

TT No.29: Paul Roth - Sat 12th September 2009; Kent County League Division 2 East; **Chartham Sports** vs. Platt United; Res: 2-0; Att: 30; Programme: 12 Pages, free as was admission; Weather: Breezy, sunny and very warm; Altitude: The Memorial Ground is 16 metres above sea level.

If you were to ask people aged forty or over, who have lived in this part of south east Kent for the majority of their lives, what they most associated with the pretty village of Chartham, located a couple of miles south west of the city of Canterbury, I'm certain they would unanimously mention the former mental hospital that stood at the summit of Rattington Street, atop the Chartham Downs. To me, the very name 'Chartham' connotes not just a mental hospital, but more an 'Asylum', a 'Maison de Lunacy', a 'Nuthouse'.

I've heard and often used the expression myself: "You'll end up in Chartham.....". My perception, probably an incorrect one, is that if a person's mental health has deteriorated to such an extent that they need to be institutionalised and shut away, then they're probably a danger not only to other people, but to themselves as well.

My great friend Bob actually worked at the hospital during the early 1960's, in the mortuary. One of his duties included sewing the brains and vital organs back into the stomachs of the deceased, after 'Post Mortem', in readiness for cremation or burial. Nice work, if you can get it!

He'd often regale stories to me of life inside those forbidding walls, of etiolated patients marooned in shaded rooms, protected from the daylight, poor souls existing only for the next cigarette or the next round of oblivion-inducing medication; of the constant moaning and wailing of the sleepless and ill-at-ease during night-times, suddenly further agitated by terrifying, shrill screams that would resonate along the soulless, echoing corridors. His insightfulness would always be beyond the moribund and the picture painted always desolate, bleak and utterly hopeless. On a happier note, it's where Bob met his first wife Kristina.

Of course, there's more to the village than just the old hospital, which by the way, has long been replaced by much needed modern housing. There's a football club for starters! Chartham Sports FC have just begun life in division 2 East of the Vandanel Kent County Football League, following promotion from the Canterbury & District league last season; in fact, they have gained successive elevations, being promoted from Division 1 of the that competition the season before last.

The village of Chartham is actually most attractive, having the Great Stour River running through its centre, with the old and now redundant paper mill still in situ on its northerly bank and having some lovely walks hereabouts, which both my wife and I have undertaken on numerous occasions over the years. The GBG accredited Artichoke Inn, at the foot of the street aforementioned and just along from the railway station, is a hostelry I've frequented often. Although nowadays much

altered to how I first remember it, it's certainly worthy of more than just a fleeting visit.

The football club play at the Memorial Recreation Ground, in Station Road, a grasshopper's 'hop' from the railhead. Upon parking in the large village hall car park, I noted the readings annotated on the complex 'Pitot-Static' instrumentation onboard my Ford Focus, and found I'd come to rest at an altitude of 16 metres, or, to be more accurate, 52.493438 feet, above sea level, and was therefore not in need of additional oxygen to aid my breathing.

The ground is fairly basic with goal furniture being erected just before kick-off. Helpful club secretary, David Woodward, had produced a 12 page programme, an informative and well-crafted effort this, which he handed to me free of charge and came as welcome surprise; it's a production that 'hoppers will be glad to hear is to be a regular feature at all Chartham Sports' home 1st X1 games.

The match itself, the club's inaugural home KCL fixture, was a hard-fought tussle between two teams that initially struggled to come to terms with the fast, rock-hard, bleached and dusty surface. I don't think I've ever seen a pitch so devoid of green grass this early in the season. With the wind behind them, Platt had the better of the first half, hitting the crossbar after half an hour. They pressed gainfully, but in reality, that was their only clear-cut opening and teatime arrived goalless.

Drinks were given away for a donation next-door to the well-appointed changing room block, and rolls, sandwiches and other comestibles could be gleaned from the 'Chartham Village Stores' across the road, at the top of the ground. I also obtained this month's edition of 'Nuts' from there.

The second half started in the same vein but slowly the homesters got more into proceedings, taking the lead in the 70th minute, when the visitors failed to clear a bobbling ball. The goal signalled an onslaught from the men in red & black, but once again they failed to hit their target and were struck a fatal blow when Chartham Sports augmented their goal tally with just a few minutes remaining, thus securing their first league points.

A friendly club, which will be visited by many of us once word has gotten around that they are 'issuing', and proof, if ever it was needed, that you don't need to travel thousands of miles on a Saturday to have an interesting, absorbing and thoroughly enjoyable day out at a football match (my home is a mere 18.4738 miles from the CSMG).

However, the day did throw up one so far unanswered question: As that 'Asylum', on top of that God-forsaken hill, is no longer, then where are all those patients today, who would have otherwise been housed and treated there?

I reckon we know the answer, don't we?

FGIF Star rating: a mind-bending, 5*.

06/20

