

**TT No.23: *Andy Gallon*** - Sat 27th August 2011; **Field** v Carlton Athletic; WYL Prem Division; Res: 2-5; Att: 38 (h/c); Admission: Free; Programme: £1 (12pp); FGIF Match Rating: \*\*\*\*.

For the second time in three days, I stumbled across a West Yorkshire League ground which, in terms of facilities and atmosphere, far exceeded my expectations. The news that Field are issuing a programme this season tempted me to Lidget Green, a pleasant residential district west of Bradford city centre, just five minutes' drive from the old Park Avenue ground. It hosted First Division football during the club's glory days, and despite the ground's demolition in 1980, enough remains to make worthwhile a short diversion onto Horton Park Avenue. If the cricket groundsman is working on the adjacent wicket, you can walk through the usually locked gates and have a determined probe about in the undergrowth. To the delight of this sporting archaeologist, terracing and floodlight pylon bases can still be unearthed amid dense foliage at the Horton Park End. Over at Field, this former works team have a great little set-up.

Though the packaging factory no longer carries the Field name and has American owners nowadays, its gaunt, grey sheds dominate the far end and near side for a pleasing link with the past. These bulky structures, along with the tall evergreens which fringe the bottom end and opposite side, provide a sensation of intimacy to what is essentially a pitch enclosed by a post and rail barrier. There is no cover, but Field (unusually for this league) have floodlights. Dugouts, little more than a bare frame and a bench, are on the far side. The main facilities are on the near side. A single-storey, red-brick building, set back at an angle from the pitch, houses the dressing rooms, clubhouse, kitchen and toilets. Money has clearly been spent in this area because everything is spick and span. In a particularly nice (and original) touch, sharing space with photographs of former Field line-ups are evocative black and white images of Victorian Bradford, complete with trolleybuses and frock coats.

Field are lucky enough to have a large car park, which is part of the works complex. Behind the corner in which the evergreens and factory do not quite meet is the track-bed of the old Great Northern Railway line linking Bradford with Queensbury. Part of the fascinating 'Queensbury Lines' system, the route's closure pre-dated Beechingisation, with passenger services abandoned in 1955. Freight traffic kept alive the line, but it was shut down piecemeal, with the last section being ripped up in 1972. So testing were the gradients, steam era footplate crews nicknamed it 'The Alpine Route'. Sadly, it represents yet another element of the West Riding's industrial heritage which has gone and is largely forgotten. Or, in the case of a chap I bumped into walking his dog, is not known about. "A railway, you say. Summat to tell the grandkids," was his verdict on my instant history lesson.

Despite the West Yorkshire League's lowly position in the pyramid, this was a hugely enjoyable match. Carlton, quicker and slicker, looked likely winners from

the kick-off, but Field gave them something to think about with a late fightback. Visiting keeper Suruwa Bojang made three crucial saves shortly after half-time, without which the final score might have been closer. A double sending-off added even more drama.

Carlton, who hail from a village at the centre of Yorkshire's famous 'Rhubarb Triangle', dominated the first half, and scored through Christopher Thornton's 12-yard prod (12min) and Matty Lloyd's well-taken effort from a similar distance (30min). A fistfight in the 29th minute led to Richard Dobson (Carlton) and skipper Cameron Nelson (Field) being sent off. Home officials claimed an elbow had been used by Dobson, leading to the melee. After the restart, Carlton extended their advantage with an eye-catching Lee Turner brace. His first goal was a stunning 20-yard drive on the run into the top corner (48min) and his second a superb dribble round a couple of defenders followed by a tap-in (58min). Field hit back in the 65th minute through Kayden Jackson, who capitalised on a rare fumble by keeper Bojang, and closed the deficit further with a penalty from substitute Richard Feltham (83min). But Carlton had the last word when, with a minute left, substitute Danny Bray broke clear to finish well in a one-on-one. With Field committed to attack, and Carlton breaking through gaps left by their opponents in midfield and defence, the end-to-end last half-hour served up rip-roaring entertainment.

Field's basic match programme included a raffle ticket, stapled to the cover. I won, for the first time since my trip to Prestatyn Town in February 2008. As at Bastion Road, I asked the home officials to draw it again, so that a local could win the prize (a bottle of red wine, in this instance). Better than the dreaded meat tray, though not much. Judging by the astonished reaction prompted by my generosity, Bradfordians are not accustomed to folk looking a gift horse in the mouth!

07/20