

TT No.123: Paul Roth - Saturday 20th January 2007; **Staplehurst and Monarchs Utd** vs. Borden Village; Sen. Les Leckie Cup 2nd Rd; Res: 5-0; Att: 25ish; Programme: 4 pages given away free for a donation.

Very fond memories have I of the small but homely town of West Malling (pronounced mauling), the odd home of Staplehurst and Monarchs Utd FC. This is actually the home ground of Uniflo FC and the team from Staplehurst are sharing until their new £400k changing room and pavilion facility is built.

This was my fourth choice of match today as the storms of Thursday and overnight rain Friday had decimated my options. I think this was a bit touch and go as well but after a few calls to the club's helpful secretary, Mr Reader, fifty minutes ahead of kick off I had the 'green light' from him to say the game was on.

The ground is tucked away behind the High Street so to get there turn into West Street off High Street and this quickly becomes Norman Road. Follow this along for 200 yards and turn into the ground and find a smallish car park. Walk back into town to find lots of pubs and eateries. I had a pint of Sheps' Porter in the lovely Joiners Arms.

The venue is remarkable for one thing...a plaque commemorating the first ever cricket match to have been played in the county in 1705. In fact, this now rather innocuous venue has had over 6000 spectators present to watch cricket, albeit a long, long, time ago. NO chance of that nowadays! I do believe, however, that the famous Lashings club have played here in recent years. To find more info on this unique venue, read Steve King's excellent article in his own Non-League Digest magazine (issue 5 Dec 2006). Every Groundhopper should subscribe!

Changing rooms and a small clubhouse are situated in the far corner of the field and it is a 100-yard walk to the pitch proper. The playing area is roped off. A most welcome and very informative 4-page programme was given away free but I was asked for a donation which I most willingly gave. The club produce a matchday programme for every 1st XI home fixture.

The game was a breeze for the homesters who cruised past the visitors from near Sittingbourne by 5 goals to nil to earn a home tie in round 3 against Lanes End. The two teams meet again next Saturday in a league match, this time at Borden.

As is nearly always the case at this level, the people involved at the club are exceedingly friendly and I was made most welcome during my short stay.

Yes, happy memories of West Malling as I mentioned at the start of this article but I never ever dreamt I would be back to watch football, but am glad I did.

FGIF rating: 3*.

