

**TT No.55: *Andy Gallon*** - Sat 3rd November 2012; **Overthorpe Sports Club** v Salts; WRCAL Prem Div; Res: 2-5; Att: 20; Admission: Free; Programme: Free (32pp); FGIF Match Rating: \*\*\*\*.

The clue, they say, is in the name. Well, Overthorpe is part of Thornhill village, the football club's ground is off Edge Top Road and I parked my car on an adjacent residential street called Mountain Road. Get the picture? We're talking pretty high up! As you might expect, the views from Overthorpe Sports Club's ground are sensational. Looking north across, along and over the Calder Valley, a breathtaking 180-degree panorama encompasses eastern Huddersfield, wind turbine-adorned Ovenden Moor, Ravensthorpe, Dewsbury and Ossett. I'd tell you this alone was worth the admission, but Overthorpe Sports Club do not charge spectators - and hand out an excellent free programme to boot.

This fascinating part of the former West Riding is where the textile and coal mining industries once rubbed grimy shoulders. Overthorpe FC were a product of the latter; formed in the early 1950s by workers from the Ings and Combs collieries. Both long gone, the two pits were sited to the north and south of the breezy upland to which Thornhill clings. The workers contributed sixpence from their weekly pay packet and a hut was built on a site still used today. This hut has been extended many times and now features a bar, kitchen and changing rooms. Until two years ago, the football pitch was a cricket square. Lack of interest from Thornhill residents in the national summer game saw the soccer section move in and, with generous financial assistance from sport-friendly local authority Kirklees Council and the Football Foundation, new dressing rooms were erected and a junior pitch laid out. Many of the original colliery workers are still Overthorpe Sports Club members: a heart-warming link with the past.

Unsurfaced Ings Lane provides access from Edge Top Road, across which, incidentally, can be found spacious Overthorpe Park, home to former National Conference Amateur Rugby League club Thornhill Trojans, now back in the Pennine League. Ings Lane passes to the right of Overthorpe's tiny car park and clubhouse (traces of the original hut must be discernible somewhere amid the melange) before plunging steeply towards the valley floor. Satnav users should be aware they will be sent up this lane and risk serious damage to their vehicle's undercarriage. Don't worry: there is a sensible, if longer, alternative.

The clubhouse, and a floodlit bowling green, is in the site's south-east corner. The new dressing rooms, a bland, flat-roof structure, are next door, but closer to the pitch. The pitch is at a slightly higher level and slopes noticeably downhill from west to east. It is railed off, but there aren't any dug-outs and neither cover nor floodlights. Given the altitude, it is a ground to visit on a clement afternoon. Houses bound the site to the south and east. A grass bank at the north end leads to a primary school and nursery, whose pitch is used by Overthorpe Sports Club's

U11s, one of three junior sides they have started running. The ground's glory is the view from the north touchline. Truly, one feels king of the castle.

Overthorpe are finding this season a struggle. They went into the Salts game bottom of the West Riding County Amateur League Premier Division with two draws (including a 1-1 early doors outcome at Salts) and six defeats to show from this season's fixtures. Last weekend, on their own ground and despite an improved display, they were beaten 4-2 (after extra-time) by league rivals Golcar United in the Premier Division Cup first round. Salts, from the World Heritage Site model village of Saltaire on the eastern fringe of Bradford, aren't doing much better and started the day only three places better off than their hosts.

I feared the worst when the visitors took the lead inside a minute. Some finish, too. Overthorpe then had a very good spell ended summarily and unjustly by two more Salts goals (the second a penalty) in the 32nd and 36th minutes. Amiable home club secretary Dave Hewitt was not impressed. Nowhere near the level of the Golcar performance, was his gloomy verdict. Would the home team collapse? Not at all: if anything, they were the better side after the break. The last 13 minutes produced a flurry of four goals. Overthorpe, let down by their finishing, managed to bag a brace. Throughout the match, both keepers were required to make a number of saves. Certainly, it was a most entertaining contest.

Overthorpe's motto is Affordable Sport for All. It obviously covers players and spectators. You will try in vain to persuade club officials to accept any payment for a programme, whose content embraces all this splendid community club's teams. Tea was also offered gratis. At this point, I felt morally obliged to get on the blind side of Mr Hewitt and hand a donation to the woman behind the bar. Unfamiliar faces get a warm welcome: clearly, the club are used to hoppers turning up unannounced from all over Britain and are very keen (and doubtless hugely amused) to learn how far you've come. This matchday experience was at the opposite end of the spectating spectrum to Rotherham United, whose new stadium I had ticked the previous Saturday. There, fans were herded in and flushed out with minimal customer care. In the main, non-league football retains a grassroots scale, charm and appeal the Premier and Football Leagues have lost for good. Long may the likes of Overthorpe Sports Club survive and prosper.

04/20