

TT No.18: *Andy Gallon* - Wed 24th August 2011; **Boroughbridge** v Knaresborough Town; WYL Prem Division; Res: 1-1; Att: 125 (h/c); Admission: Donation; Programme: None; FGIF Match Rating: ***.

Not much cheers a hopper more than stumbling across an attractive ground having left home with fairly low expectations. There cannot be many West Yorkshire League enclosures with greater aesthetic appeal than Aldborough Road, a multi-sport complex the Boroughbridge club share with cricket, tennis and bowls. Right on the boundary between Boroughbridge (a small coaching town now bypassed by the Great North Road) and Aldborough (once an important Roman settlement), the ground was a thing of beauty during a first half played out in glorious late summer evening sunshine. When the cloud and rain arrived during the second 45 minutes, a perfect rainbow arced gracefully over Aldborough Road. Truly, in hopping terms, a pot of gold - and within 20 miles of my front door, to boot.

Unusually for the West Yorkshire League, Boroughbridge provide cover. A bijou stand, about 10 yards long with two rows of bench seats and smart paintwork, straddles the halfway line on the west side. This backs onto the boundary of the cricket field, which is at a slightly higher level and therefore provides elevated viewing. Opposite is a curious structure, which appears to consist of a wooden hut with a dug-out tacked onto it in 'lean-to' fashion. The whole thing has been painted white, which somehow softens its ugly design. Aldborough Road is effectively two sided because there is barely room for spectators at either end. Indeed, there are railings only along the touchlines. Both goals back onto hedges. Beyond the foliage at the north end are tennis courts and a bowling green; at the south end is located Boroughbridge's second pitch, used by their reserves, who play in the Harrogate & District League. Sundry sheds in the south-west corner house the groundsman's equipment, which, the superb state of the pitch indicates, is put to good use on a regular basis. Past these sheds can be found a single-storey pavilion, shared by the football and cricket clubs, containing dressing rooms, a social club, kitchen, bar and toilets. A bumper crowd for this local derby tested parking arrangements to the limit. Though a fairly open site, the presence of the hedges, and mature trees running the length of the east touchline, gives Aldborough Road a homely, intimate atmosphere.

Both teams had begun the season with two wins and a defeat, and an even contest resulted. Knaresborough, who have ambitions to join the Northern Counties East League, had the better chances and really should have won. A Town official told me they need £50,000 to erect floodlights at their Manse Lane ground. Planning permission is in place, as are the holes for the pylons. No lights at Aldborough Road, though, and with unimpressive referee Joe Goodwin unaccountably getting things under way six minutes late, it became distinctly gloomy during the closing stages, certainly once the cloud had rolled in and rain begun to fall.

Visiting striker Colin Heath fluffed a sitter in the opening five minutes and later saw a firm, angled drive blocked by Boroughbridge keeper Paul Diamond. The hosts offered little in attack, and it was a surprise when they took the lead in first half stoppage time. Paul Eagling's shot was charged down and the ball dribbled into the net off the thigh of Ben Clayton, who was lurking close to the goal line. The nature of his celebrations suggested he didn't know a great deal about the part he played in breaking the deadlock. Knaresborough equalised four minutes after the restart. It was another soft goal. The home team failed to clear their lines, and from just outside the penalty area, Christopher Hastings sent a poorly struck volley towards goal. Everyone, defenders and attackers alike, abdicated responsibility for dealing with the situation, and the ball rolled gently into the back of the net. One of those head-in-hands moments.

With rain and darkness now falling, and the aforementioned rainbow providing a stunning diversion, the game began to peter out. The referee seemed determined to hold up play whenever he could with pointless lectures over minor infringements. Inevitably, the players began to get tetchy, and the mood boiled over into a double sending-off in the 83rd minute. Dan Clayton (Boroughbridge) and Daniel Berry (Knaresborough) indulged in a bit of pushing and shoving whilst disputing a throw-in, and Mr Goodwin dismissed them. Both had been booked earlier, though Clayton's yellow card was simply farcical. He was cautioned for retaliation - when the culprit had been goal-scorer Ben Clayton! "It wasn't me!" he could be heard yelling at the whistler. The visitors had several good chances in the dying minutes, the best to James Bradley, who, in a one-on-one with the keeper, poked his effort wide.

I headed for home wondering why it had taken me so long to get to Aldborough Road. The main reason is that Boroughbridge do not issue a programme, a 'sin' that always receives a black mark in my ratings book. Given the size of the attendance, not to mention Boroughbridge and Aldborough themselves, this seems a silly omission. Judging by the number of pitch-side hoardings, there is scope for making money from advertisers. Neither were refreshments available, and there wasn't a raffle, though donations into a collecting box were encouraged during the second half. If you can bear going without 'paper', this is tidy venue which merits attention.

07/20