

**TT No.76: Andy Gallon** - Wed 22nd September 2010; **Walsham-le-Willows v Norwich Utd**; ECL Prem Division; Res: 1-1; Att: 62; Admission: £5; Programme: 50p (28pp); FGIF Match Rating: \*\*\*.

**THE PLACE:** Walsham-le-Willows, 11 miles east of Bury St Edmunds, is scarcely big enough to make it onto the road map. How does such a small place support a senior football club? With difficulty, according to the exiled Aberdonian manning the pay hut alongside the main entrance. It seems that, without chairman Mike Powles' considerable efforts (he lives and breathes the Willows, I was told), things would be very different. Though a small village, Walsham is perfectly formed. Willow trees line the beck along the main (and almost only) street. The parish church of St Mary is a beauty. Its tie and hammer-beam roof construction are something unique to Suffolk and rarely seen elsewhere. The church also features a virgin's garland. Numerous weather-boarded and timber framed buildings outside this pleasant ecclesiastical oasis are a bonus.

**THE GROUND:** Just beyond the northern fringe of the village on Summer Road, a byway linking sleepy Walsham with the A143 and the outside world. Effectively three-sided, the ground, opened in 1952, is shared with the local cricket club. The sole stand, a modern cantilever sheltering four rows of seats and two tiny areas of terracing, straddles the halfway line on the east side. Opposite is the cricket pitch, its square fenced off at this time of year after re-seeding. The extra space now houses a second football pitch, used on this balmy evening for a training session by members of Walsham's youth teams. There is a small cover behind the north end goal. Curiously, its roof is attached to the pitch railings by supporting columns. The pavilion, complete with cricket scoreboard and built at an angle to the football pitch, houses a tidy social club/bar, toilets, a kitchen and the dressing rooms. Team photos in the bar include one from the black and white era of players posing in front of a stand with a thatched roof. Fantastic! The two floodlight masts on the halfway line can be erected only when the cricket season is over. This was their first outing of 2010-11. The Walsham Sports Ground is very rural - and, surrounded by fields and trees, certainly feels that way. Definitely one to savour.

**THE GAME:** Norwich United dominated the second half from first kick to last, and yet needed a stoppage time goal to salvage a deserved point. It left Walsham without a win from their opening nine league games, six of them drawn. The visitors had only themselves to blame. Their delivery into the box was abysmal. Aimless, high balls were meat and drink to home keeper Duncan McNally. A flash of individual brilliance was required, and substitute Tom Jeal supplied it, cutting in from the left wing to unleash a stunning 20-yard shot across McNally and into the far top corner of the net. Walsham were well on top in the first half, during which United failed to muster a single effort on target. The Willows' 18th-minute opener was nicely worked. Shane Leech sent Gary Newman scampering away down the right wing, and though his low cross ran behind James Tatham, Andy Cusack,

unmarked at the back post, drilled home an angled shot from just inside the box. Jeal's goal was remarkably similar. The game boiled over just after the hour when Walsham's Lee Sim was sent off for a mindless stamping offence which prompted something approaching a mass brawl. The extra man was all the incentive Norwich needed, but, boy, did they make heavy weather of securing a point.

**THE PROGRAMME:** A stomach-turning melange of purple, yellow and red, the cover on this issue is possibly the worst I've ever seen. A missive from Barnes Print, therefore seriously underwhelming. Cheap, though, at 50p.

**THE VERDICT:** An isolated, rural ground which will cheer most hoppers. The infrastructure, mostly modern, isn't especially diverting, but the setting certainly is.

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