

TT No. 13: *Andy Gallon* - Wed 22nd August 2012; **Bardsey** v Whitkirk Wanderers; WYL Prem Division; Res: 1-1; Att: 70; Admission: Free; Programme: None; FGIF Match Rating: ***.

As a rule, my feet never cross the turnstile thresholds of clubs who don't issue programmes. A good many dedicated hoppers will cluck with disbelief at this revelation, shake real ale-muddied heads and mutter sorrowfully into beer guides and bus timetables about missed opportunities amongst scenic venues staging Viv's Village Store Outer Snoringshire & District Veterans League football (or similar). But (and it's a big but) obtaining a programme has been an integral part of my matchday experience since a first encounter with live football way back in 1971. I simply don't like not getting one, frankly, and if that makes me preposterously anal then so be it.

And yet rules, as everyone knows, are there to be broken, so maybe once or twice a season I drag myself off with considerable reluctance and an unshakeable sense of dread to a club usually beneath the notice of the committed paper chaser. After spending the day working in the Holmfirth area (walking, actually: some journalistic tasks are less onerous than others), I sought an early evening kick-off and a 'tick' on my way home to York. Petrol (and running a car generally) isn't getting any cheaper in Great Recession Britain, and killing several birds (as it were) with a single tank of fuel is fast becoming a mantra. Bardsey, hosting Whitkirk Wanderers in a potentially attractive West Yorkshire League Premier Division derby, fitted the bill to perfection.

As expected, no programme, but the ground (the hopper's *raison-d'être*, I guess) was a delight. In a way, I wasn't surprised. I've been bagging West Yorkshire League grounds in a desultory fashion for some years now, and many have proved unexpectedly charming enclosures. Bardsey is no exception. It is a fairly affluent village (Sunday name: Bardsey-cum-Rigton) straddling the busy A58 between Leeds and Wetherby, and the football club boast a 'des res' of their own. They play at Bardsey Sports Club on leafy Keswick Lane. The site is shared with a cricket club, who are members of the Airedale & Wharfedale League. I got the impression the footballers were very much the junior partner in this co-habiting arrangement. Both grounds were in absolutely tip-top condition. The pavilion-stroke-clubhouse, a plush, modern and sizeable building dedicated to a recipient of the British Empire Medal, is adjacent to a small car park on the east side of the site. Behind this used to be a railway: the long-abandoned Harrogate-Wetherby-Leeds line, another victim of the bloodstained Beeching Axe. The metals went through where the children's play area is now. The football pitch is slightly to the north of the impressive pavilion.

Facilities for football are what you'd expect at this level. There aren't any lights, there's no cover and only three sides of the pitch are railed off permanently. A temporary rope hangs along the south touchline, the common boundary (if you'll

excuse the pun) between the two sports. Dug-outs it does have: rather nice ones, too. Funny how these assume importance when there's no other infrastructure to admire. This far out of Leeds, we're in what estate agents would describe as the highly desirable semi-rural commuter belt. Fields, golden with corn, extend beyond the north flank and west end of the site, and the headache-inducing stench of muck spreading is a sharp (in every sense of the word) reminder of how far away the city centre is. It's always nice to spot a touch of the quirky, and Bardsey's singular contribution stems from the presence of a stream (a tributary of Keswick Beck) running along the north side of the pitch. A net on a pole is used to rescue balls booted into its lively flow. Next stop the Aire, I suspect. Two sides are fringed with mature trees, a dense barrier. The groundsman had cut the grass lovingly into a pattern of ever decreasing circles. In summary: there are far worse places to spend a balmy late summer evening.

Not a bad game, either. Bardsey (the bulk of whose players must come from outside the village) are consistently useful performers in the West Yorkshire League and I expected them to win comfortably. Early on, that scenario seemed likely. Whitkirk cleared a close-range shot off the line and their goalkeeper flapped an effort from outside the box onto his crossbar. However, around the half-hour, the visitors broke away to take the lead with a well-worked and coolly finished goal. Frustrated, Bardsey poured forward, but couldn't find an equaliser.

"One of them nights," opined their manager to a sweaty midfielder he replaced late in the second half. This tubby boss, looking utterly ridiculous in shorts, offered encouragement in single word bursts. Options, he bellowed. Gamble, he hollered. Squeeze, he barked. And, still, Whitkirk's stubborn defence resisted all advances. When, with five minutes remaining, one of the Wanderers' centre-backs was shown a straight red for a desperate 'last man' foul, the pressure really cranked up. The visitors had to crack, surely, and did so two minutes into stoppage time. Two of their players got in each other's way trying to belt the ball as far down the field as possible, giving a Bardsey striker the time, and space, he needed to pick his spot with a 20-yard daisy-cutter. It fizzed into the bottom corner. The corpulent boss was beside himself.

A fair result, to my neutral eye, and overall an excellent evening. But, you see, no programme. Something definitely missing. A little nag, nag, nag. It's back, I fancy, to paper chasing on Saturday. I'll leave the Outer Snoringshire veterans and their ilk to others. Each to his own, of course, but it's not my thing. Rules, after all, are rules!

04/20