

**TT No.167: Paul Roth** - Sat 12th January 2008; **Saga Sports & Social** vs. UK Paper; Kent County League Division 2 East; Res: 1-4; Att: 8; NO Programme or entry fee; Weather: Sunny and mild after heavy rain overnight.

Let's get all the Saga jokes out of the way shall we, before we carry on;

No, they don't have a youth team.

No, the players aren't all over 50 years of age.

No, they don't play a more elderly game here, unlike Fulham FC, as Alf Garnet once cruelly remarked.

And, yes, I do qualify for all Saga's myriad benefits! (that's not funny, actually).

East Dean FC, Otford Utd FC and Beccles Town FC all have stunningly beautiful football grounds, but I think just shading it in those beauty stakes is Canteen Meadow, the former home of Bishopsbourne FC and now home of Saga Sports and Social Football Club.

The hamlet of Bishopsbourne is found about 4 miles South of Canterbury, along and just off the A2, on the way to Dover, and consists of a short street, church and a super pub, the Mermaid(GBG listed for the past 20 years)which is the hub of the community and is used by the club as a meeting and social venue after all home fixtures. Plus, of course, the football ground, I've previously mentioned. The whole place has a sleepy, Olde Worlde charm that's hard to capture in words without actually visiting.

The ground is so stunning I'm having a job as to how to pick my sentences to best describe it to you all, that will fully do the place justice. Here goes.

Enter from the tiny High Street through a big wooden gate and onto a large field that is used as a car park on match days...sheep grazing pasture on any other day of the week, and follow round to the old pavilion which houses the shower and changing rooms. The pitch is fully wired and fenced-off and a few very well-appointed houses encompass half the arena. The charismatic Bishopsbourne cricket club lies further beyond and behind this pavilion. There's an elevated view from behind the far goal, but one has to negotiate sheep and their droppings to attain this higher ground, but it's well worth the effort. The vistas over the playing area and hamlet beyond are glorious. The sheep are curious creatures and venture over to get a butcher's(!) of the intrepid, stupid traveller.

Yellow and blue goal nettings seal the scene.

Run to strict disciplinary rules; they've only had four yellow cards all term so far, and foul language is prohibited on the field of play, Saga hail from Folkestone, the home town of the famous multi-million-pound conglomerate, and have only being playing at Bishopsbourne for the past 3 years or so. Their ebullient fixture

secretary, Jenny Fagg, had rung me in the morning to confirm that the match was definitely going ahead as scheduled, after torrential rain of the past few days in this neck of the woods, and she introduced herself to me during the match.

Val Gawler and her husband put in a lot of the admin work here and their small band have managed to get the ground ship-shape again, after much neglect. Well done!

At half time Val offered piping hot tea, a mince pie and a doughnut, free of charge to all those watching from the touchline. I've never had service like that before, have any of you?

A muscular and better-on-the-day UK Paper team, from Sittingbourne, comfortably won this mid-table tie by 4 goals to one, and although, of course, the football is of paramount importance, it seemed to me just being a part of this beautiful set-up and standing on canteen Meadow today, amongst friends-for-the-afternoon was of more significance.

They don't issue programmes and I fully realise that is going to inhibit many paper-chasers from attending here, but I have got to say; **THAT IS YOUR LOSS**. This is a magical place, and I was utterly and totally smitten with it.

No programme, no floodlights, no tea bar but I still preferred it to Otford United last week, and its far, far, far, better value for money than the New Wembley!

FGIF Rating 6\*. I said it, and I stick by it; it was nicer than Otford!

06/20