

TT No.182: Paul Roth - Saturday 21st March 2009; Middlesex County League Division 1 (Central and East); **Sloane FC vs Copland**; Res: 4-3; Att:150 (?); Entry: Free; Programme: Weather: Warm, sunny and glorious; French Onion Soup: None!

17 minutes and 17 seconds. That's how long it took me to walk from Victoria station to the historic Chelsea Hospital, home of the legendary Chelsea Pensioners. A nostalgic walk for me personally too, as along the route of the Buckingham Palace and Pimlico Roads are monuments that hold significant poignancy for me. When 'doing' the Football league, Bob and myself would use overnight coaches to travel to the north east; after we'd we met at Victoria railway station, outside platform 5, we'd always have a few beers in the Orange Brewery prior to departure. For six years in a row, in the Summers of the late 1970's and early 80's we used to travel with the infamous 'Consolas' coach company to Athens; it became 'de-rigueur' for us to drink in the Ebury Arms before boarding that magic/tragic bus. We always reckoned it could be our last drinking session together, so dangerous was that coach journey. Not to wax too lyrically, but I could write book after book about our experiences.

Those establishments are still there, on my route to Hospital Road, along with the excellent Belgravia Farmer's market, Belgravia Police station and a host of other up-market eateries and shops.

The hospital itself has been in the news recently, following the disclosure that it has allowed two ladies to take up residency within its hallowed walls for the first time ever. Sloane FC are supremely lucky to have their headquarters within the grounds, alongside the Thames, slap in between the hospital on the north bank and the iconic Battersea Power station on the south. The two create an almost surreal juxtaposition. Watching and towering over proceedings throughout is the omnipresent, striking, golden domed Chillianwalla Memorial obelisk, a monument that commemorates the 1849 battle of the same name.

On this glorious day weather-wise, all present for this 11 am kick-off (another match in the on-going series of 'Groundhop days' organised by the MCL) and let me tell you here and now, there were an awful lot of us who had travelled from all over the kingdom to be here, knew we were witnessing something very special indeed. An excellent 8-page programme sold for £2 and was obtained from outside the changing area, where a samovar had been positioned to dispense copious amounts of tea; actually, in truth, it was only an old a tea urn, but samovar sounds so much more in keeping with the grandiose surroundings!

In this unique setting you just had the feeling the match was going to be a wondrous spectacle. We all were not going to be disappointed. League leaders Copland, from Stonebridge Park, started the better and had a couple of half chances early doors, as the home 'keeper McCausland battled with the hard, dry surface. However, against the run of play, and just before the teatime break (or

should that read 'lunchtime') Sloane took the lead when claims for a handball by the visitors saw the resultant ricochet fall kindly for the centre forward, who duly made scoring a formality.

The second half saw six further goals for the assembled mass and a final score-line of 4-3 in favour of the homesters. This seemed unlikely when they led 4-1 with just a quarter of an hour to go, but mistakes in the Sloane defence had them nervously clinging for the important three points that may well ultimately see them gain promotion to the top division, come season's end.

Everyone who was lucky enough to come here today will without doubt never forget the experience, and for your correspondent this was yet another memorable chapter to add to his list of events that have so richly enhanced my life on the highways and byways hereabouts.

For more information regarding this fascinating club, visit their website. 17 minutes and 17 seconds later I was on the train heading back to Farningham Road, where I'd parked-up, in readiness for part 2 of my wondrous day.

FGIF Rating ...5*.

06/20