

TT No.172: Paul Roth - Sat February 25th 2012; **Sheringham** v Mattishall; Anglian Combination, Premier Division; Res: 2-1; Att: 50; Entry: £3 including 16-page programme; Altitude and global location: The Recreation Ground, Weybourne Road is 15m (52.493 ft) above sea level: at latitude 52 degrees, 56.3 mins N north; 1 degree, 11.3 mins E (location derived from centre circle); SAT NAV NR26 8EJ; Weather: Sunny with a chilly zephyr; Club shop: No; Local MP: Norman Lamb (Lib Dem); My day's carbon footprint: 13.6.

Apart from the briefest of liaisons when taking in a rubber at Linton Granta FC back in early January, I'd not seen Geoffers since the end of November: that was on the occasion of the Firm's pre-Christmas London extravaganza.

This annual jamboree takes the form of visiting numerous GBG-listed city centre pubs that neither of us has drunk in previously.

All was going swimmingly, as we were enjoying our usual fun, when disaster struck. Having arrived at the Town of Ramsgate, in Wapping, and whilst sitting on its terrace overlooking the River Thames putting the world to rights, we thought it might be a jape to descend the adjacent steps onto the stone-strewn beach below: the base of this flight of stairs, we soon discovered, is dangerously slippery.

In the gloaming Geoff lost his footing, hitting the back of his head on one of the slime-covered steps, rendering him unconscious. Momentarily I thought him Surrey all out. An ambulance was summoned and naturally that was that as far as the day's jolly was concerned. The incident initially shook me up, but at least I was in the right place.

The aforementioned public house offered me steadiness and composure in the form of stiffer tinctures than had been imbibed earlier: after an hour's steadying composure I was able to carry on, alas alone now (at least it was cheaper without him) with our planned agenda.

My friend, I'm glad to report, had hurt nothing more than his pride. But a month later I got a second scare, when he informed me that he'd given up drinking! For a while I genuinely believed he'd suffered permanent brain damage. Luckily, he hadn't. In a drive to lose weight, following a trip to his GP for a 'Well Man' examination, and after two of his blood tests came back from The Queen Elizabeth II Hospital in Welwyn Garden City with levels that his clinician described as 'Alarming Off the Scale', Geoff decided to jump on the wagon and took remedial action. Not a drop of alcohol passed his lips (he also went jogging, and added a large salad to every meal) from Christmas Eve night, 'til the fourth day of February.

In truth I'm rather in awe of his achievements, which has certainly seen a reduction in the nodules of excess fat that beforehand had clung stubbornly around his midriff. I did by chance make enquiries of his girlfriend, Raksha - she's a distant

relation to the late Leslie Crowther you know - about his mood during this period of sustained abstinence, to which she informed me it had been..."continuously murderous". Much of the time, she told me, he had been almost unbearable and constantly incandescent with rage.

Fortuitously - after a fourth medical 'Second Opinion' - when that glorious Saturday finally arrived, Geoff joyously cartwheeled off that accursed caisson. He is once again swigging beer like the true champion I know him to be.

And what better place to resume where we'd so ignominiously left off those nine weeks beforehand, than the north Norfolk coast. It's a place that holds fond memories for me, of lazy school-time holidays spent in the company of my godmother Ida and her schoolteacher sister Edith, at their seaside abode in Salthouse.

Having rendezvoused in Bishop's Stortford on our way northwards to Sheringham FC, one of the public houses we stopped at was the much-altered Dun Cow in Salthouse itself, the establishment being a recent addition to the Blessed Book. The pub became a merciful refuge in later life whenever my wife and I stayed with Ida, who always insisted on turning in at the ridiculously early hour of 8.30pm. Out of necessity, I concocted the cock-and-bull story that we always took our fidgety Border Collie, Snoopy, out for a lengthy 2-hour walk at this time of night, come hell or high water. Of course, with the avidity of Olympic 100m sprinters, not long after 8.35pm we were ensconced inside the hostelry's welcoming walls.

Having threatened to come dressed today in a linen smock - Geoff reckoned such a garment was befitting of the locale's milieu - it was a relief to see my as ever snappily-dressed companion wearing nothing more outrageous than an eau-de-nil-coloured seersucker two-piece, a pale blue herringbone Ludlow shirt, yellow and black-striped braces and a pair of fluorescent lime green booties. With a cherished Brentwood Town FC scarf around his neck and a tsunami of Brylcream adhering his flowing locks to his scalp, the ensemble, fashion-wise is best described as Dolce and Gabbana meets Coco the Clown.

Secreted behind the Splash Leisure Centre, on the Weybourne Road, Sheringham FC's ground is set on a raised plateau, shoe-horned between domestic dwellings and the town's cricket club. A pay-booth at the gate is where we paid our £3 entry fee, which included a 16-page programme.

The stadium (stet) is fully enclosed by a metal-and-post surround, adorned with floodlights and has a swanky new grandstand opposite its entry point. Refreshments are purchasable from the brick-built building opposite and across from the un-metalled car park: more the cricket club's pavilion, this edifice also houses changing facilities below.

The Recreation Ground's most pleasant aspect though is the splendid panoramas afforded the spectator from within its confines. The undulating golf course and North Sea, coupled with the surrounding countryside frame the whole in a delightful manner.

This disappointing Anglian Combination Premier Division match sprung into life a quarter of an hour from the end: with the scores level at 1-1, fourth-placed Mattishall were awarded a penalty-kick after a Shannoeks' (a Shannock is the sobriquet for someone born and bred in Sheringham) defender inadvertently hand-balled. The resulting kick hit the crossbar, bounced clear and justice was seen to be done. Ten minutes later the home side were themselves awarded a spot-kick. This time there was to be no mistake. No. 11 Lee Edwards' pile driver slammed into the corner of the net, undeservedly proffering Sheringham all three points.

A nostalgic, fun-filled day spent in the company of probably the most garishly dressed groundhopper on earth.

FGIF Star Rating: 5*.

FOOTNOTE: Fellow travellers will be interested to hear that Anglian Combination club Mundford FC, which we passed en-route yesterday, are in the process of installing floodlights at their Glebe headquarters.

The poles are up, seemingly only awaiting the addition of lamps.

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