

TT No. 19: *Justin Holmes* - Sat September 1st 2012; **Crown Alex** v Seven Acre & Sidcup (H); Kent Invicta League; Venue: Oxford Road, Sidcup; Score: 1-1; Admission: £4.00; Programme: £1.00; Attendance: 36; Match rating: 2.

This game was not on my radar at all up to 24 hours ago, however an 11.30am kick off opened up the possibility for a rare Saturday double of full matches. Although this was supposed to be the home game for Crown Alexandra, the match had to be switched to the opposition's home ground as Crown's ground was not yet ready to host Kent Invicta League football, partly due to vandalism.

Oxford Road is located about a twenty-minute walk from Sidcup rail station via the town centre, and I had heard in recent years that the ground had fallen into sad disrepair since the Cray Wanderers first team stopped playing there in 1998. So, it was a very nice surprise to see that clearly a lot of effort has gone into making this a very well-maintained ground, that has the feel of a good old-fashioned county league ground - indeed, it rather felt like I had stepped back twenty years in time. As one enters the ground in one corner, one passes a white brick building housing the changing rooms and tea bar. Along the length of the pitch from the entrance is newly laid hard standing and an old-fashioned long stand with several steps which has been painted in red and black club colours - even the floor is painted. Apart from half a dozen seats at the back of one corner of the stand, it is standing room only. It seems that spectators are only intended to access this one length of the pitch, as the other sides are not really maintained, although the old hard standing is partially still in place. Behind one of the goals is a grass/weed bank. On the opposite site to the main stand, to one side of the dugouts is a small covered area which would not offer any protection in driving rain, with it having no back or sides to the structure, and behind this length and the other goal is a pleasant rural backdrop of trees, fields and farm animals. The pitch has quite a slope to it from end to end, and railings freshly painted in club colours complete the neat finish of the ground. Floodlights are not present - that is why Cray Wanderers had to vacate the ground, although ironically Seven Acre and Sidcup seem to be quietly confident of being able to gain planning permission for lights in the coming years. It was Crown Alexandra who manned the gate and produced the "programme", which was just an A4 sheet made into four sheets including a cover, team sheets and a full-page advertisement. Fair enough at this level of football... but certainly not fair to charge £1 for it.

This is Crown Alexandra's first season in the Kent Invicta League, and it is pretty remarkable that they were accepted into the league, considering last season they finished in eighth place in the eleven team fourth tier of the South London Alliance. They certainly were not helped at all in making the considerable step up, with their place in the Kent Invicta League not confirmed until mid-July following an appeal. They started their season with a 2-2 draw at Lydd Town, before losing at Crockenhill on Monday. Seven Acre and Sidcup finished in tenth place in the

Kent Invicta League last season, and this season they are in fourth place in the table, although they have played more games than everyone else, six, and have won three and lost two of their games so far.

On a warm, mostly sunny morning, an open start to the game led to a surprising development, with Crown Alexandra opening the scoring, when Sam Noller glanced a header in off the post from a corner on six minutes. Five minutes later and Seven Acre almost got back on level terms when the ball hit the crossbar direct from a corner. On 26 minutes, Sidcup did equalise, when an attacker and defender challenged each other for the ball and the ball squirmed forward and Alfie Harris placed the ball low past the keeper and into the net. There was little to set the pulse racing for the rest of the first half, with few chances created.

The second half continued in the same vein, with plenty of huff and puff but very few real chances to score, although on 52 minutes, it seemed that Seven Acre had regained the lead with a far post header, although the linesman's flag went up some time after the ball had hit the net. Although Seven Acre probably shaded possession and half chances, the match ended all square, which was a fair result and must be considered a good point for Crown Alexandra against a team that is fancied to do well this season.

04/20