

**TT No.74: *Andy Gallon*** - Mon 20th September 2010; **Team Bury** v Whitton Utd; Eastern Counties League Div. 1; Res: 1-1; Att: 64; Admission: £4; Programme: £1 (20pp); FGIF Match Rating: \*\*\*\*.

**THE PLACE:** Bustling Bury St Edmunds is like the curate's egg - good in parts. The small cathedral dedicated to St Edmundsbury, the flint ruins of the Benedictine abbey of Edmund, a towering 14th century stone gatehouse and the Butter Market square are all delightful. On the walk up to the main shopping precinct, side roads reveal attractive buildings, many of medieval origin. The main drag, almost inevitably, is a bit of a let-down. Most of the UK's communities now seem to be saddled with ill-conceived centres. Incidentally, parking in Bury is a complete rip-off.

**THE GROUND:** Spick, span and thoroughly appealing. Team Bury, sixth formers from the sports academy of West Suffolk College, share Ram Meadow with Isthmian League Bury Town. Lucky lads! That means the spectator facilities and pitch quality are well above what is usually encountered in the Eastern Counties competition. Ambitious Town have clearly spent a good deal of money on the ground during their climb up the pyramid. There is cover on all four sides, and the north end is dominated by a sugar beet factory, which lends a sense of place. The stands on the north, south and east sides are simple propped covers, but neatly painted in matching blue and white. The River Lark runs behind the stand on the east touchline, with a pleasant footpath between the two. The main stand - tall and narrow with a high, steeply angled roof - brings to mind the arrangements at Northern League Esh Winning. Wooden bench seats are demanding on the backside, mind. The social club/bar, rather dark and unappealing, is next to the main stand. The attached hospitality areas, not in use for Team Bury fixtures, look very decent. Parking in the adjacent local authority car park is abundant and, after six o'clock, free. I guess, years ago, sheep would graze on the meadow alongside the river. What must have been an idyllic scene has changed beyond recognition. But, thankfully, not beyond imagination.

**THE GAME:** A beautifully-tended pitch and a perfect evening for football. Happily, the teams responded to A1 conditions by serving up an extremely watchable contest. Whitton, from a suburb in the north part of Ipswich, went ahead in the 17th minute. Nobody picked up Ronaldo (not his real name, I was informed) Wright from a long throw, and he looped a header over and beyond Blues keeper Nick Pope. The visitors, not surprisingly, looked physically stronger and more streetwise than their youthful opposition. Whitton really should have had the game won by half-time, though Team Bury served notice of what was to come by almost equalising through Steve Bugg moments before the interval. The second half was a different story. The hosts, clearly coached in the right footballing habits, played supremely well. They levelled in the 56th minute. Andrew Nugent crossed from the right and Ryan Clark, Team Bury's best player, glanced a header past Whitton

keeper and captain Darren Moyes via the inside of the far post. The fresh-faced youngsters went agonisingly close to a winner on several occasions before the end, not least four minutes from time when Will Hitter struck the bar with a looping volley and Moyes pulled off a stunning save to grab - right on the line - Clark's close-range follow-up header. Much, I have to say, to the chagrin of the row of proud mothers sitting directly in front of me.

THE PROGRAMME: Basic, but nicely produced on decent quality paper.

THE VERDICT: Hoppers have various views on ground-sharing. Few favourable. This was my first visit to Ram Meadow, so I wasn't too bothered about who was playing. But I guess most hoppers would prefer to see the landlord in action here rather than the tenant. My (no girlfriend along for this game) evening was enhanced by a chance meeting with Barry, a Diss Town supporter and a gold mine of information about the football scene in East Anglia. We'd seen him, flat cap and all, at the Long Melford match the previous Wednesday, so I was interested to get his views on the abandonment of that fixture. And much else besides.

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