

**TT No.73: *Paul Roth*** - Sat 29th September 2007; Anglian Comb Prem Division; **Beccles Town vs. Sprowston Athletic**; Res: 2-1; Att: 50; Programme: 20 pages, £2 with entry fee; Weather: Autumnal sunny intervals.

The One Pound note; Five Boys Chocolate bars; telephone directories in phone boxes; Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother...God bless her; steam trains; Route-master buses; Concord; London smog.....just a few of the icons that have slipped out of the gaze of our everyday life over the last 92 years. Throughout all these losses, the main stand at Beccles's College Meadow ground has remained a constant.

When I turned off Common Lane into the picturesque park that hosts rugby, cricket, football and indoor bowls, my eye was immediately taken by this beautiful edifice. Built in 1915 and extended for an FA Cup tie against Enfield during the 1950's, this sleek structure harks back to an era long since gone. Let's be honest, if this stand was anywhere else than in rural Suffolk and accommodating anything more than step 7 Anglian Combination football, it would have been demolished years ago with something else far more, bland, occupying the site backing onto the bank of trees and railway line.

The football ground is a lovely place, entry being gained through a small gate, where £2 gained my admission and 20-page programme.....a smartly produced magazine in black and white throughout. Everything and more, is contained therein. An erudite bunch these Suffolk-onians (?), testament to this given by the first of 20 question in the half time quiz....."What is the chemical symbol for Helium?" Trees surround the arena, which is enclosed by a small fence on the nearside, wire fencing behind the nearest goal and of course that stand on the furthest side. A tea hut adjoins the stand and there is a swanky newish clubhouse next to the entry point.

Situated on the river Waveney, sleepy Beccles is redolent of so many towns that host this level of football, in as much they are pleasant places to while away a couple of hours but perhaps places not to linger much longer. That's hot, coming from me, living in Margate but I guess the reader might know what I mean!

Driving up today from my home in the South East corner of Kent, I was surprised to find it is over 170 miles door to door...measured coming home you understand, as naturally detours to a couple of GBG pubs had augmented my mileage on my way North.

Beccles can be reached by train direct from London Liverpool Street, albeit in 3 hours, but if you can drive this will be much the quicker option. The Bear & Bell in the Old Market, in the town proper, is well worth seeking out, which I found by exiting the ground in the far corner, through an old rusty gate and ascending the bridge that crosses the railway line and from there straight up Station Road to the square.

Bottom of the league, Beccles have really struggled this term, having only won one league game so far, and that being an extraordinary 5-0 win at Sheringham. On the other hand, their visitors from Norfolk, lying 3rd in the table, had won three of their six outings. The match didn't pan out as the league standings would suggest though, and a really tight game was decided by the odd goal in three by the homesters. Play was very much a midfield war of attrition, won by Beccles purely by their better finishing of the few chances that appeared during the 90 mins.

This early Autumn day was an utter delight, and I can't remember being captivated so completely by a football ground for quite some time. Just a word of caution though...the idyll of that wondrous stand is slightly tarnished when you step into it to discover the detritus of 92 years laying at your feet where you sit, and that the fittings within are pretty tawdry and broken. No matter, this is a place where time has miraculously stood still.

FGIF 5\*.....for the stand alone.

06/20