

TT No.8: *Andy Gallon* - Sat 24th August 2013; **Yorkshire Amateur** v Dinnington; NCEL Division 1; Attendance: 33; Result: 3-0; Admission: £4; Programme: 20pp, £1; FGIF Rating: 3*.

THE HOP: Not my first - or even second - choice. Plans to visit Northern League newcomers Heaton Stannington, via a morning spent exploring attractive Tynemouth, fell-foul of forecasted atrocious weather for the east and north of England. Opted to delay a trip to Tyersal, of the West Riding County Amateur League, because the Robins secretary - very kindly returning a mid-morning call - informed me they weren't issuing a programme today but would do so later in the season. They can wait, I figured. By now, it was after one o'clock, so I couldn't go far. Yorkshire Amateur, a fairly local (60-mile round trip) re-visit, got the nod. I hadn't seen a daylight fixture at Bracken Edge and my only other visit (so the old programme collection revealed) was way back in 1996.

THE CLUB: In common with so many at this level, apparently run on a shoestring by a tiny band of helpers. Indeed, the programme contained an appeal for volunteers to assist with coaching/managing the club's numerous junior teams (which start with the under-nines) and providing matchday support for the senior XI, the reserves and the under-19s. The piece concluded, somewhat ominously: "We can only exist as long as people are able to give up some of their time to help us keep running".

Ammers (as they're known) were formed in November 1918 and began playing matches the following year. Their first season was spent at Elland Road. Ammers, for whatever reason, decided this now palatial venue wasn't suitable and sold the lease to the newly-formed Leeds United for £250. The rest is history! Ammers were founder members of the powerful Yorkshire League in 1920 and two years later became the first British club to tour Latvia and Estonia.

A nomadic existence ensued. Grounds used in and around Leeds included the Wetherby Road home of Harrogate Town. Ammers eventually moved to Bracken Edge, in the Harehills district of Leeds, in 1930. The Thirties marked their most successful period. A record 3,569 crowd watched an FA Amateur Cup quarter-final replay victory over Wimbledon. Ammers later reached the first round of the FA Cup, losing at home to Carlisle United. Post-war, however, the club fell into serious decline, and by the Seventies were at a distinctly low ebb.

Introducing a youth policy reinvigorated Ammers. Bracken Edge's facilities were transformed during the Eighties and Nineties. A new committee took over for the 2007-08 season and turned around the club's finances. Ammers, despite being one of the worst supported teams in the NCEL, are now debt-free.

THE GROUND: Despite being close to the busy centre of Leeds, Bracken Edge has a pleasantly rural feel. Mature trees fringe the ground, located amid 1950s semis on a lofty shelf in the north-east of the city. Before Ammers moved here, it was home

to Roundhay RUFC, now part of Leeds Carnegie RUFC. Most of the facilities date from the Eighties. The west (near) touchline offers three areas of cover and a handful of seats. These covers, erected piecemeal, replaced the original grandstand, an impressive structure doomed by the repercussions of the 1985 Bradford Fire at Valley Parade. The two covers nearest the entrance, in the south-west corner, are tacked on to single-storey structures housing the function room and tea bar, and dressing rooms. The remainder of the ground consists of open hardstanding, though patches of grassy banking at each end and on the east side - all that is left of once more extensive 'terracing' - permit elevated viewing. Bracken Edge's spindly floodlights, said to be of Conference quality, are dwarfed by the presence of two bulky telecommunications masts, which doubtless bring in useful revenue. An all-weather training area is located on the far side of the ground. There is a small gravel car park behind the motley collection of buildings and stands. Not the most salubrious part of Leeds, evidenced by a 'No Cars' sign at the Harehills Lane pedestrian entrance to Potternewton Park.

THE PEOPLE: I received a warm, unsolicited welcome from Jeni French, Ammers' hard-working chairman, secretary, treasurer and co-operator of the Bracken Edge tea bar. Spotting a strange face, and responding to my request to see the team sheets, she asked if I were a groundhopper and checked to ensure everything was OK. Jeni noticed my camera gear and remarked very few photographers visited the club. Being a generous soul, I offered to forward for free a selection of matchday images ("as many as you can, please!"), and she also eagerly took me up on my suggestion of a pre-match team photograph. Ammers don't have many fans, so those watching were well acquainted, which made for a relaxed atmosphere. Good rapport between home supporters and players, too.

THE WEATHER: Thankfully, the predicted torrential rain held off until the final whistle. A few spots fell during the second half but nothing serious. It was gloomy but very humid; the worst sort of English summer afternoon. Absolutely no problems wearing a T-shirt - shorts, too, if I'd opted for them. Got caught in a tremendous downpour between Bardsey and Collingham on the way home. With swollen streams gushing straight off adjacent sloping fields, the A58 flooded rapidly with murky water.

THE GAME: Tighter, certainly in the first half, than the score suggests. Skipper Chris Hitchings headed Ammers in front from close range in the 34th minute. Two minutes after the break, Dom Noteman netted from the penalty spot after he'd been brought down. Joel Hughes revealed delightful control to round keeper Marcus Weston and tap in the third with 66 minutes on the clock. Referee Paul Saunders rather lost the plot late on and ended up dismissing three players, two from Dinnington. But it wasn't that sort of game. With eight minutes left, visitor Greg Ramsden went for a second bookable offence (neither of which really warranted a caution) and shortly before time Ben Rosser, the most forceful Dinnington player on view, and Ammers substitute Kaden Fishley were dismissed for little more than 'hand bags'. Times must be hard in Dinnington: the visitors didn't have a shirt sponsor. At this level of football, most unusual.

THE PROGRAMME: A low-key, budget production with a poorly designed card cover and badly photocopied inside pages. The generic cover did not feature any match details. If the league didn't demand a programme, I suspect Ammers wouldn't issue because there's no indication of this being anybody's labour of love. The only content of interest was a comprehensive club history, and that must bore regulars to tears. Overpriced, even at a quid, but better than nothing.

THE VERDICT: For many reasons, worth visiting, though preferably in daylight.

04/20