

**TT No. 16: *Andy Gallon*** - Mon 27th August 2012; **Clifton All Whites** v Bilborough Pelican; CML South; Res: 1-0; Att: 100; Admission: £3 (including four-page programme); FGIF Match Rating: \*.

Some hops don't pan out the way you'd hoped. This was dull, dull, dull. Dull setting, dull weather, dull game. To add insult to injury (at least for the dedicated paper chaser), Clifton weren't able to produce a proper programme for this derby. "Our printer has let us down," explained the woman in a pay hut of such restricted dimensions it made her look like a Buckingham Palace foot guardsman. I didn't have the heart to determine whether the printer was human or mechanical. The one time I don't ring ahead to double check... Still, credit where it's due: Clifton had run off a photocopied four-pager to give away. Better than nothing, but not much.

My mood was hardly buoyant when setting out on the same A1/M1 route I'd taken to Blaby & Whetstone Athletic just 48 hours previously. The skies were Bank Holiday black and heavy rain was forecast. I'll be glad when autumn's mists and mellowness get here: at least then (with expectations zero) I can stop moaning about this dismal 'summer'. On arrival in Nottingham, the weather had not improved. Clifton is at the south-western extremity of the city, and the All Whites' Norman Archer (former committee member) Memorial Ground amid a depressing 1960s council estate. You could tell which tenants had purchased their homes by the crazy paving, ornamental gates, gaudy pointing and risible water features. Honestly, what are people like?

The ground, overlooked by a couple of towering electricity pylons and new-build nasty South Nottingham College, failed to raise my interest rate. The entrance, off the Ruddington road, brings the spectator past the aforementioned pay hut and a flat-topped, red-brick clubhouse (nicer inside than out), and onto an unsurfaced car park. The pitch, broad and well-trimmed, is ahead. Its barriers are formed from an ugly mixture of railings, ropes and hurdles, doubtless cobbled together to meet the minimal grading requirements of the Central Midlands League. The only cover, a rickety 40-yard stand with no fewer than nine roof columns, straddles the halfway line on the west side. Benches are dotted about (apparently at random) and there is hardstanding (apart from the stand) only along the east touchline. Viewing from the stand's Heath Robinson seats - the lids of boxes containing corner flags and the like - is ruined by the two huge dug-outs plonked directly in front. Honestly, what are people like?

Clearly, the considerable amount of time on my hands before kick-off could not be killed somewhere as drab as this. So, I chanced, my arm, and drove the short distance to Ruddington, a neighbouring village on the other side of the weed-choked Great Central Railway track-bed, a relatively new (1899) high speed line abandoned scandalously by dotty Dr Beeching in the late Sixties. To my delight, Ruddington is a proper English village, with green, church, two museums, alms-

houses, cottages, police station, post office and high street. Chuck in the nearby (and unseen by me) Nottingham Transport Heritage Centre, and I really must return some day to watch Ruddington's football team play in the Notts Senior League.

At length (and with some reluctance), I returned to the Norman Archer Memorial Ground, where the game began fairly brightly. Clifton, watched by a crowd double their average, looked the better side and went ahead in the 24th minute with a well-taken goal. Things degenerated from there. A stiff breeze hardly helped, but both teams were shockingly limited, and in the second half Pelican decided 'let's get physical'. The inevitable outcome was a flurry of spiteful challenges, bookings galore and wholly disjointed action. Unfortunately, Clifton snaffled the bait and, by way of retaliation, dished out some strong-arm stuff.

Pelican (I've also seen the Owls and the Penguins this season) probably deserved a point: they hit the top of the crossbar from 20 yards eight minutes before half-time and repeated the feat from half that distance just before the end. Not that I cared by then. It was that sort of game, that sort of day. Oh, and it rained, too. All a bit different, I daresay, from the CML Hop game at Clifton enjoyed by *WebEd* towards the end of last season. Club officials were still talking about an attendance they estimated at 750. Perhaps I should have levered myself out of bed for that 10.10am kick-off, but I'm not a fan of organised Hops. I prefer (though, on this evidence, goodness knows why) seeing a ground in its 'normal' state and, truth be told, meeting one or two travellers is fine. Two or three hundred in a single dose is way too many!

I shall close my report with a bit of ground news. Apparently, Clifton have this season and next to erect floodlights or risk being kicked out of the CML. They have received planning permission after a survey (costing £600!) revealed there are so few bats in the adjacent nature reserve the colony won't be affected adversely by additional light once a fortnight. Good news, though I imagine there is still time for the environmentally obsessed to unearth rare toads and orchids. As things stand, however, all Clifton have to do now is raise the money - which might prove the trickiest bit.

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