

TT No.31: *Chris Freer* - Sat September 15th 2012; **Lincoln Moorlands Railway v Scarborough Athletic**; NCEL Premier Division; Score: 0-10 (ten); Attendance: 140; Entertainment value: 5/5.

There's been a lot of talk about 'phoenix' clubs of late, particularly when some high-profile names have become involved. 'Alleged' skull-duggery at the highest level invariably leaves the fans suffering as the players jump ship and the authorities tighten the noose. Some clubs fare better than others, deciding to be 'Newco' when it suits them to avoid further punitive action. Others get kicked up the backside so hard they end up in the Northern League, despite the best efforts of fans groups to play fair with creditors.

Clubs over-stretching themselves and going tits-up are not new of course. It's been going on since football was first civilised. Prime candidates are often the rising star sides, spiralling upwards on the coat-tails of ambition, only to come nose-diving back in the opposite direction when fate intervenes. Fans of Gretna and Maidstone United might know how that feels, as would those die-hards supporting Scarborough Athletic, the 'phoenix' club that sprang up when Scarborough FC followed a dozen seasons in the Football League by imploding in 2007, in no small part due to the intransigence of the local authorities.

The new club, still having to play in Bridlington, has not managed to make too much progress up the football pyramid after starting life in Division One of the Northern Counties East League, and despite offering some promise last season, still find themselves five levels lower than that which their illustrious forebears achieved at the back end of the last century. I went to the McCain Stadium a couple of times, and remember being mostly impressed by the catering. When you're sponsored by a food company, you have to get that right. The ground itself was fairly traditional and formed a landmark as you drove into the town on the A64. Maybe it still does, as I haven't been to Scarborough for a dozen or more years.

I last caught up with the new Scarborough team at the back end of last season when they were on the wrong end of a reverse at Arnold. I wasn't too impressed then with the quality of football or the attitude of some of the fans, but there's always another day, and maybe that would be at Lincoln Moorlands Railway today. I arrive at the ground, which is a couple of miles south of Lincoln Town Centre, after a morning cruising the country lanes of Lincolnshire visiting pubs, although sadly all in the line of business, with no alcohol involved. My last port-of-call is the Golden Eagle on the High Street, one of the most convenient watering holes if you are heading for Sincil Bank, home of Conference side Lincoln City. The pub has just opened a cracking new outdoor facility which takes alfresco drinking to a new level. The choice of beer is pretty damn good too.

The Newark Road ground of Lincoln M.R, is signposted on the A1434 road as you head south towards Newark (funnily enough!). The stadium is set in spacious grounds, with a large clubhouse facility accessed from outside the ground. The bar area itself isn't that big, but there is room for a pool table, TV showing live football, and a solitary handpump on the bar, today serving Old Speckled Hen, although a bit too fresh and lacking in maturity for my tastes. The adjacent Scarborough fans seem to relish it, though. A tray of cobs on the bar is being well patronised, and my cheese & onion example for £1 represents good VFM.

Inside the stadium, I am impressed by the facilities for this level. There's enough space round the playing surface to build a decent-sized stadium - should Lincoln MR's sugar daddy ever materialise - but in the meantime the club has erected a couple of seated stands and covered one-step terracing. There's a tea hut behind the changing rooms, but it doesn't cater for the veggie. I am also bemused as to why the chocolate bars are kept in the fridge. My Snickers is a real jaw-snapper when I try to bite into it.

Having survived relegation last season by default, the home side has not enjoyed a good start to the current campaign, and has drafted in a new management team and several players, notably from Grantham Town. It's clear from the start that there is a gulf in class as the visitors go a goal up in 5 minutes, and by half time have moved on to a three-nil lead with Lincoln failing to trouble the visiting keeper. Things can only get better for the home side, or so we think, and they do start the second half with more purpose. That is until a suicidal back pass lets in ace striker Ryan Blott for Scarborough's fourth on 60 minutes and you suspect Lincoln heads might go down.

In my 47 years of watching senior football, I've never been to a game where one side has scored ten. I recall being at the epic Forest v Watford game which finished 7-3, with ten goals shared, but never where one team has notched double figures. That is until today. For the next 30 minutes Scarborough raid at will, the home keeper is trying to perform heroics behind a creaking back line, and the net bulges at regular intervals. 63, 78, 80, 82, 85 & 90. Ten-nil or rather nil-ten. Wow.

Maybe this year is the one in which the Scarborough 'Phoenix' will rise. They certainly have a team good enough to succeed in this division, and although they won't meet a defence as generous as Lincoln's every week, they are certainly capable of moving to a higher level. Just hope if they ever do get back to Scarborough, the catering will be well up on their list of priorities. Mine's a veggie pie!

There's more on my blog at <http://flynn123.wordpress.com/>

"We want eleven..."

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