

TT No.153: *Andy Gallon* - Sat 27th April 2013; **Cambridge City** v Redditch United; Southern League Prem Division; Res: 1-0; Att: 814; Admission: £10; Programme: £3 (64pp); FGIF Match Rating: **.

The long goodbye is over. Cambridge City sold Milton Road to a developer back in 2005 but only after this match, are they vacating the ground. Houses will be built once the area occupied by the stands, pitch and car park is razed. City are off to share with neighbours Histon for the next two seasons. The club must wait three weeks to hear if planners have given the go-ahead for a new stadium in Sawston, a village south of Cambridge - the other side of town, of course. The proposed complex will boast a stadium holding 3,000, have two floodlit pitches, 300 parking places and enough space to accommodate youth, female and school's teams. The sticking point is the site's classification. Initially brownfield, it was changed to greenbelt. City hope South Cambridgeshire District Council sees sense and deems it brownfield. No reason why not, say the fans: it is a location away from houses, round the back of an industrial estate (Dales Manor Business Park) and on land formerly occupied by a tip. Not King's from The Backs, then!

This day (very sad all round, according to manager Gary Roberts' programme column) was always going to be about the occasion. Neither team had anything to play for and, inevitably, the game proved to be unwatchable end-of-season rubbish. In keeping, I'm afraid to say, with the stuff - dross, in the main - I've witnessed up and down Britain over the past eight months. At least City organised the farewell celebrations with some style. Highlight for locals was a parade of more than 30 legendary former Lilywhites favourites, some of whom played in the Fifties. Most in City's largest crowd of the campaign applauded each introduction enthusiastically. The bulk of the names were unfamiliar to me. The biggest cheers appeared to be reserved for Steve Gawthrop, Gary Grogan and Kevin Wilkin. Ninety-one helium-filled black & white balloons were released as the teams came out. Samba band Arco Iris (a tuneless din) entertained spectators and an American-style penalty shoot-out competition for kids, surely the type of thing only doting parents enjoy, was also staged. A souvenir programme was produced - fatter and pricier than usual. I didn't rate the issue, especially as City have had eight years to ponder how best to put it together. Its content was disappointing, design mundane and presentation confused. Not all it might have been. I didn't hang around for a post-match auction of fixtures and fittings.

City have played at Milton Road for 91 years - but at two different grounds. The original, at right angles to the present set-up, was where the Westbrook Business Centre now stands. It was used between April 1922 and April 1984. City - who were established in 1908 as Cambridge Town - set up home at Milton Road following a nomadic early existence. The bill came to £2,769. The first match, watched by 2,500, was against Merton in the Southern Amateur League. City's record crowd (12,078) turned up in 1950 for an FA Amateur Cup tie against Leytonstone. In the

Sixties, the Lilywhites regularly attracted crowds of up to 5,000 and the City Ground (as it became known) hosted cycling and athletics before adaptation for greyhound racing. Until overtaken in this famous seat of learning's affections by local rivals Cambridge United, the Lilywhites even submitted an application to join the Football League. Not a trace remains of the first Milton Road. The second ground opened in August 1985, with Corinthian providing the opposition in a Southern League game. This fixture followed the notorious 'Away Day Season' in which City played every match (bar one, at United's Abbey Stadium) outside Cambridge.

The second Milton Road, though modest, represents a sad loss. Tight, homely and compact, it is a superb arena. Being hidden beyond its confines adds to its appeal. With just over 800 inside for this match, a fine atmosphere was generated. A sizeable cantilever stand, extended clumsily on its further flank, dominates the ground. Fronted by a large car park (built partly on the original Milton Road's training pitch), this pleasing structure is clad in grey sheeting and has an unusual glazed central section. Opposite, a delightfully untidy collection of covers over shallow terracing gives every indication of having evolved rather than being planned. The two ends are open and narrow. The particularly slimline area behind the Milton Road goal is dominated by the red-brick bulk of the Westbrook Business Centre. The pitch at this end covers a portion of the first ground's footprint. The towering presence of the business centre, and mature trees on all but the main stand side, makes Milton Road feel very intimate.

A relatively central location amid plentiful housing counts amongst the ground's other advantages. It is a mere 10-minute walk from the claustrophobic heart of Cambridge, crammed in equal measure with colleges, students, bicycles and tourists. A stroll across the gloriously broad acres of Jesus Green, pausing when crossing the Cam to admire all manner of boaters, makes a delectable preface to Southern League football. Cambridge United, stuck out on dowdy, traffic-clogged Newmarket Road, shoulder to shoulder with dreary DIY stores, have never been able to match that. They, too, hope to move - to an 8,000-capacity stadium at Trumpington Meadows, another greenbelt site. City, who along with Cambridge RUFC, snubbed sharing United's new stadium, will lose much if and when they go to Sawston. The club plan to lay on buses for supporters who don't drive. Talk at Milton Road was reassuringly positive: lots of 'new era' platitudes. Let us hope City do not live to regret leaving the warm embrace of cloistered Milton Road.

I won't sport with your intelligence by dwelling too much on the game, around the 2,700th first-team fixture on the site. It was poor. Fittingly, though, a player called Cambridge - Adie Cambridge - scored the last goal at Milton Road. It was as scruffy as the rest of the contest, mind. With 16 minutes gone, a shot was partially blocked by a defender and wrong-footed Redditch keeper Bradley Catlow could do nothing as Cambridge tapped into an empty net from a couple of yards. Considering City lost two defenders to injury during the opening 12 minutes, they did well to keep Redditch at bay. The lacklustre visitors, safe from the drop after the previous weekend's results, did not create much. Left-back George

Washbourne wasted their best opportunity, shooting wide in a one-on-one with City keeper Zac Barrett late in the second half.

If you haven't ticked Milton Road, there are still chances to do so up to the expiry of City's lease. Junior matches and local league cup finals are scheduled to take place at the ground before the bulldozers move in and consign another piece of Britain's football heritage to the history books. Designer dwellings, doubtless way beyond the budget of City fans, will rise in its place and this part of residential Cambridge shall become as anonymous as the others. I gather from director Rick Winter (former Histon president and still-practising rock and roll drummer) the NIMBYS living around Milton Road are kicking up a fuss about the disruption the building work - and its aftermath - will cause. They may, in the years ahead, miss City. After all, a couple of hundred spectators once a fortnight isn't too heavy a cross to bear, is it?

04/20