

**TT No.194: Paul Roth** - Sat 17th March 2012; **Sturry FC** v Faversham Harlequins; Canterbury and District League Challenge Cup Rd 5; Res: 4-11 (eleven); Att: 3; Entry and programme: N/A; Altitude and global location: Quarry Park is 6m (19.685 ft) above sea level: at latitude 51 degrees, 30 mins N; 1 degree, 12 mins E (position derived from centre circle); SAT NAV: CT2 0BW; Weather: Drizzle, then heavy rain; Club Shop: N/A; Local MP: Julian Brazier (Cons); My day's carbon footprint legacy: 13.8.

The irony of having a pint in the Welsh Harp on St. Patrick's Day wasn't entirely lost on me.

I'm today once closer to home, again out of necessity, this time in the village of Sturry, on the eastern outskirts of Canterbury. In fact, my choice of match was made solely on the basis of its early 2.30 kick-off, as it was imperative that I was back in St. Nicholas-at-Wade by a quarter to five.

After the debacle at Charing FC a fortnight earlier, another dip into the caliginous waters of the Canterbury and District League was taken by your correspondent with more than a soupcon of apprehension. Beggars can't be choosers though, and anyway meteorites surely don't strike twice - do they? It was thus that I set forth with nothing more than hope in my heart to Quarry Park (the Welsh Harp is the nearest public house), the home of Canterbury and District League First Division outfit Sturry FC, for their Challenge Cup 5th round encounter with Faversham Harlequins FC.

The settlement, located along the busy A28, is as far as I'm concerned notable for two things: three if you count its position near to Britain's smallest town, Fordwich. The traffic jams caused by the continual closing of the level crossing barriers of the Ramsgate to London railway line are legend; a more obscure factoid about Sturry is that it's twinned with the beautiful northern French town of Aire Sur-la-Lys.

Found along a lane utilised predominantly by lorries travelling back and forth to the 'Brett Specialized Aggregates' gravel pit, where the residencies of Marlow Meadows finish, Quarry Meadow is a venue I've passed countless times without ever having clapped eyes on it. What a plonker, as it is rather special.

For me it was actually love at first sight, having glimpsed the edifice from across the babbling brook that separates the roadway from its hallowed turfs. Encircled by ancient woodland, and with the peal of wedding bells wafting across the field from the nearby St. Nicholas (more irony) church, the sylvan setting instantaneously makes this arena one of my all-time favourite footballing venues. The only structure amidst this bucolic prospect is a graffiti-daubed changing block. Apparently not an outpouring of adolescent angst this, the artwork is the culmination of a locally-led community initiative.

I can't stress how vital it was for me to be away by 4.15 at the latest, so with five minutes of the first-half remaining and the sides locked at 2-2, the threat of extra-time - maybe even penalties - was making me decidedly antsy. If the match finished all square then I'd have to leave early.

At that moment Faversham Harlequins (their spiritual home is the Swan and Harlequin pub, situated on the brewery town's North Street) took the lead with a wonder strike from a yard out. Twenty-five minutes into the helter-skelter second period, having just gone 9-3 up, my erstwhile Weltschmerz was well and truly assuaged.

Three more goals, one for hapless Sturry and a brace for the rampant visitors, resulted in the highest aggregate (a lot of that, as well as irony around here it seems) score-line I've ever witnessed. But just imagine what the tally might have been had the blues not missed two penalties, had five goals disallowed and hit the goal frame on at least four occasions!

Referee Bedford's no-nonsense approach to injuries, feigned or otherwise, and his insistence that the interval break lasted no more than five minutes, meant this extraordinary cup tie concluded not long after 4pm. Thirty minutes later I'd crossed the River Wantsum back onto the Isle of Thanet, changed into dress-appropriate garb and was en-route to the village hall to officially open the thrice-postponed, 2nd Birchington-on-Sea and St. Nicholas-at-Wade Luau for Lupus.

FGIF Star Rating: 15\* - oops, I mean 5\*.

07/20