

TT No.177: Paul Roth - Sat March 3rd 2012; **Charing FC** v St Margaret's FC; Canterbury & District League Prem Division; Res: 3-0; Att: N/A; Entry and Programme: N/A; Altitude and global location: The Arthur Baker Playing Field is 102m (334.646ft) above sea level: at latitude 51 degrees, 2 mins N; 0 degrees, 7 mins E (position derived from centre circle).

Nestling beneath the North Downs, near the route of the Pilgrims' Way four miles northwest of Ashford, is the delightful village of Charing. It's somewhere myself and my wife have passed through many times whilst traversing the county, without ever having taken the time to stop and have a mosey round. In hindsight that's been remiss of us because there are numerous historical timber-framed houses to admire and some bespoke shops to rummage about in.

Its most notable building is the Grade I-listed Archbishop's Palace, which as the name suggests once belonged to the Archbishop of Canterbury. The edifice is of such national importance to be deemed a Scheduled Ancient Monument, and with the adjoining church of St. Peter and St. Paul said to contain the stone on which John the Baptist was beheaded, the zeitgeist for medieval England hereabouts is palpable. In 2004 the palace was an unsuccessful contestant - although it did reach the final - in the BBC Two series Restoration.

Today was one of those all too familiar occasions of late when I needed to find somewhere close to home for my weekly fix. Nowadays, unless it's for a revisit, I've all but exhausted local venues to while away my Saturday afternoons. Therefore, a second dip into the murky waters of the Canterbury and District League seemed an idea.

To be honest that's being slightly unfair, as my sojourn to Chilham FC in January was a thoroughly enjoyable experience. It's just that I'm convinced the Chilham Parish Recreation Ground is at the zenith of loveliness when it comes to C&DL amphitheatres (the other option I'd briefly considered today was Red Arrow FC: they play at the Ramsgate Swimming Pool Recreation Ground. If you're ever Thanet way pop along and take a butcher's; instantaneously you'll comprehend my preference for Charing FC).

The village has one public house listed in the 2012 GBG (also in situ, but unlisted, are The Oak and The Wagon and Horses). The Bowl Inn however is located atop the Downs - as is the Wagon and Horses - and is a long way from the village itself. Motorised transportation would probably be necessary should you feel the urge to imbibe a pre-match sharpener within its confines. If inclined you could walk, but that's exactly what you'd be for most of your trek - inclined. From the railhead the hike would take the best part of an hour. If you do manage to get there you might find it a wheeze to play a game or two on the pub's revolving pool table.

Over the years, on balmy summer evenings having watched a cricket match close by (last year we'd been to watch the Band of Brothers' annual fixture versus Old

Amplefordians, at the nearby idiosyncratic Belmont House ground. The match will live long in the memory for the sole reason that on arrival the touring Yorkshire school's former pupils were too hungover to field, and insisted on batting first), we've oft gravitated to the comfortable surroundings of the Bowl's welcoming saloon, ending up shooting a frame or two. My advantage in this on-going series over HRH currently stands at 5-1 (I've the memory of a pachyderm when it comes to such matters). If hungry why not try one of the chef's Billy Bunter-sized 'snacks'. I can personally recommend (and vouch for its enormity) the Gorgonzola and pickled walnut salad.

The Arthur Baker Playing Field - Charing Football Club's HQ - is situated off the High Street, at the end of a looping passageway entitled The Moat. It's a venue that shares occupancy with the summer game and surprisingly is a destination the Roths have yet to visit for cricket (the club play in the Kent Village League, Division Six). Also, at the disposal of the denizens of the village within the paddock are tennis courts and a Flat Green Bowls rink. Within the setting of tree-covered Down-land, the church's belfry and a smock windmill framing the setting, the location couldn't be more idyllically Atcost-free.

Another reason for my choosing this fixture was the opposition. Former Kent County League outfit St. Margarets FC, who hail from the cliff-top parish of St. Margaret's-at-Cliffe near Dover, are having a torrid time of it this term. Their season's statistics bluntly connote the sorry table - PL 13; W 0; D 0; L 13; GF 9; GA 99; PTS 0; GD -90.

Last week they did actually register one of their better results, coming away from Ash FC with a 7-1 reversal: when they last played a league fixture on home soil (the Alexander Field) on January 28th, they were routed 15-0 by Chilham! The reverse league match, played on September 24th, saw Charing squeeze past their hapless hosts 3-2.

Having visited all three of the aforementioned boozers, my expectations of bucolic footballing bliss were about to be dashed. When I rocked up at The Moat it was devoid of any activity; except in a cruel twist of irony for water - rain water. It transpires the club's pavilion was hit by a 75,000-megaton meteorite on Christmas Eve, engulfing it in a conflagration that completely destroyed it.

A new wooden edifice has been constructed, but won't be ready for use until Easter at the earliest. I now know that this C&DL match took place across the road at the club's 'B' stadium (stet). At the time I was unaware the club possessed such a facility, and panic-stricken to find a game ended up driving like Jehu to get to Salters Lane in time to watch Faversham Town's crud-like encounter with Godalming Town. The affair was so dour I wish I'd not bothered.

'Win some lose some'.....as they say. I WILL return when things have sorted themselves out. In the mean-time, I'd strongly advise all 'hoppers to check for extraneous astronomical objects that could in the future put your planned destination in jeopardy.

FGIF Star Rating (for what might have been): 5*

SAT NAV: TN27 OJH; Weather: Rain showers; Club shop: N/A; Local MP: Damien Green (Con); My day's CFL: 13.8.

07/20