

TT No.126: *Stephen Harris* - Saturday 24 November 2007; Eastern Counties League Division 1; **Halstead Town 0-1 Godmanchester Rovers**. Att: 74; Admission: £4; Programme issued; FGIF Match rating: 4*.

As the only senior ground in Essex that I had not visited before, Halstead Town's ground has been high on my list of possible destinations for a free Saturday for some time. I made one attempt last season, foiled by wet weather, and admit to having been pretty nervous about the prospects for this game in the morning as the train rattled along through frozen Essex countryside. But by the time I had sought refreshment at the excellent Dog Inn and viewed the sights of this pretty little town, the sun had done its work and the frost had vanished.

The Rosemary Lane stadium first opened in 1948, with the 500-seater stand following in 1950. I don't reckon much has happened to the ground since and it remains a perfectly preserved 1950s venue. A white rail surrounds the pitch, with a sloping concrete walkway all around and shallow grass banking behind up to a neat black and white boundary fence. The south side is dominated by the relatively large red-brick and concrete stand with its six rows of red plastic seats and one row of benches at the back, with 'HTFC' painted in white on the backwall. Behind is the large and recently refurbished clubhouse and a portacabin houses the efficient kitchen, where I was charged just £1.50 for a bacon roll and a mug of tea. Apparently, a programme shop also operates from here, but of it there was no sign on this occasion. Overall a very likeable ground; more than adequate for the status of the club and instantly one of my favourites.

Unfortunately, the game did not really live up to the surroundings. Halstead pretty much dominated both halves but exhibited woeful attempts on goal, easily dealt with by the away 'keeper. Meanwhile Godmanchester made the most of an early free-kick to pinch the only goal of the game. The home side's frustration in front of goal was exemplified by a forward who received a straight red card late in the match for apparently diving twice within the box in the space of a minute in a desperate search for a penalty.

I discovered whilst I was here that Halstead can be reached by bus from Chelmsford for evening fixtures, so I hope that it will be a nice little addition to my circuit of accessible midweek grounds. Not so long ago I read that the ground was under threat and Town planned to move to a new stadium. There was no mention of this on Saturday, but I would suggest that anyone who has not yet found the time to visit this excellent ground should do so soon.