

TT No.20: *Justin Holmes* - Sat September 1st 2012; **Bridon Ropes** v Lydd Town; Kent Invicta League; Venue: Meridian Sports & Social Club, Charlton; Score: 2-2; Admission: None; Prog: £2.00; Att: 38; Match rating: 3.

At the conclusion of the game at Seven Acre and Sidcup, I made my way back to Sidcup rail station, with a choice of games to go to. The most obviously attractive would be Cray Valley's first ever game in the FA Vase, although that would mean a revisit for me, and so I headed to familiar territory for me and a journey to Charlton for some more Kent Invicta League action.

The Meridian Sports and Social Club, which is home to both Bridon Ropes and Meridian and who both play in the Kent Invicta League, is about a twenty-minute walk from Charlton rail station, up a fairly steep hill to the high street and then passing by Charlton Park. Imagining a scene of a multi pitch facility in suburban London is not usually one to excite one's imagination, however this ground came as a relatively pleasant surprise. The main pitch which hosts Kent Invicta League football is closest to the entrance and main road, and trees line this length of the pitch. Along the other three sides is railing and hard standing. A very large old-fashioned clubhouse is situated at right angles to the main pitch, and although is rather rundown, offers an attractive backdrop. As well as offering refreshments, a barbecue and even a seafood kiosk, it is also possible to watch the game from the first-floor balcony to the side of the clubhouse for an excellent elevated view of the action behind a goal. No admission was taken, and one had to really hunt and keep one's eyes peeled to find the person selling programmes. It was worth the effort though, with some interesting articles to read, match reports, statistics and colour photos from a recent match.

Having finished in fourth place in the Kent Invicta League last season and just five points behind the Champions, Bridon Ropes have had an interesting start to this season, losing their first game at Bearsted 1-4, before winning their next game at Crockenhill by the same score-line. On Monday they lost to Meridian by 0-2, following a "disgusting poor performance", when "the attitude & discipline of certain individuals was unacceptable" according to Bridon's Director of Football's notes in the programme. Harsh words indeed, and so presumably the club would be looking for a reaction in today's match. Lydd finished in twelfth place, last season and have gained four points from their five games so far. Last season, Bridon Ropes won both encounters between the two sides.

On a fairly warm but for the most part overcast afternoon, the tone was set for the game in the fourth minute when Lydd almost conceded a calamitous own goal, when a defender tapped the ball past his own keeper, but the ball was just cleared. Bridon Ropes went on to increasingly dominate proceedings, always looking dangerous breaking forward, and whilst Lydd could not be faulted for effort, they looked extremely limited and seemed to have a shoot on sight from long distance policy. On 11 minutes, Lydd had an amazing let-off, when a fast

break down the wing saw the ball crossed low into the box, but the ball was skied from very close range when it seemed much easier to score. Three minutes later and the home side did take the lead with a fine individual goal, when Jimmy Doherty ran from the half way line, sidestepped a couple of defenders as he approached the box, before dispatching a low shot under the keeper. The pick of several excellent chances for Bridon to extend their lead came on 27 minutes when their striker just beat the keeper to the ball but the ball dropped just wide of the goal, and shortly before half time, a long ball created a one-on-one opportunity, but the resultant shot struck the crossbar.

Although Lydd had to replace their keeper at half-time, they came out after the interval looking a better team, although steadily Bridon imposed themselves on the game once more, creating and spurning at least half a dozen glorious chances to score, most notably when they hit the post. As limited as Lydd always looked, they did appear to have a goal in them, and on 70 minutes, Lydd applied some rare pressure when they had a powerful header tipped over the bar, and from the resultant cross, a shot went just wide. Seven minutes from time, they hit the post and the rebound was put wide. These were exceptions to the pattern of play though, and Bridon really should have been out of sight in this game. Just as one sensed that they might pay for missing so many chances, they doubled their lead with four minutes left when Jamie Tomkins beat the substitute keeper at his near post. Surely that had put the game to bed and earned the home team a thoroughly deserved three points, but as the game entered added on time at the end of the game, Lydd scored what appeared to be a consolation goal when a superb cross by Mark Read right into the danger area allowed Wes Ford to nod the ball past the keeper. Four minutes into injury time and Lydd were awarded a penalty for a push, although it looked a very soft award indeed. Dan Fisk saw his penalty shot hit the post, but Bridon couldn't clear the ball, and the ball fell for Alex Coyne to rifle in a shot high into the net from just inside the area. There was barely time to restart the match, as Lydd claimed a point they barely deserved. Bridon will feel hard done by, not only by the soft penalty award but they also felt the first Lydd goal was offside. But they only have themselves to blame really for missing so many chances to score a hatful.