

**TT No.132: *Andy Gallon*** - Mon 1st April 2013; **Guisborough Town** v Marske United; Northern League Division One; Res: 1-0; Att: 245; Admission: £6; Programme: £1 (32pp); FGIF Match Rating: \*\*.

It is surprising how many football grounds - even the good ones - fade from the memory. I spent four years living in a village very close to Guisborough but, in true hopping style, watched a game at the King George V Ground just once. That was a couple of decades ago. This revisit, the first part of an Easter Monday double-header that culminated in York City's Bootham Crescent League Two relegation six-pointer against Plymouth Argyle, allowed me to get reacquainted with the place. I was alarmed (frankly) by how little I remembered of what must be one of the most attractive enclosures in the Northern League.

The only aspect of the KGV I could recall with any clarity was the evergreens (and they must have shot up a bit during the passage of 20 years) lining each side of the ground. Happily, there is no such obstruction at the south end, allowing fine views of two landmark hills - Highcliff Nab and Roseberry Topping. These handsome eminences, bare rock bald, rise above the Cleveland Plain to about 1,000 feet and dominate the district.

Two sizeable stands, positioned on each side of the KGV, ensure Guisborough Town aren't short of cover. The tidy main stand, painted white with a steeply angled roof, offers a mixture of seats and terracing. A press box is located centrally at its rear. A sign by its door warns bad language is not permitted. Are journalists noted for turning the air blue? A flat-topped structure between the stand and the solitary turnstile houses the dressing rooms. Tucked away behind the stand, past a refreshment hatch, is another flat-roofed building. Easily missed, this is the social club, internally a gloomy affair whose walls are decorated with mementoes that include the Priorymen's 1980 Wembley appearance in the FA Vase Final. They lost 2-0 to Stamford. The portable buildings on the other side of the stand are khaki, scruffier and of less obvious function. Substantial dug-outs occupy the touchline in front of the stand.

The more utilitarian stand opposite, a boxy, multi-columned Plain Jane that is painted red, covers shallow terracing. Both stands - and the floodlights - are dwarfed by the KGV's impressive evergreens. The north end consists of a low grass bank and the south end uncovered hardstanding, which goes right round the pitch. High ground is also visible to the north, through trees this seemingly endless winter has shorn of foliage.

Sadly, the quality of the game did not match that of the surroundings. Priorymen manager Chris Hardy's ('Chardy') programme notes suggested we could expect "a great advert for grassroots football". Not so. The hosts, comfortable in the top half of the Northern League First Division, have little to play for as their 40th anniversary season reaches its finale but Marske United are desperate for points to

pull away from the relegation zone. The visitors might have secured victory if a 20-yard effort around the hour mark had not come back off the crossbar. Mike Roberts provided a tame contest's only goal, sliding a low shot past the advancing keeper in a one-on-one with 68 minutes on the clock. There was little in the way of goalmouth incident to entertain a good-sized crowd on a desperately chilly morning. Much of the play was frantic, shapeless and scrappy. The Northern League, in my considerable experience, is usually better than this.

I cannot imagine watching representatives of the Stokesley-based North Riding FA were terribly impressed with what they witnessed, though they probably enjoyed what they didn't hear. This was a fixture designated to publicise the FA's Respect campaign, by turns laudable and laughable. At least on this occasion the players took its message to heart. Dissent was kept to an absolute minimum and I didn't catch anyone swearing, either on or off the pitch.

At the final whistle, I was first out of the bumper-to-bumper car park, shared with a swimming pool. A quick dash through a council estate (the KGV, inevitably, is in one of the less salubrious parts of agreeable Guisborough) and down the A19/A38 saw me arrive at York City in plenty of time for the Plymouth game. Admission was £17 (Pop Stand seat), York's usual excellent 52-page programme sold for £3 and a bumper Bank Holiday crowd amounted to 4,682.

Three new signings, not least gnarled veteran ex-City striker Richard Cresswell, appear to have transformed the Minstermen, who deservedly beat the Pilgrims 2-0 to record a first victory in 17 games. York played at a high tempo from the kick-off. Their opening goal, to Ashley Chambers (20min), featured some superb one-touch passing and a composed finish. Grizzly bear Cresswell (29min) nodded in a soft second after Plymouth failed miserably to clear their lines.

A hugely creditable 671 troopers from the Green Army were in the away end but they failed to lift their side. Argyle was hopeless. It was hard to believe they had won their last three matches and lost only once in seven. Defeat by York, however, keeps them firmly in an increasingly fraught relegation dogfight. Any two of eight clubs could go down. I fear for Plymouth: three of their remaining five fixtures are against teams in the top six. There was over 13,000 at Home Park for the Easter Devon derby with Exeter City. That's not a non-league crowd, is it? Mind you, to me, both York and Plymouth looked distinctly Conference on the field. Little finesse and a lot of crash, bang, wallop. The second half petered out amid a stiff breeze. York took their foot off the gas but Argyle were incapable of creating a decent opening. Plymouth boss John Sheridan described his team's performance as unacceptable. Not so my double-header. It fitted the holiday bill.