

TT No.106: Justin Holmes - Sat 16th February 2013; **Canvey Island** v Hendon; Isthmian League Premier Division; Venue: Park Lane, Canvey Island; Score: 0-3; Admission: £10.00; Programme: £2.00; Att: 321; Match Rating: 3.

After weeks of either following Charlton or being hindered by extreme weather, my first new ground visit of 2013 was not decided until lunchtime on the day. I headed through the Dartford Tunnel with the intention of paying a visit to Thurrock, however whilst wandering around the neighbouring Lakeside Shopping Centre, I remembered that their game against Carshalton Athletic would be between the bottom two teams in the Isthmian League Premier Division and so may not have been a particularly attractive game to watch. Therefore, I changed my plans and headed a further 20 miles east along the A13, for a match between two of the in-form teams in the Isthmian League Premier Division.

Canvey Island Football Club is very conveniently signposted all the way from the approach road onto the island, and car really is the best option to get to Canvey Island - the nearest train station is several miles away in Benfleet, from where a bus journey is necessary. The ground is situated on the eastern side of Canvey Island, very close to the Thames Estuary - in fact, the ground is positioned below sea level and behind one goalmouth one sees freighters sail along at regular intervals, with the north Kent coast also clearly visible. Whilst Park Lane is not a ground that exudes historic charm or character, it is a pleasant and fairly appealing arena, with a very neat and tidy feel to it and almost everything being painted in club colours of yellow and sky blue. Along one length of the pitch as one enters the ground is a tea bar, club shop and a long shallow all-seater stand, whilst along the other length are two small stands covering a few terrace steps. Behind one of the goals is possibly the best feature of the ground, a large steep uncovered terrace, whilst behind the other goal - the sea end - are just a couple of terrace steps, and is the one part of the ground that looks a little unsightly, with a small blue metal fence bordering the terrace. The 40-page programme was a colourful, attractive publication with plenty of interest to read particularly for the regular Canvey Island supporter.

Canvey Island came into this game on a great run of form, having won their last three games and five of their last six, and were in third place in the league, although nine points adrift of leaders Whitehawk. After a poor start to their season, Hendon have also been in very good form recently, having lost just once in their last eight league games, picking up 19 points out of the 24 available and were in twelfth place in the league. When the two teams met last month in the league, Canvey Island claimed a 2-1 away win.

On a mostly overcast but surprisingly mild afternoon, it was the home side who had the better of the opening exchanges, with plenty of possession in the final third without ever really looking like they would score. However, on 12 minutes, it was the visitors who opened the scoring with their first attack. The ball was played

back in the area by Casey McLaren, and Dean Hacknell rifled the ball home. The rest of the first half was even, with Canvey Island just shading things but still rarely looking like they could get back on level terms.

One imagined that the home team would receive a rollicking from their manager Steve Tilson at half time and show more urgency in the second half, but apart from a brief bright period at the start of the second half, their play became increasingly worse, particularly after they conceded a second goal on 58 minutes, when they lost possession in midfield, and a fast drive towards goal ended with Junior Morais placing the ball powerfully into the corner beyond the keeper's dive. Canvey Island really seemed to throw in the towel now, as their play became sloppy and aimless. On the stroke of full time, Hendon put some gloss on an excellent away performance when Belal Aite-Ouakrim strode forward before shooting emphatically low into the corner from the edge of the area. So, a score-line that on paper would have been very surprising, but was a very good reflection on proceedings this afternoon, with Hendon producing a fabulous away performance and Canvey Island producing a surprisingly woeful one.

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