

TT No.175: *Chris Freer* - Sat March 3rd 2012; **Glossop North End** v Ashton Athletic; North West Counties Premier; Score: 2-1; Attendance: 198; Entertainment value: 3/5.

I've no idea who first coined the expression 'Bounce-back-ability' - somebody who works on Soccer AM I suspect - but it certainly sums up a positive attitude in some football clubs. Even when times look grim, as they do in a number of Football League and Conference clubs currently, it helps to look longer term. Almost like a love affair that's run its course - it hurts plenty right now, but you know it's going to be all right further down the line.

Whether fans of Portsmouth, Stockport, Kettering, Darlo and a few others see it like that at this moment in time is questionable, but football history is littered with clubs that have hit dire-straits, but their names have survived to once again grace the pools coupons. I'm thinking here of the likes of Accrington Stanley, Wimbledon, Brighton, Bristol Rovers ... clubs that have each hit a crisis point at some stage of their history but have still lived to fight another day. And I suppose, maybe to a lesser extent, you can include Glossop North End in that category.

Less than a century ago Glossop was a Football League town. The smallest town to ever have this honour, so legend has it. Backed by the financial clout of Sir Samuel Hill-Wood, whose patronage was later to transform Arsenal's fortunes, the 'Hillmen' spent several years in Division 2 - plus one memorable season in the top flight, during which they had the temerity to beat Forest 3-0 - before failing to win re-election as the First World War kicked in. About 90 years as a 'wilderness' club followed before a Wembley date in 2008 in the FA Vase final saw the club's name back on the national map. And this season there is serious optimism that promotion to the Northern Premier League can be achieved. Still four steps away from the Football League, maybe, but it's all pointing in the right direction.

My day starts with the 'cattle truck' that is the Derby to Stoke-on-Trent train, before switching to Virgin at Stoke and heading into Manchester. I have my heart set on a Wetherspoons brekky so my first port-of-call is the Waterhouse where I wash it down with an excellent pint of Peerless Paxton's Peculiar, a traditional malty bitter just as I like 'em! From here I walk up Fountain Street to the Arndale Centre where the 2012 Good Beer Guide tells me there is a place called the Micro Bar, a rare outlet for Boggart beers.

Sure enough, as I pick my way through several niche eatery's, I stumble upon the afore-mentioned bar complete with its four handpumps, a beer shop featuring a wide selection of British and foreign bottled brews, and a small cafe-style seating area. How quaint! I browse the goods whilst enjoying a swift half of Boggart's Ruby Porter, a 6.3%abv delight I'd fallen in love with at the Derby Winter Ales Festival a couple of weeks back. Just a short walk from here is the Hare & Hounds on Shudehill, and probably my favourite Manchester pub. It's a no-nonsense, multi-

room city centre boozier where you probably wouldn't take your new girlfriend (or boyfriend if you like). There's so much character the place doesn't need the music that's playing. The banter is coarse, vulgar and openly sexist, but that's from both sides. The cracking beer is Holts Bitter. Enough said!

I've just time to nip into No57 Thomas Street, which is the latest offering from the Marble Brewery. Save for a few easy chairs, there's just one long table so you need to be a gregarious sort of fellow to drink here. There's a wide range of strong - and expensive - bottled beers, plus casks of the Marble brews sitting on the bar. My Chocolate Marble is a delight on the tongue.

The 30-minute rail journey from Piccadilly to Glossop takes in some dramatic Peak District scenery and my journey is shared with enthusiastic outdoor types mainly equipped with bikes. We go our separate ways on arrival, as I head up the hill to a part of town known as Old Glossop, past charming stone cottages, ancient churches, trees full of bickering rooks, a Robinson's pub and then the Wheatsheaf, understated tap-house of the Howard Town Brewery. I'm guessing the terms of the lease doesn't allow unrestricted promotion, as there are no signs to this effect, and there's only one Howard Town beer on the bar, the 4.2% Wren's Nest, described as 'light and hoppy', sadly two words that when linked to a beer description are anathema to this scribe.

Back down into town I call into the Star Inn, directly opposite the rail station, where the five-beer range features a couple of Scottish delights, including Orkney Dark Island, one of my personal 'faves'. It would be rude not to drink one. There's a bloke sitting near the bar who seems to be smoking a cigarette. Unusual to be flouting the law right in front of the landlady, I muse. However, judging by the lack of reaction from fellow customers, plus the fact my specially trained nose can't detect any stinky nicotine odours, I'm guessing he's got one of those fancy electronic cigarettes. Wonder if I can get myself an electronic pipe!

Time's cracking on but I still have enough for a brisk walk south of the town centre - past a Holts pub, I must be mad! - to the Crown Inn, a traditional Sam Smith's multi-room local where the Old Brewery Bitter is just £1.59 a pint. OBB is a bit sweet to my tastes but at that price, who's complaining?

On the way into Glossop, the train affords a great view of the town's cricket ground, the south-east corner of which was known as North Road, the home of Glossop F.C. during their Football League days. Although there is no apparent evidence of its former glory, at least the land is still available for recreational use and not buried under bricks and mortar. North End's new Surrey Street ground is another couple of hundred yards west and although hardly palatial, is promising work-in-progress.

Behind one goal is a large admin block which provides club house and changing room facilities. The spacious clubhouse seems especially popular with the punters, and the hand-pumped Howard Town Longdendale Lights doesn't last the day. Next door the snack hatch is legendary for its locally-made award-winning Mettricks pies and I'm extremely happy to see a Cheese & Onion variant amongst all the other

delicacies. Despite being already well stuffed thanks to my 'spoons brekky and a fair, few pints, I feel obliged to add one to the mix. I survey the spectator facilities which consist of a covered terrace behind the same goal as the clubhouse, a 'scratching shed' along one side, and a compact main stand opposite.

And so, to the action, between promotion-chasing North End and mid-table visitors Ashton Athletic. While never being a classic, the game is entertaining enough, with the home side having the attacking edge and nosing into a two-goal lead by the hour mark. An Ashton reply with 25 minutes left reminds the home crowd that it's not a given three-pointer, but to be honest it never really looks like the visitors have enough 'bounce-back-ability', and so 2-1 it finishes.

Whether or not this turns out to be a promotion season for Glossop North End - 6 points off the top with games in hand on most of their rivals - remains to be seen, and it would be a real visionary who could foresee another spell in the big time for this small town club, but a day at Surrey Street certainly tops my table. Real ale, cheese & onion pies, attacking football and some good banter - what more could a man want?

There's more on my blog at <http://flynn123.wordpress.com/>

The pies the limit...

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