

**TT No.76: Andrew Gallon** - Wed 3rd September 2007; **Winterton Rangers** v Arnold Town; NCEL Premier Division; Res: 6-3; Att: 82; Admission: £4; Programme: £1 (36pp); FGIF Match Rating: \*\*\*\*\*.

Where there's a will, there's a way. In the five years since the Crowder family swapped Brigg Town for Winterton Rangers, a revolution has transformed the West Street ground and the club's fortunes. When the Crowders arrived, bringing an energetic new committee with them, Rangers were on their last legs. The ground was a dump and the team, seemingly trapped for good in the lower reaches of the Northern Counties (East) League First Division, emphatically going nowhere. Now the ugly duckling is a princess and the pride of a league of which they were founder members.

Some £250,000 - half from the Football Stadia Improvement Fund and the rest raised by the club - has been ploughed into the facilities, which must rank among the best anywhere in the country at this level of the pyramid. Hull City, watching developments from across the Humber, have clearly been impressed for their Youth Alliance League team play all their games at West Street and a contract has just been signed for midweek reserve games to be staged at the venue. Winterton's results have been transformed, too. Rangers won promotion last season and are looking good to go up again this time in a division shorn of those clubs poached during the summer by the fledgling UniBond League Division One North. That all this has happened in a small village some way off the beaten track makes Rangers' achievements all the more laudable. Neighbours Scunthorpe United may have grabbed all the headlines for their charge into the Coca-Cola Championship but Rangers, along with north-west Lincolnshire rivals Barton Town Old Boys and Bottesford Town, are also flying the flag for the area by surging up the non-league ladder.

Anyone who visited West Street before the revamp simply won't recognise the place. Effectively, it's a new ground. Access is via a narrow lane which leads to a good size tarmac car park. The turnstile block brings you into the near end, which has also had the tarmac treatment. A large red-brick building to the rear houses the dressing rooms, a social club which is in the process of being revitalised, a room for serving and eating refreshments and a tastefully decorated bar. To the left is the main stand, opened in 2006 and the last part of the phased rebuild to be completed. It runs between the penalty areas and a cantilever roof provides shelter for three rows of blue plastic tip-up seats. Behind is a strip of neatly mown grass and then the gardens of a line of semis, which get a great free view. In front of the stand are twin dugouts of metal and glass - proper dugouts, too, so those sitting in them don't obscure the views of those behind who have paid to get in. A thoughtful touch. A similar, though smaller, stand, over terracing, is opposite. The remainder is open hard standing, with the ground's predominant colour of grey offset by blue trimmings. It's neat, tidy and it works. The two ends and bottom

side are fringed by trees, and the tower of All Saints church in the heart of the village can be seen over to the right from the main stand. The entire complex is owned by Rangers, who bought the land for just £700 in 1950. Money well spent.

The stunning pitch, which slopes downhill slightly from the main stand side and won a major award for the octogenarian groundsman, is surrounded by a breeze block wall capped with shaped concrete. Metal panels provide the perimeter fence and the floodlights are masts - three per side with three lamps on each. Rangers won the system, which was upgraded to Conference standard this summer, in a national six-a-side competition in 1978. They beat Newcastle Blue Star, winners of the FA Vase that year, in the final.

The game, a see-saw affair, proved to be a cracker, with victory extending Winterton's unbeaten league sequence this season to seven games, for just one defeat in 13, all told. Arnold, who got lost en route from Nottingham, so forcing the game to kick off 15 minutes later than the advertised time, played their part to the full and scored three times against a defence which, until this point, had conceded just twice in the league.

Here's how the scoring went:

22 mins: Andy Catton forces the ball in from close range after an unmarked Matt Plant heads a corner goalwards (1-0);

27 mins: Danny Clarke's cross from the right gives Plant a simple header from inside the six-yard box (2-0);

28 mins: Rob Northen wriggles through half-hearted tackling to fire an angled drive under advancing keeper Lee Broster (3-0);

31 mins: Catton outwits his marker to make space for a well-struck shot past a hopelessly exposed Broster (4-0);

43 mins: Mark Gadsby does well to find room for a deep cross which ex-pro Chris Freestone converts expertly with his head (4-1);

59 mins: Freestone, chasing down a long clearance, manages to nick the ball past keeper James Norton for a tap-in (4-2);

71 mins: Poor marking again by Arnold and Plant capitalises with another firm header (5-2);

78 mins: Gadsby takes advantage of a lack of concentration in the Rangers defence to glance a lovely header across Norton (5-3);

90 mins: Steve Underwood is released on the right side of the box and thumps a rising drive past Broster (6-3).

The only down side to the Winterton success story as far as I can see is their relatively low crowds. It's a shame given the quality of the facilities and the football but the inevitable consequence, I imagine, of being based in a sparsely populated area which contains several other senior clubs all competing for the

same spectators. Rangers' programme is worth a mention because it, too, has improved markedly. With its editorship now in the hands of one of the friendly Crowder clan, a value-for-money issue contains all the required elements - and a few decent extras besides. Simply another reflection on a club, justifiably proud of the progress they have made, heading indisputably in the right direction. I departed with the invitation 'come again' ringing in my ears. It's one I'll definitely take up.

06/20