

**TT No.60: Paul Roth** - Saturday 17th October 2009; Surrey County Intermediate League (Western) Division 1; **Shalford FC** vs. Unis Old Boys FC; Res: 1-0; Att: 7; Programme: 8 pages free, as was entry; Weather: Overcast but mild; Altitude: Shalford Park is 37 metres above sea level.

Sitting in the back garden during another blisteringly hot day, at the back end of last Summer, sipping my umpteenth Daiquiri Floridita and with time on my hands, I engaged in the compilation of a prioritised list of the top one thousand football clubs that I would most like to visit in the future.

It's probably of no consequence to the reader whatsoever if I were tell you that a trip to Real Madrid appears 388th on my 'Hit List' but you might be more taken aback if I were to tell you that an excursion to Shalford Park, the home of Surrey County Intermediate League (Western) Division side Shalford FC, was up there in 9th spot. Life will be complete, almost not worth continuing with, if ever I attain nirvana and stand outside the lofty gates of Batman Petrolspor!

At an altitude of 37 meters, or 121.391 ft in old money, above sea level, Shalford Park has been a bolt-on destination of mine for some little while now, ever since I'd read an article about the club last season. Their headquarters are situated just to the south of Guildford, and a little way out of Shalford village, on the A281. As usual, I'd arrived early for my customary liquid preamble, not only around the historic county town itself but also amongst yonder Down-land.

Actually, Guildford isn't a place I've dropped anchor that often; wry smiles, as well as cringes, inevitably flash through the memory whenever I drive past on the A3, recalling one ghastly, hideously shameful drunken night spent in the city's Uni bar.

Parking was a bit problematical, as I didn't realise it was free in the pay-and-display car park en-site, only that is if you are visiting SP for football related matters and only on Saturdays. Difficulties really only arise when trying to get past the elderly, over-officious and charismatically bypassed council gatekeeper, who guards the area as if he was protecting the crown jewels themselves. He must rate as one of the grumpiest attendants I've ever had the misfortune to come across.

Once the Oberfuhrer had been assuaged, the ground lays before you and is a joy to behold. Fully enclosed by neat wooden rail and having an elevated area on its easterly side, a feature that adds bags of character and a sense of theatre to the whole, the arena has the meandering River Wey beyond (!), tree covered hills and the city as a backdrop.

The lush playing area rarely floods, I was told, as any surface water quickly drains away into the flood plain below.

More trees, this time behind the changing rooms and refreshment pavilion end, had shed their leaves, carpeting that entire area with fallen, golden Autumnal foliage.

I'd been in electronic communication with chairman Andy Rudman prior to my visit and it was he who warmly welcomed me, furnishing me with the club's excellent, well written and colourful 8-page matchday programme. Ex Wessex and Kershaw Cambridgeshire League player, Andy is in truth Mr. Shalford, being in charge of everything logistical at the club.

Ably assisted by his dad, Mike, who fed and watered me at teatime, this truly is a family orientated set up.

The football match on the day was a little disappointing, containing not that many goal-scoring chances and with too many passes going awry. That said, the pace was always fast and a goal was always in the offing, most likely coming, I thought, from the yellow and blue clad Old Boys, who hail from the other side of town. With 10 minutes remaining and hopes of a score fast receding, the Old Boys managed to fluff an 'unmissable' chance. The 'Caged Tigers' then swept up field, netting the game's only goal with a well taken strike from centre forward Jack Lofthouse. My goodness, doesn't a goal settle the angst?!!

Shalford FC and Unis Old Boys FC, who are comprised totally of Surrey University's former graduates, both have excellent and informative websites and are well worth checking out.

Another wondrous day at an as friendly a football club as you're ever likely to encounter, comes accompanied with FGIF's highest star rating. Mind you, I do admit to a miscalculation; I really should have had Shalford FC higher up on that 'Hit List' of mine, and maybe Real Madrid a wee bit lower.

FGIF Star Rating: 5\*.

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