

TT No.123: Paul Roth - Sat 3rd January 2009; Kent County League Division 2 West; **BOROUGH UTD** vs. Meridian FC; Res:1-0; Att: Variable, depending who was walking their dog across the rec; Programme & Entry: N/A; Weather: Sunny but bitterly cold.

SWANSCOMBE -THE FINAL FRONTIER.

Between the ages of four and eight I lived with my father in Erith, above his dental practice, whilst my mother was away pursuing a brief operatic career.

At week's working end Pops and I would commute back to our dacha on the North Kent Riviera; the journey from Erith necessitating a change of train at Dartford, from where we would board our bullet train, head-code 82, onward and Eastward. Even as tiny child, I can vividly remember the first few towns after Dartford, each resembling a permanent, frosty, Wintry landscape, even in the height of Summer, being covered as they were back then with a thick layer of chalk dust from the enormous nearby cement works. At one time Blue Circle Industries, based here in Northfleet and Swanscombe, were the largest producers of cement in Europe.

A massive protest in the 1950's, regarding the appalling conditions the local populace found themselves living in, led the cement industry in Great Britain to be completely cleaned up, and is now the most environmentally friendly such industry anywhere in the world: Swanscombe finds itself today a totally 'white-free' zone!

The massive excavations have eventually and conversely benefited the inhabitants of the Borough; the Bluewater Shopping complex being built in one of the resultant craters. Also, a new 700 home community is supposedly going to be constructed opposite. Swanscombe Man, an archaic Homo Sapien, now found to be a woman (!), plus a prehistoric elephant have been uncovered in the chalky deposits.

Borough United, who play at the Broomfield Recreation Ground, were formed in 1946, taking their name from their first chairman, the then Mayor of the Borough of Dartford. Swanscombe may well be a cleaner place to live in than it used to be, but personally, I still regard it as grim as death. Take the three pubs I sampled this afternoon; The George and Dragon, The Alma and The Wheatsheaf. In no particular order of preference, they range from the grotesque and ghastly to the gruesome. None have or will ever feature in any guide book with the word 'Good' in its title! That said, they do possess a certain "je ne sais quoi", which makes them more than interesting places to linger.

Turn off the High Street, up and along The Grove, by the Wheatsheaf pub, and you come to the very modest surroundings of the football ground. Car parking is available in a free such area opposite, and is a completely safe place to leave your vehicle as police patrol cars pass by every ten minutes!; a changing room block with a tidy but old fashioned clubhouse attached, only open at the end of play, are the only clue of football's presence. Goal posts and nets are put up by the players

themselves prior to matches, being taken down immediately the final whistle blows.

A few chimney stacks of the only remaining cement work's in the area, and the tallest electricity pylon in the country, at just over 600 feet high, break up the otherwise dull horizon. In truth, I'm lucky to be watching this game at all, the sharp frost having only just cleared by 1 pm, leaving a rock-hard pitch, but referee Simon Haydon, a portly gentleman who actually makes me look like a serious contender for slimmer of the year, sensibly allows play to take place.

The lack of any structures on the recreation ground itself has allowed the sun to thaw things out enough, unlike a mile away at Stonebridge Road, where Ebbsfleet United's match versus Wrexham was postponed early on.

Borough are challenging for promotion back to Division 1 West, from whence they came last season, whilst Meridian, from Charlton, are doing a grand job propping up the rest of the teams in the league. The game doesn't reflect this situation, the only goal of a tight contest coming after 55 minutes, when S. White curls a shot past the heroic visiting stopper. Meridian have a goal disallowed themselves and are unlucky not to snatch a point.

I wonder what the 'Major' would make of Swanscombe today, if he were still alive? He would not believe, or even thought it was possible, that an international railway station lies nearby, making Swanscombe, in essence, a frontier town, from where you can today travel to either Paris or Brussels in under three hours by rocket train.

Let's be honest, nobody in their right mind would turn off the A226 onto Swanscombe High Street unless they absolutely had to and only the most devout football follower would wish to visit the Recreation Ground, the home of Borough Utd FC; but despite the ennui that permeates the towns' streets, a real sense of community shines through and the great humour in which this football match was played made my three and a half hour stay here an utterly enjoyable experience. No chalk dust either, although somehow, I think I preferred the town bedecked in white!

FGIF Rating: 4*.

06/20