

TT No.38: Andy Gallon - Sat 16th November 2013; **Barrowby** v Linby CW; CML South; Res: 1-1; Att: 32 (h/c); Admission: £3 (including 28-page programme); FGIF Match Rating: ***.

THE HOP: Not my first-choice game by any means but with the forecast indicating murky weather - at best - in the North it made sense to point my Polo in the opposite direction. I like to keep abreast with the Central Midlands League, a task rendered seemingly endless by its sizeable turnover of clubs. Barrowby, newcomers this season, and Linby Colliery Welfare were rubbing shoulders in the lower reaches of the South division therefore a close contest appeared likely.

THE PLACE: A lovely village, clearly affluent, perched on a hill two miles west of Grantham and high above the verdant Vale of Belvoir. It features all the required 'village' elements: pretty green, attractive church (thirteenth and fourteenth century vintage All Saints, whose spire is visible from the football ground), historic buildings (grouped around the crossroads at its heart, if nowhere else), post office, pub and shop. The shop is, in fact, a deli - sure sign of a middle-class presence. It brought to mind a recently overheard exchange between a moneyed couple in Waitrose: "Darling, do we need parmesan for both houses?"

THE CLUB: Ambitious! Images in the programme revealed the ground's infrastructure - stand, dug-outs, hardstanding and railings - was put in during the summer. The work enabled Barrowby, a Football Association Charter Standard club, to end their lengthy membership of the Grantham & District Premier League and step up to the Central Midlands League. Funds were raised by the club, with the parish council and the Barrowby Pavilion Committee also contributing. The programme described it as an "epic journey" and the "realisation of a dream". Last season, the Swans lifted four of five available trophies, including the league championship, which was secured thrillingly on the final day of the campaign. Barrowby run junior teams from under-six to under-15 along with a veterans' side. Their women's team has just folded, however. I'm all for women playing football but frankly cannot imagine any circumstances that would prompt me to watch one of their matches.

THE PEOPLE: Not, I have to say, noticeably friendly although secretary Trevor Milne did reply with alacrity to my emailed enquiry earlier in the week about kick-off time and programme. Martin, *FGIF* editor, appeared apparently from nowhere during the interval and I spent a convivial second half in his company.

THE WEATHER: Headed south in search of sunshine - and managed to find it. Developed into a glorious autumn afternoon; breezy but dry and not too cold.

THE GROUND: On the edge of the village and undeniably charming. The location of Lowfields, at 300 feet, rates as 'lofty' in Lincolnshire terms. Grantham, at a lower altitude, is out of sight but tilled fields roll engagingly away to the east and south. An impressive country pile completes the vista. It is Harlaxton Hall, a 'Jacobethan'

manor house built between 1837 and 1845. With the toffs, a family by the name of Gregory, long since departed, the hall serves as the British campus of the University of Evansville, an American owned and operated college. The large Lowfields site slopes downhill gently from west to east. A cricket square, at the top of the gradient, occupies the flattest area. It is separated from Barrowby's first XI pitch by a stand of trees, resplendent in autumn regalia. An all-in-one breeze block structure, painted a livid green, provides covered standing for spectators between matching dug-outs. There is hardstanding - well, gravel - either side. Elsewhere, you're on grass. There aren't any floodlights. Beyond the main pitch, its surface rather bumpy, are three other football pitches and parking. A modern clubhouse, large and airy, is located in the site's north-west corner. Shared with the cricket club, it houses dressing rooms, function room, offices, loos and kitchen, from which refreshments are dispensed.

THE GAME: One of the better football contests I've witnessed this season. The goals came in the opening 10 minutes. Barrowby netted first through Danny McDonald's 18-yard daisy-cutter and Linby levelled with a close-range prod from top scorer and skipper Matt Murphy following a cross from the left. Murphy was set up by Adam Fox and Joe Butler, two of four seventeen-year-olds sporting the visitors' colours. Little to choose between the sides up to half-time. Barrowby created the better chances after the break and really should have won. Linby were a threat on the break and the hosts were grateful for a couple of let-offs.

THE PROGRAMME: Well above average by the rather basic standards of the Central Midlands League: game-specific cover, tidy design, colour throughout and reasonably interesting content. Even the half-time quiz came with images. These included one of that well-known Lincolnshire lad Tony Book, whose brother Kim I used to watch playing in goal for Doncaster Rovers during the early Seventies. Famously, poor Kim was beaten six times by a Beatle-mopped teen called George Best when Manchester United won 8-2 at Northampton Town in a 1970 FA Cup tie.

THE VERDICT: Worth an afternoon of any hopper's time.

04/20