

TT No.75: Andy Gallon - Tue 21st September 2010; **Thetford Town v Gorleston;** Eastern Counties League Div. 1; Res: 3-1; Att: 52; Admission: £5 (including 20pp programme); FGIF Match Rating: ****.

THE PLACE: Thetford, with apologies to those unfortunate enough to live there, may well be the armpit of Norfolk. What little there is to see (and the remains of the Cluniac priory and medieval castle are far from extensive) is overshadowed by a simply hideous central shopping area populated by chavs. This shocking act of civic vandalism appears to date from the 1960s. Clutching at straws, the town relies on an association with Dad's Army (funny only when we were kids) to attract tourists. Many of the exterior sequences of the over-running sit-com were shot in and around the town. There is a Dad's Army museum and trail, while a sculpture of Arthur Lowe's Captain Mainwaring was unveiled next to the River Thet earlier this year. I'm lost for words. Stupid boy! That description could not be applied to revolutionary philosopher Thomas Paine, Thetford's most famous son, who penned the seminal 'Rights of Man' - and promptly fled to America.

THE GROUND: Stuck out on an arterial road in a desperately unappealing location. However, much can be forgiven owing to the presence of a wonderfully archaic wooden grandstand, the like of which is disappearing quickly from UK football grounds. The stand, on the Mundford Road touchline, is a real museum piece. It boasts one of those classic open players' tunnels, where the masonry rises in steps towards the stand roof. There is a paddock in front. The remainder of the Recreation Ground isn't much to write home about. The social club/bar alongside the stand is cramped, tired and dingy. An ugly perimeter fence of unpainted steel slats does little to improve the venue's aesthetics, though I imagine such a structure was forced on the club by grading extremists. There is a cricket ground, and drab industrial units, beyond the goal at the western end. A college abuts the eastern end, and its playing fields, along with new houses and more industrial units, fill in the area beyond the touchline on the north side. There is a tiny car park shoehorned into a sliver of spare land between the main road and the grandstand. Arrive early to secure a space!

THE GAME: A crackerjack of a contest - and one from which Gorleston really deserved a draw. The visitors, spearheaded by classy midfielder Gary Williams, played their part to the full as the match evolved into an open, end-to-end thriller. Williams was outstanding. His first touch was excellent, his passing superb and his work rate astonishing. I don't know why he is playing at this level. Thetford were ahead before many of their rustic fans had made it into the ground. With less than two minutes on the clock, Henry Scott fired over a low free-kick from the right, and Luke Bailey, all alone on the edge of the six-yard box, scuffed a weak shot past wrongfooted keeper Elliott Pride. It became 2-0 in the 19th minute. Another ball in from the right was again poorly defended, and an unmarked Matt Howard had time to effect control and crack an angled 16-yarder past Pride.

Williams got Gorleston on the scoresheet in bizarre circumstances nine minutes before half-time. His 40-yard free-kick seemed to deceive home keeper Mark Bowden, and the ball dropped into the net at the back post. Bowden did much better in dealing with a glut of second-half Gorleston chances, many of them set up by Williams. The keeper's heroics were rewarded when Thetford broke away with 13 minutes remaining to seal (or steal) the points. Sean Blowers conceded possession in midfield, and a quick break gave the exotically named Bruno Tavares the opportunity to drill a low shot through Pride, who committed himself far too soon. And that was pretty much that.

THE PROGRAMME: A communication from Barnes Print. I didn't expect much and therefore wasn't disappointed with the generally lifeless contents. At least this issue was thrown in with the admission charge.

THE VERDICT: The splendid wooden grandstand makes a visit to the Recreation Ground a must. But don't waste any time on Thetford itself. Unless, of course, you're one of those strange people who regards Dad's Army as the last word in comedy.

07/20