

TT No.181: Paul Roth - Sat 10th March 2012; **Old Southendian** v Springfield; Essex Olympian League Senior Div. 2; Res: 3-1; Att: 40; Entry: £1 including 20-page Prog; Altitude and global location: Warners Bridge Park is 11m (39.370 ft) above sea level: at latitude 51 degrees, 33.9 mins N; 0 degrees, 42.5 mins E (position derived from centre circle); SAT NAV: SS2 5RR; Weather: Sunny intervals and mild; Club shop: N/A; Local MP: James Duddridge; My day's CPL: 13.7.

Opened in three stages - firstly in 1963 with what's today known as the West Tunnel, later augmented in 1980 by the East Tunnel and latterly in 1991 with The Queen Elizabeth II Bridge - The Dartford River Crossing is a virtual necessity if you wish to travel from Kent into Essex, or vice versa.

In 1988 the respective county councils passed control of the crossing to Dartford River Crossing Limited (DRC) who agreed to fund the building of the bridge, and take over the two tunnels' outstanding indebtedness.

When the QEII bridge opened DRC were granted a 20-year licence to collect tolls, with the option to abolish the levy once all debts were repaid.

It was generally thought that at the end of March 2002 revenue collections would cease, and that enough funds by that time would have been accumulated to cover all outstanding construction costs: it was also envisaged sufficient monies would by then have been accumulated to sustain a maintenance programme.

To the chagrin of motorists not only have the charges not been removed, they have over the years increased.

To drive across the River Thames today costs £1.50 per car (more for vans and HGVs) each way, with the threat of an increase to £2, and then £2.50 promised.

There are however ways to lessen, even avoid, this tariff. Purchasing a pre-paid DART-Tag provides a substantive discount: it mightn't be worth the outlay though if you're not an everyday crossing user (a monthly DD has to be initiated). Use the crossing between 10pm and 6am, and it's free. Another way to negate paying is of course to drive clockwise, or anti-clockwise depending on your standpoint, around the M25, and since the last price hike in 2008 that's more or less what I've done. Yes, there are occasions when my journey takes longer than it would have had I utilised tunnel and bridge, but when cruising around the London Orbital in gay abandon I'm able to bask in the contemplative satisfaction of all the hard-earned 'wonga' I've saved myself.

The destination of choice for my football extravaganza this weekend is Old Southendian FC, for that club's top-of-the-table clash with current league-leaders Springfield FC. Founded in 1900 and originally entitled 'The Old Techs', the club is an association of former pupils, plus past and present staff members of Southend High School for Boys.

Newcomers to the Essex Olympian League in season 2010/11, the club gained promotion to the competition's Senior Division Two at the first attempt. In their second term OS are again performing excellently, and at the time of writing occupy the division's 2nd berth, seven points behind the leaders, but with two games in hand.

The club plays its home matches at Warners Bridge Park, a stone's throw from Southend Airport, at the end of Sumpters Way on the seaside town's northern periphery. This sporting oasis is also home to Southend Rugby Football Club and Old Southendian Hockey Club.

Having found a parking space, the boisterous clubhouse was my initial port of call. Upstairs I was greeted by club stalwart Andy Crow, who served me my pint of Young's Ordinary Bitter straight from the barrel. We immediately fell into conversation, with my host keen to explain how the club's constitution - playing or otherwise - is to this day made up of 95% Old Boys. Andy then furnished me with the club's magnificently arcane all-colour matchday programme (one question I've never come across before in any Player Profile spot was 'School House?' Luke Stillwell's answer (Tuscany) before heading back to the table of ex-players he was looking after, who were enjoying a pre-match meal. A helping of their feast was generously offered to your correspondent: there was no chance of me turning down the gift horse of a portion of shepherd's pie!

Within the complex Old Southendian FC have the use of two dedicated football pitches, separated from the 3G hockey arena and impressive rugby ground (SRFC play in National League Division 2 South) by a babbling brook and an ancient-looking line of trees. The playing area on the day was roped-off, with a raised area of banking behind the near goal affording a marginally more advantageous viewpoint.

Before the lunch-goers had had time to congregate the green white and black-clad ex-pupils were two nil up.

A penalty, awarded for hand-ball on 45 seconds, and a second score two minutes later so stunned the Chelmsford-based visitors that they ultimately never recovered. From then on Springfield dominated play, without ever being able to penetrate the well-organised, hard-working home defence. Perhaps against the run of play OS added a third strike midway through the second-half. After that Springfield had no way back, and despite a last-minute consolation the visitors had to concede they'd been beaten by the better-organised side.

In two-weeks' time, on March 24th, OS face high-flying Castle United FC at Warners Bridge Park. A six-pointer if ever there was one, this match's outcome will probably determine which teams are promoted come season's end. If you've not previously 'hopped to this marvellous club, then make the most of this opportunity: you will not be disappointed.

Having had time to 'tick' just one GBG-listed establishment (the Horse and Groom in Rochford) before the big match due to my lengthy outbound odyssey, and

following a magnificent afternoon spent in wondrously hospitable company, the time had come to retrace my steps around east, north, west and south London. Okay, home wasn't achieved much before 8pm; but the rigorous journey was worth every penny-saving mile.

FGIF Star Rating: 5*.

07/20