

TT No.148: Paul Roth - Sat January 21st 2012; **Chilham** vs. Staplehurst Monarchs Utd; Weald of Kent Charity Cup Q-F; Res: 0-3; Att: 18; Entry and Programme: N/A; Altitude and global location: Chilham Parish Recreation Ground, Branch Road is 26m (85.30 ft) above sea level: at latitude 51 degrees, 14.6 mins N: 0 degrees, 58.1 mins E (position derived from centre circle); SAT NAV: CT4 8AA; Weather: Windy, overcast but mild; Club shop: No; Local MP: Damian Green (cons); My day's carbon footprint legacy: 13.8.

After finishing work at 5pm one Friday afternoon, and having packed an overnight valise, we'd set off for the Woolpack Hotel in Chilham for a weekend getaway. The two-day sabbatical was to be a surprise mid-winter break for my beloved (and hopefully one of unbridled amore for the two of us), and as we set forth from our then home in Sandwich HRH hadn't a clue as to where she was headed. We enjoyed excellent repasts, comfortable lodgings and unbridled amore during our stay, and on the Saturday travelled up to London by train, spending the day, and a lot of our hard-earned cash, Christmas shopping.

That was then, but this is now. Today, my wife is fully aware that hell itself would have to freeze over before I'd contemplate giving up just one of my precious Saturday afternoons, to trudge the pavements of retail Gehenna: anyway, the high street nowadays comes to me via the auspices of Internet shopping!

Back in those halcyon days of the 1980s I was a neophyte as far as groundhopping was concerned, never for a moment envisaging that I'd return 25 years later to the 'chocolate-box' village (Chilham - nestling in the glorious Great Stour Valley, has a host of 15th century black and white timber-framed dwellings adorning its tiny central square, that stand next door to the still-occupied medieval castle and 11th century church - is located 6 miles southwest of Canterbury, off the A28 Ashford Road) to watch football. But that's precisely what I am doing!

Today sees me at Canterbury and District League (my initial dip into this footballing genre) club Chilham FC, to watch them take on Haart Kent County League Premier Division behemoths Staplehurst Monarchs United FC, in a Weald of Kent Charity Cup QF tie.

I calculate the difference in status between the combatants to be around three steps, so an away win would seem a given. Hold on a moment though; in the last round the district league minnows had won 6-2 at KCL Div. 2 East side Tenterden Town (SMU are entering the competition for the first time at this juncture). That phantasmagorical result is still being talked about in knowing quarters as one of the most notable giant-killing acts achieved by any Kent-based football club for more than half a century.

Game on!

After quickly poking my head around the door of the aforementioned auberge (unsurprisingly, nobody remembered me) and a pint in the White Horse (don't ask the attractive and effusive 20-year-old barmaid about her car insurance premium!), it was time to decamp to the sports field.

I'm pleased to report that The Parish Recreation Ground is an absolute peach. No remedial work of any kind would be necessary for the incumbent to waltz upward, into the lofty echelons of the County League. A large, un-metalled car park leads past the unexpectedly well-proportioned pavilion, onto an immaculately-kept playing area, which in turn is back-dropped by the architecturally historic settlement, swathes of ancient woodland and adjacent fast-flowing, gin-clear river: I command you to match me a footballing Valhalla more hauntingly beautiful.

From the get-go of this absorbing cup tie the players, officials and ball fizzed around the field as if entrapped in a cyclotron (isn't there, or at least I think there used to be, a lower-league Norwegian, or was it maybe a Finnish side, entitled FC Cyclotron?) as the match's initial exchanges careered by at breakneck speed. Staplehurst, fielding a youthful side, took the lead on 20 minutes with a spectacularly struck free-kick, and from then on held sway until half-time, as the homesters struggled with the frenetic pace.

The second period was entirely different. Quite how the black and blue-uniformed Chilham side managed not to equalise remains a mystery to all those that were present. Time and again they squandered gilt-edged chances, hitting the woodwork thrice and forcing the young visiting 'stopper into countless saves, many of which were of Dicky Guy-esque proportions. The reds somehow weathered the siege, delivering, against the run of play, a devastating coup de grace in the form of two last-minute, undeserved goals.

A thoroughly enjoyable and nostalgic day spent in delightful surroundings, that meant for the second week in a row I was indoors in ample time to watch Winter Wipeout. How good is that!

FGIF Star Rating: 5*.

07/20