free; Programme: £3 (78pp); FGIF Match Rating: *.

Years ago, when I was at school, my Dad and I were regulars at Halifax Town home games. Dad wasn't one for going to away matches, which left us with a vacant Saturday to fill once a fortnight. We'd visit different clubs in the locality, and despite our allegiance to the Shaymen, were never so one-eyed that we couldn't get along to Leeds Road four or five times a season to watch Huddersfield Town, our local rivals. Halifax's visits to Leeds Road aside (and we played the Terriers in league games for much of the Seventies), we always attended as neutrals. Actually, thinking back, that's not strictly accurate. Generally, we egged on (internally, at least) whoever Huddersfield were playing. I still recall, with considerable affection, watching Shrewsbury Town spring a surprise 3-0 FA Cup win over the Poodles at Leeds Road.

Life moves on, of course, and I left Yorkshire for university and then the world of work, whilst Huddersfield quit Leeds Road (a venue with a real sense of occasion, I thought) for a new ground a couple of hundred yards away on the other side of the River Colne. The Galpharm (nee McAlpine) Stadium is shared with Huddersfield RLFC, who moved the short distance from their historic (but crumbling) Fartown ground. My affection for Huddersfield's rugby league club is genuine and long-standing, and I have been to a fair number of their games at the Galpharm. But only once for football (November 1994) have I crossed the threshold.

Having 'ticked' the Terriers in their new kennel, I had no real desire to return, but last week got an email from a colleague offering two free tickets (value £48) for the best seats in the house. My colleague is a season ticket holder and as such the recipient of random giveaways once every season. The 'Category C' visitors from over the Pennines were Oldham Athletic. After some consideration (in common with most hoppers, I don't like to waste Saturdays on pointless re-visits), I decided not to look this gift horse in the mouth. My girlfriend was keen to take in a 'Big Game' and the Galpharm is a sporting rarity: a new stadium designed in so daring a fashion as to make it worth seeing. With the temperature plummeting as the weekend drew near, my decision looked increasingly sensible. The Galpharm boasts under-soil heating, and therefore the match was guaranteed to go ahead. There'd be none of that 'fannying' around, trying desperately to find a non-league fixture that had beaten the weather.

The day started well. My Surrey-born girlfriend was suitably impressed ("bloody hell") by her first sight of Huddersfield railway station, a mere touch-finder from the George Hotel, birthplace in 1895 of rugby league. To anyone who has not seen the station, putting it on a tour itinerary might seem a bit odd. But if I say it has been described as "a stately home with trains in it", you should get the picture. To summarise: two nineteenth century railway companies had been at loggerheads for

ages, and celebrated finally agreeing to agree by constructing a very special station. With neo-classical columns, elaborate carving and breath-taking symmetry, it is the finest building in what can only be described as a very ordinary West Riding town.

Equally incontestably, Huddersfield's next most important structure is the Galpharm Stadium, shoehorned into a parcel of land between the Colne and the wooded Kilner Bank. It rises like a glittering liner above a surrounding ocean of grey. Dubbed 'The Blue Banana' at the time of its 1994 opening, the ground, inside and out, retains a powerful visual appeal. The arched roof trusses - crisp, white and futuristic - of the four cantilevered and broadly identical stands are the eye-catching element. Seductive as rearing waves, the trusses plunge steeply at each end and meet at ground level to form a part of the corner floodlight pylons known as quadropods. So simple, and yet devastatingly effective. This ground-breaking (as it were) stadium has 24,499 seats. The main (or north) and east stands are two-tiered, the other two single-tiered. For about a year, the stadium was three-sided whilst the money was cobbled together to add the east stand, behind which is a multi-screen cinema.

That the stadium was built at all is something of a miracle. When plans for it were hatched during the early Nineties, Kirklees Council, Huddersfield Town and Huddersfield RLFC between them had barely a penny to rub together, but unashamed exploitation of every grant available (the Totaliser stopped flashing at about £12m) got the job done with very little financial pain to the three (original) co-owners. The blue seats represent the football club; the claret ones the rugby league club. Ownership of the stadium has now changed, and I would not wish to poke a stick into that extremely murky pool. Suffice to say, the football club are unhappy with the present arrangements and there is even talk of them leaving the Galpharm to play elsewhere. The Shay, Halifax, has been mentioned as an alternative venue. Stropmy sabre rattling, I would suggest. Incidentally, the site of Leeds Road, a utilitarian arena highlighted by its barrel-roofed Cowshed at the north end, is now occupied by a retail park.

As for the game, well, I've deliberately left the worst to last. It was truly awful. Unambitious Oldham, too poor to make the play-offs and good enough to avoid relegation, didn't assist the spectacle by playing stoically for a goalless draw. They slowed the game down at every opportunity. Constant feigning of injury was the worst of their excesses. Not a tasty dish to put before their 1,500 travelling supporters. The sole consolation on a raw afternoon of purple fingers was that these underhand tactics did not pay off. Huddersfield's winner, a flash of quality completely at odds with the fumbling ineptitude that preceded and followed it, arrived just four minutes from the end. Danny Cadamarteri, so briefly a headline maker when at Everton, made a bold dash down the right and crossed to the near post where fellow substitute Alan Lee committed his marker to a rash challenge, dragged the ball back stylishly and then poked an angled shot beneath the exposed keeper from close range.

I had been looking forward to a first glimpse in the flesh of the much-vaunted Jordan Rhodes, but the Terriers striker barely got a kick. Apart from flashing a header inches wide shortly before the break, the Scotland international was anonymous. Zander Diamond, a lump of a centre-back with plenty of Scottish Premier League experience at Aberdeen, blotted Rhodes out of the game most effectively. And yet on his previous outing, Rhodes had scored five goals in a 6-0 Adams Park rout of Wycombe Wanderers, surprise 1-0 winners at the Galpharm on the stadium's opening day.

We left our lofty seats in the main stand's upper tier reflecting with astonishment on the paucity of skills shown by relatively well paid full-time professional players and a lack of entertainment which would have disgraced the lower reaches of the Central Midlands League. No wonder my colleague, when we met him before the game outside the club shop to conduct the tickets handover, said: "I'll apologise in advance for the football." The Galpharm Stadium is a first-class venue. Indeed, it was named 1995 Building of the Year by the Royal Institute of British Architects. What a shame Huddersfield Town, certainly in this present football day and age, will only ever have a third-rate team to play in it. And I say that without a trace of bias. Honest.

07/20