

TT No.244: Paul Roth - Tues 9th May 2006 **Sheppey Utd.** vs. University of Kent; British Energy Kent Co Lge. Div. 1 East Res: 3-3; Programme: N/A; No admittance charge.

The Isle of Sheppey has always held fond memories for me, as it was there that traditionally we always went to watch the first Friendly game of the season at the end of July. This was combined with doing the Shepherd Neame Passport Trail (getting 260 odd stamps from all its' pubs throughout Kent), and also by way of tradition a start-of-the-season meal which was a roast lunch from a cafe in the High Street. When we had finished the meal, the proprietor would ask if we wanted anything else and for our party piece, we duly ordered another roast lunch, much to his chagrin! Guffaws of laughter would then flow as we desperately tried to cram this extra food down. We would then literally roll round to the magnificent old ground in Botany Road to watch some football. Always at that time of year I remember it was very hot, and invariably we would spend the match asleep on the terraces. Yes, those were the days!

Much has changed since then...I am twelve stone heavier to start with and the ground at Botany Road is long gone. Even before you get onto the Island the approach to it, along the A249, is altered with a new dual carriageway speeding the motorist up to the new road bridge that has risen like the proverbial Phoenix and is about six months away from completion. This is a vital piece of construction and will greatly reduce driving times to and from the mainland, bypassing the old bridge that often had to be lifted to allow shipping to pass underneath, and caused massive traffic congestion.

The men in red and white now find their home ground at the Medway Ports Sports Arena which is located at the aptly named urbanisation of Halfway. Follow Queenborough road for 1/2 a mile and turn left into Holm Place and immediately right into the club's big car park. The club use the near pitch and the changing facilities are housed in the impressive looking pavilion which is the cricket clubs' HQ during the summer months. On a lovely balmy Spring evening it was a delight to watch football there...in the depths of Winter.....?

This was both teams' last game of the season, and as they had played each other only a couple of days previously and fought out a 4-4 draw, I was naturally expecting a goalless encounter! No way, as every player on the field did his best to serve up a riveting game which ended quite rightly even at 3 all. The University side have a justly renowned reputation for playing attractive football, but suffer from an ever-changing line up of players from which they can choose.

This Tuesday must have been unique for the football lover on the Island, as Sheerness East were beating Old Roan 1-0 not 300 hundred yards up the road at the excellently appointed working men's club ground...a superb set up this, for the level the club play at.

Finally, mention must be given to the tremendous unofficial website run by Shaun McCann. There are bang up-to-date reports and action photos therein and an in-depth history of the club. Great effort Shaun. A super evening out then, which brought back many happy memories. Oh yes, I forgot to mention there is no clubhouse at the ground where drink or food can be purchased, so bring your own Roast lunch with you!!

FGIF Rating: 4*.

04/20