

TT No.158: Justin Holmes - Sat 15th January 2011; **Pease Pottage Village** v Cuckfield Town; Mid Sussex Senior Charity Cup 2nd Round; Venue: Finches Field, Pease Pottage; Score: 6-2; Admn and Prog: N/A; Attendance: 15; Match Rating: 4.

After heavy rain fell on south-east England in the preceding days, it was looking like it would be another headache to avoid today being another blank Saturday. Happily, the rains relented from Friday lunchtime onwards, and as I fancied taking in a county league level game for first time since early November, I chose to head to the outskirts of Crawley for a Mid Sussex Senior Charity Cup game between Pease Pottage Village, of the Sussex County League Division 3, against Cuckfield Town, of the Mid Sussex League Premier Division.

There are many absolute gems of grounds in the Sussex County League - Finches Field is not one of them. In truth, there is little to recommend paying a visit to Pease Pottage. Located at the bottom of the M23 and very close to the Pease Pottage motorway service area, Finches Field is certainly easy to get to by car. By train, it's a three mile, just under an hour's walk from Crawley station, and one walks past the Broadfield Stadium, home of Crawley Town, about half way en route. Finches Field is a pretty unremarkable and bland place to watch football, it must be said. Located adjacent to the busy A23 dual carriageway, there is a constant loud roar of traffic noise in the background, and there are three pitches with a very open feel to the complex. The main pitch is railed off with hard standing along one length and behind one of the goals, with a wooden stand providing a small covered standing area but with limited shelter as many of the side panels have been blown off/removed. A clubhouse is set well behind one of the goals. Only one wooden dugout was in place - the other plastic one had blown down, leaving only a bench for the away team.

Pease Pottage Vilage, as has been customary in recent years, are struggling in the Sussex League Division 3, second bottom in the table with only two wins from 16 games and none since 11th September. They did progress to this round with a comfortable 3-0 win at Cowfold, of the West Sussex League Premier Division. After two successive promotions, Cuckfield lay in ninth place in the 14 team Premier Division of the Mid Sussex League, but with only three league wins all season.

On a dull day with a strong biting wind making conditions feel terribly cold, the game started in explosive fashion, with the home side opening up a two-goal lead within the first few minutes. The first goal was a delightful free kick into the top corner from just outside the box, the second smashed home after a corner had caused confusion in the box. One feared for Cuckfield at this stage as they appeared to be losing their discipline with reckless lunges, however they managed to get back into the game just a couple of minutes later, with a free kick from a long way out which swirled its way past the keeper in the gusty wind. The game settled down from this point and was much more even, although the home side missed several gilt edged chances to score, including a one-on-one opportunity,

until Pease Pottage regained their two goal lead on the stroke of half time when a good cross was headed home powerfully unmarked from 10 yards out.

Any hopes that Cuckfield might have had of getting back into the game were dashed when a shot came off the crossbar and, according to the linesman, crossed the line before bouncing clear. It looked a very debatable decision to put it mildly, and Cuckfield seemed to be on the wrong end of a debatable decision again a few minutes later when a penalty was awarded to Pease Pottage after their forward seemed to stumble over the ball more than anything. The penalty was converted well down the middle to give the home side a 5-1 lead. Cuckfield scored a consolation goal when a cross was tapped in from 8 yards out, but Pease Pottage almost immediately restored their four goal lead when a ball over the top found three forwards queuing up to run in on goal, and in the end the goalkeeper allowed a fairly tame shot to beat him at his near post. So, Pease Pottage it was who comfortably progressed to the next round and a trip to nearby Balcombe. Cuckfield played reasonably well for long periods, but they allowed far too many glorious chances to the opposition and on another day, if the Pease Pottage forwards had passed to better positioned players rather than take the shot on themselves, could easily have notched double figures.

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