

**TT No.278: Paul Roth** - Sat May 7th 2011; Kent County League Div. 2 West; **Crofton Albion** v Hildenborough Athletic; Res: 3-6; Att: Not many!; Programme and Entry: N/A; Altitude and location: The Crofton Albion Sports and Social Club is 21 m (68.897 ft) above sea level, at latitude 51 degrees, 27.5 mins N; 0 degrees, 1.2 mins east (position derived from centre circle); Sat Nav:SE12 8HF; Weather: Warm and sunny; Club Shop: None; Local MP: Nick Raynsford (Lab).

I am most grateful to my wife, who this morning steadfastly clung to my ankles as I lowered my sizeable frame head first into the cavernous wooden barrel that's tucked away in the furthest-most recess of our back garden. Having scraped furiously at the very bottom of it, under the auspices of ultra-high-lux arc-lighting, Crofton Albion FC's KCL Division 2 West match vs. champions-elect Hildenborough Athletic FC was the best I could come up with, sporting-fixture-wise today.

In truth, a Forester Kent League cricket match would have been eminently preferable to peruse, but with my spouse unable to accompany me on this occasion, and with the weather forecast not wholly cricket-friendly, football fare was what I was left to endure. Endure is perhaps a smidgen harsh. It was just that the thought of a trip to the invidious wastelands of SE12 was about as appealing as a sojourn to pub-less Tripoli.

Lee's lack of appeal however hasn't always been so. The Metropolitan Borough of Lewisham, and moreover Lee itself, was, believe it or not, once deemed.... 'A healthy and pleasant situation' by wealthy City merchants back in the early 19th century. As London expanded, it perhaps isn't so hard to imagine this area of then-Kent functioning as a welcoming and cleansing lung to the squalor of the filthy, squalid capital 5 miles further west. When you think about it, unfashionable-today Lee is only a mile south of still-affluent Blackheath. How fortunes wax and wane!

Despite most of its grandiose dwellings having long-since disappeared, some iconic landmarks hereabouts still remain; the famous Old Tiger's Head public house (juxtaposed The New Tiger's Head), situated on the A20 thoroughfare en-approach to the metropolis from the eastern seaboard, and St Margaret's Church - the burial site of Sir Edmond Halley, of comet fame - are two such edifices that have somehow managed to survive time's relentless upheavals.

All this spellbinding, latter-day information cannot disguise the truism that my trip to Weighall Road, Crofton Albion's 44-year-old spiritual headquarters, was not something I particularly held any predilection for. But I was in for pleasant surprise!

My murderously sombre mood brightened once I'd taken in a few overs of FKL cricket at Bexley CC's charming Manor Way ground, and after a pint in the nearby GBG-listed Railway Tavern; its eclectic range of real ales was a not what I'd at all expected.

My experience a few miles further along the A2, at the Princess of Wales on Blackheath itself, will live long in the memory. Nothing to do with the pub or the beer on offer though. It was the honeymooning couple, sprawled out on the heath in front of my outdoor vantage point, that caught my attention. It did require the use of the longest telephoto lens in my camera bag to verify what was occurring, but the two protagonists were unquestionably consummating their earlier marriage in the most unashamed way!

The Crofton Albion Sports and Social Club is then just a 2-mile, double barrelled howitzer volley away from the PoW: it was also nothing like I'd envisaged. Set on a leafy suburban lane, the venue boasts three pitches, two for the use of football and one for cricket - the 1st X1 one is positioned next door to a typically SE London-style clubhouse (its kitchenette does bang out a tasty beef burger, so I'm told!) - and has a babbling brook coursing behind the sloping, town-end goal. Spick and span is how I'd describe the set-up.

Hildenborough Athletic had won the division 2 west title a few nights previously, by virtue of a 10-0 drubbing of basement club Westerham; they hadn't hung up their shooting boots yet either, as they raced into fortuitous 5-1 half-time lead - I say fortuitous because their opening score came from a hand-ball referee Ken Storey failed to spot, and every shot they struck thereafter flew past Albion's hapless 5th choice 'stopper, into the net.

The latter 45 minutes saw the men in blue, white and black even more to the fore, but after missing a hatful of chances, they somehow contrived to lose the session by two goals to one. Nine goals ain't a bad return though, especially given my gloomy mindset beforehand.

So, a soupcon of cricket, some unexpectedly good ale, a free sex show, a football venue I liked having expected not to, and a cracking afternoon's footballing entertainment. You know what, I've changed my mind; I love SE London!

FGIF Rating: 5\*.

07/20