

TT No.239: Paul Roth - Saturday 26th April 2008; Oxon Senior League Prem Division; **Chadlington** vs. Rover Cowley; Res: 1-2; Att: 100 (?); Programme: 20 pages for a donation; Entry: Free; Weather: Sunny and mild.

Spring has eventually sprung in my neck of the woods this week and with the promise of sunshine, I've been out in our back garden busily rubbing and polishing my gnomon! We've had a glorious show of daffodils and tulips in both our back and front gardens, here in Garlinge, this year and I always think of Spring as a time of burgeoning new beginnings. It's of course, also, a time when our football season reaches its climax and leagues and cups are won. But like the proverbial 'scorpion', Spring can have a sting in its tail. Our daffs and tulips, for example, are dying back now and don't look quite so 'glorious', and for every league and cup winner, there's a runners-up and loser, not to mention the unfortunate few that suffer the ignominy of relegation.

My old pal and drinking partner, Geoff Seers, 'hops' aboard my Ford Focus at Uxbridge and we are soon enjoying a few real ales, in varied hostelryes, as we travel West towards Chadlington, our chosen football halt today.

The Tite Inn, newly refurbished, in the village and the White Horse at Hedgereley are amongst our favourite inns during our sojourn to Chapel Row, the quintessentially English home of the Oxfordshire Senior League club.

The club, with its comfortable pavilion and ample car park, sits on the side of a hillside, overlooking the Evenlode valley, today resplendent with fields of yellow rape-seed all around, in the heart of the Cotswolds. It is a magnificent setting on such a lovely afternoon.

The venue is also the site of the local cricket club and for part of its boundary is enclosed by drystone walling, giving it that unique Cotswoldy feel. Wooden dug-outs are sited on the far side and a small overhang behind the near goal offers a modicum of protection, on inclement days.

Before kick-off I proffer the superb 20-page programme for us both, from club Chairman Paul Duester. This is a super read and with its colour cover and production on quality paper, this offering is a real collector's item.

The mathematics of the game are simple...Chadlington have to beat their visitors from Oxford this afternoon to keep their championship aspirations alive. Any other result will see Rover Cowley crowned champs. Kick off brings confusion, but that's nothing unusual for this writer, as the goal nets are blue and white, as are the corner flags, but it's the men in green and black that occupy the 'Chadlington' dug-out. Yes, Rover Cowley are playing in the blue and white hoops today! Most odd.

As expected, the contest is very tight and unsurprisingly the first half ends goalless. After the interval, the more muscular and bigger visiting side take the lead, but 'Chad' stick at it and grab an equaliser, to the delight of most of the

hundred or so spectators assembled, that sets up a grandstand finish. Almost inevitably, as the homesters push forward for that winning goal, RC snatch a late winner themselves, that confirms them as Oxfordshire Senior League champions for the 2007-08 season.

At the final whistle I get chatting to Chairman Paul, who he tells me there is a good chance of the club gaining Hellenic league status next term, if they can only finish in second spot. They need to win at Garsington next Saturday; that game kicks-off at 11.30am, incidentally. My conversation with Paul leaves me with the feeling that, despite the disappointment of today, the folks of Chadlington FC and the community as a whole are a pretty contented lot. And why not indeed...this is a fantastic, community-based football club set in idyllic surroundings with a great future ahead of it.

No, Chadlington FC haven't succeeded in winning the league this year, but I reckon that this particular scorpion's Spring sting is only is only a minor irritation.

FGIF Rating: 5*.

06/20