

TT No.197: *Justin Holmes* - Saturday 12th March 2011; **Arundel** v Hailsham Town; Sussex County League Division 1; Venue: Mill Road, Arundel; Score: 2-3; Admission with Programme: £5.00; Attendance: 59; Match Rating: 4.

Considering that I have visited all but a handful of grounds across the three divisions of the Sussex County League, looking back, it is rather inexplicable how come I have never visited a ground with the reputation of being one of the most picturesque at this level - Mill Road, home of Arundel FC. The historic and beautifully situated village of Arundel - well worth spending some time in before the football - is surely one of the most attractive villages in Sussex and today I finally decided to visit Mill Road, having potentially saved one of the best Sussex League grounds to last.

Mill Road is located about a ten-minute walk from Arundel train station. The imposing Arundel Castle is perched above the ground in close proximity, which makes for a most attractive and spectacular backdrop to the ground. There is a moderately charming, old-fashioned and green coloured small stand offering three rows of seating - but with several obstructing pillars to get in the way of one's view of the action. On the opposite side, in one corner, there is a small rather flimsy looking stand offering seating but is used primarily for covered standing. Hard standing surrounds the rest of the ground, and the ground does have a neat and tidy as well as rural feel to it, although despite the castle overlooking the ground, it does still have a "bog standard" county league ground feel about the place - I have certainly encountered several more appealing grounds in the Sussex League.. Whilst the programme, it has to be said, was poor, eight pages with the absolute minimum of essential information - league tables, predicted line-ups, today's league fixtures and midweek results, it is included with the moderately priced admission charge of £5, and so becomes hard to criticise too harshly. My opinion with the quality of programmes at this level is that I don't have a problem with programmes lacking in quality or substance, as long as the price reflects it. So, I have no real issue with Arundel's publication.

This was another game of also-rans, with both teams seemingly having absolutely nothing left to play for in the closing weeks of the season. Arundel are in tenth place in the twenty-team league, and although they have games in hand against most teams above them, a top six finish would appear to be the most they could hope for - which they are six points shy of. Hailsham Town are struggling at the wrong end of the table, down in 16th place, but would appear to be safe from any relegation fears, six points clear of a bottom three and potential relegation place but have five games in hand on third bottom Shoreham. The two games these sides have played out so far this season have been rather one-sided affairs, Arundel triumphing at Mill Road in the FA Cup by four goals to one, whilst in the league, Hailsham won 4-0 at home in the league.

On a disappointingly overcast, occasionally drizzly afternoon, this turned out to be an entertaining game, and Arundel could easily have taken an early lead, the Hailsham keeper forced into his first of several fine acrobatic saves in the opening minutes. Hailsham took the lead on the half hour with a powerful shot on the turn by Tristan Jarvis from the edge of the box which the keeper might have done better with. Arundel soon got back on level terms with a rather fortunate goal on 34 minutes, a long range shot by Howard Neighbour taking a huge deflection from a defender, wrong-footing the keeper as the ball looped into the net. Hailsham then went back in front on 40 minutes with an excellently placed shot into the top corner by Jarvis for his and his team's second.

After scoring two very well taken goals, Hailsham's third on 51 minutes was scrappy and rather fortunate, when Shane Saunders failed to properly connect with a long punt forward, although he did enough for the ball to squirm past the onrushing keeper and had the easy task of tapping into an empty net. Arundel's play had been somewhat flat all afternoon, but their player's heads seemed to drop completely after conceding the third goal and they seemed to lose discipline as well, with a flurry of reckless challenges. They did force a couple of excellent saves from the Hailsham keeper Ross Tanner, but on the whole, Hailsham cantered towards a fairly comfortable victory. However, as the game entered stoppage time, Arundel were awarded a stone-wall penalty, which Scott Tipper, the league's top scorer on 25 goals before today, struck firmly down the middle to give Arundel a sniff of an underserved point. Despite a sudden intensity in their play that was lacking previously, there wasn't enough time for Arundel to score an equalising goal and Hailsham claimed a deserved victory.

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