

**TT No.193: Paul Roth** - Saturday 28th March 2009; Anglian Combination Premier Division; **Loddon United** vs. Hindringham; Res:4-1; Att: 60(?); Entry: N/A; Prog: 20pp donation/none was asked for! Weather: cold and wet; French Onion Soup: None!

We're collectors, statisticians, accumulators and 'tickers-off', aren't we, us Groundhoppers? You probably already know, I collect cravats and beer bottles (I have over 450, every single one, from a different brewery). You can add to this list my extensive collection of pickled walnut jars. I'm not a statistician per se, but I do like to mark off and keep records of all the GBG listed pubs I visit on my travels.

Today I had four such establishments on my itinerary, before decamping to George Lane, the splendid and most characterful home of Anglian Combination Premier division side Loddon Utd. FC. The Ferry Inn, at Reedham, is of extra special interest to me, as both my wife and I remember waiting to take the unique, tiny (it can only carry three cars at a time, maximum) chain-hauled ferry that transports you across the River Yare at this point.

The waiting I recall, on the north bank, where the pub is located, but my beloved reckons we also went in it for a drink! I don't! Admittedly, this all happened more twenty-five years ago, but it does seem odd that she does recall the drinking bit and that I do not. Maybe it says something about me? So, here's my conundrum; should I count it as having been visited and put faith in her memory? NO. That's the simple answer; I know what her memory is like!

The Artichoke at Broome was my first port of call en-route and is worthy of a visit even if Real Ale isn't your thing. Its interior has been restored to how it would've looked one hundred years ago, by its present owners; now it even boasts a wondrous old fashioned 'tap room'. The Ferry Inn is unique, as I mentioned before. I parked on the Yare's southern bank and crossed as a foot passenger. If you're going to the pub, there is no toll charge. The ferryman told me to wave to him after I'd finished my 'session', and if he was on the other side he'd come over and collect me. Unique!

It was a foul morning; cold and hosing it down with rain and after my imbibing sojourn I first spotted the football ground from Kitten's Lane. From here, my immediate impression of the club's HQ is one of joy. A slope runs down to the community hall, which is home to football in Winter and cricket in Summer and is used by both as a cosy clubhouse.

The playing area is roped in its entirety and with household dwellings and tall trees surrounding it, the whole has an enclosed, hugger mugger and homely feel to it.

A large car park is to be found off George Lane.

Once inside the snug pavilion, which by the way sells Real Ale too, I got chatting to home secretary 'Carlos' Pitcher. A nicer chap you could not wish to meet. He even bought me a half a pint of Wherry. Cheers mate!

The splendid 20-page programme, a real labour of love and a most informative read I should add, can be picked up from the bar counter and a donation is collected later, although I didn't notice anyone doing the rounds personally.

On the field of play, Loddon are struggling to find the back of the net just at present, but hold a comfortable enough mid-table position in the league of sixteen clubs', following their elevation last term. A goalless draw last time out, at League-leaders Sheringham Town, was most noteworthy. Hindringham, on the other hand, are leaking goals at an alarming rate, and although are not in a relegation spot themselves, the bottom two teams, Whatton and Holt United respectively, are slowly gaining ground on them.

The 2.30 pm kick-off heralds as entertaining a match as your correspondent has seen all season, which sees the homesters sail into a comfortable three nil lead by teatime. It could've been much, much worse for the visitors from west Norfolk, who have a lot of injury problems at present, had Loddon's taken all their chances.

Free tea and biscuits are gleefully had by one and all in the warmth of the clubhouse at this juncture.

PLEASE NOTE, that repugnant French pottage is not to be found here. Coincidentally, I am joined today by fellow 'hopper Cliff Heath, from Sittingbourne, who is visiting his daughter in nearby Norwich. Cliff recounted the story of how both his wife, Rosemary, and himself had suffered food poisoning when partaking of this obnoxious elixir; see, it's not just me!

The heavy rain returned after the break, as did the siege conditions upon the Hindringham goal mouth. Somehow, through luck, great goalkeeping, stout defending and Loddon United profligacy no further goals were conceded by the men in black and white. They even pulled one back, courtesy of a penalty kick. The lads in red had the final say though, netting a late and supremacy-underlining score near the end.

Now here's an odd thing to say. Loddon United is best visited on the wettest day you can! Two reasons for this statement: first off, the sloping pitch drains so well that rain alone is never going to see a match called off here. The fire brigade could pump water onto it all day long and it would still be fit for play. Secondly, and something I do not remember seeing at a football ground before, is that when it does rain, a massive awning is unfurled from the pavilion's side, offering spectators protection from the elements. Not quite a retractable roof, I know, but sort of!

Great day, great match, great company, great football and great value. I doubt if I've had a more enjoyable day for years, but as my wife pointed out to me on my return home, "you say that every week". Do I really? Next time you see me, ask to see my pickled walnuts!!

FGIF Star Rating: 5\*.

06/20