

TT No. 123: *Paul Roth* - Mon December 26th 2011; Kent League Premier Division; **Cray Valley Paper Mills** v Fisher; Res: 1-2; Att: 105; Entry: £7 including 24-page programme; Altitude and global position: The Badger Sports Ground, Middle Park Avenue, Eltham is 58m (190.288 ft) above sea level: at latitude 51 degrees, 27.0 mins N; 0 degrees, 2.1 mins E (position derived from centre circle); Sat Nav: SE9 5HT; Weather: Mild, sunny and dry; Club Shop: No; Local MP: Clive Efford (Lab); My day's carbon footprint legacy: 13.7.

My only previous visit to Middle Park Avenue was on the 12th of March 2005 - 2480 days ago - to watch Cray Valley Paper Mills FC's Kent County League Inter-Regional Cup semi-final tie versus Stansfeld Oxford and Bermondsey Club FC.

Since that time the Eltham-based side has progressed, winning a much-coveted place in the Kent League this term. As a result, surroundings at the venue are greatly altered...not totally for the better I might add.

On-arrival I was initially impressed by the Blaze-Neon sign advertising this Boxing Day clash with local rivals Fisher Athletic; paid my £7 entrance fee (which included a poor, quickly-read, 24-page programme) at the white-washed turnstile block and entered with expectancy. Disappointment quickly ensued.

The spectre of an arena bereft of any covered accommodation, and floodlight-less (they apparently have a year's grace in which to rectify these failures), with a sparsely-grassed pitch surrounded by a metal post and rail barrier, augmented only by a narrow paved walkway on three sides, is not what I'd expected. The characterful, rambling old pavilion has been replaced by a bar area only slightly more welcoming than an undertaker's parlour. Perfunctory service, coupled with cuisine marginally preferable to hunger, sadly summates the catering. Bland sterility, as seems always the case nowadays, has replaced history and character.

The saving grace on the day though was the thrill-a-minute, action-packed football match. Wes Hammond opened the Greens' account on 28 minutes, courtesy of a delightful 25-yard curling shot, only for Fish to equalise two minutes later. The skilful Chan Quan secured the points for the former Surrey Docks-based side with a consummate lob on 65th minutes, as both sides strove to gain ascendancy. That no further goals arrived is testament to the outstanding quality of both goalkeepers.

Burton Park Wanderers FC had been my intended destination today, but a double-murder at the bottom end of our street meant I wasn't able to leave Garlinge until gone 10am. No matter, as I thoroughly enjoyed my day's football, if not the less-than-salubrious surroundings. The 1pm kick-off also facilitated my early arrival home in plenty of time to gnaw on the remnants of the goose, be interviewed and subsequently finger-printed by Margate CID and enjoy umpteen more games of The Minister's Cat!

FGIF Star Rating: 5*.

