

**TT No.73: *Andy Gallon*** - Sat 22nd February 2014; **Camberley Town** v Westfield; Combined Counties League Premier Division; Res: 1-1; Att: 105 (h/c); Admission: £6; Programme: £1 (24pp); FGIF Match Rating: \*\*\*\*.

**THE HOP:** Slowly but surely my visits to the in-laws are enabling me to 'tick' the many clubs dotting the Surrey-Hampshire-Berkshire border country. Camberley Town missed out by a whisker during our last expedition to the Deep South for Christmas. My wife's birthday (one of those big ones ending with a zero) led, by our standards, to a fairly immediate return. With Camberley (second) hosting Woking-based Westfield (fifth), this was the pick of the fixtures available in the vicinity of Farnham, my wife's hometown, and a very obvious choice.

**THE PLACE:** To a Northerner (to any stranger, I'd hazard), most of the communities in this heavily populated corner of the South East appear to merge into one sprawling urban mass (or mess). The locals, I suppose, must have an idea where one place ends and another begins. Camberley, sandwiched between the M3 and the A30, and the largest settlement in the borough of Surrey Heath, isn't terribly inspiring. It has the look and feel of commuterland: near the football ground, there are short rows of shops, many of which seem to be takeaways, breaking the monotony of densely packed semis. I didn't bother with either The Atrium, a residential, retail and leisure complex opened in 2008, and likely the best non-football entertainment in town, or The Mall, an Eighties shopping centre. None of this sounds appealing but is doubtless a mighty improvement on the 1720s scene that prompted writer Daniel Defoe to describe Camberley (through which flows the river Cam) as "horrid and frightful to look on" and "good for nothing". The town developed during the first half of the nineteenth century after the opening nearby of the famous Sandhurst Military Academy then mushroomed with the relatively belated coming in 1878, of the railway.

**THE CLUB:** Owes its existence to a cleric, the Rev C. J. Berryman, who in 1895 gave permission for a football team called St Michael's, Camberley. The club played friendlies for a few years before progressing to the East & West Surrey League. It folded in 1901. A new club, Camberley & Yorktown, was formed immediately and took its predecessor's place in the East & West Surrey League. Membership followed of the Aldershot Combination, the Ascot & District League, the West Surrey League, the Aldershot Senior Civilian League, the Aldershot Senior League and the Surrey Senior League. All before 1922! The club's name was changed in 1946 to Camberley FC and in 1967 a merger with Camberley Wanderers prompted the advent of Camberley Town. The Reds rose through the Athenian League to the Isthmian League, which they joined in 1976. The 1978-79 season was the most successful in the club's history: a 17-game unbeaten run saw the team finish Isthmian League Division Two runners-up and lift the Surrey Senior Cup. Camberley subsequently flitted between the Athenian and Isthmian competitions

before, in 2006, linking up with the Combined Counties League when Isthmian League bosses opted to dispense with their Second Division.

**THE WEATHER:** The promise of spring - at last. The sun played hide and seek with sizeable patches of cloud but felt pleasantly warm when present. For the first time in weeks, a Saturday without rain, which was a considerable delight.

**THE PEOPLE:** Affable enough. I'm not the sort of hopper who expects a welcome mat and an invitation to the boardroom. A cheery greeting from the gateman, a few smiles and a bit of chat always suffices. There was all that here.

**THE GROUND:** Krooner Park, named after a racehorse, opened on Boxing Day 1923 with a 3-2 defeat by Egham and enabled the Camberley club to end a hitherto nomadic existence. One Ferdinand W. Baker helped the club buy the site. The winnings of his racehorse, Krooner, partially footed the bill. Krooner, foaled in 1916, won two races, both at Haydock Park, as a four-year-old.

A wooden grandstand was built in 1927. It survived until August 1990, when a fire caused by faulty wiring caused £100,000 of damage. A speedy insurance pay-out enabled Camberley to open a replacement, the present main stand, just three months later. Cantilevered, this modest structure has seven rows of red, plastic tip-up seats. The club's name appears on the stand's fascia. Earlier, in 1939, the club was forced by pressing financial concerns to sell the ground to Frimley & Camberley Urban District Council, forerunner of Surrey Heath Borough Council. The sale cleared the Reds' debts and was completed with the handy proviso that the club can play at Krooner Park in perpetuity.

The floodlights, which look rather old-fashioned now, were switched on in 1974 for a game with Crystal Palace, at the time one of the old First Division's sexiest clubs. A ground record crowd of 3,100 jammed in to watch a 1-1 draw. The single-storey clubhouse, adjacent to the main stand, dates from 1980.

Krooner Park is approached through a dreary industrial estate, typical of the breed. The ground is located on a plot of land that has become hemmed in by houses, a second industrial estate and Crabtree Park. All these elements are embraced within a sharp bend described by the Ascot-Guildford railway line. The ground is a little frayed round the edges but, for the Co-Co League, offers decent facilities. A low cover, dedicated to one Chris Evans and featuring numerous roof columns, extends the full width of the near (west) end. Pass through a small turnstile block and this stand is on the right, with the clubhouse, dressing rooms and main stand ahead. The low-ceilinged clubhouse is a bit gloomy. Dug-outs are located opposite the main stand. This far side and the top end have uncovered hardstanding. The pitch falls noticeably towards the Chris Evans cover.

Town have been engaged in a prolonged, frequently bitter, battle with residents over plans to establish a £2.5m community football centre at Krooner Park. A revised second scheme (an earlier one was withdrawn in 2011 after residents derided it) features seven artificial five-a-side pitches partially on land occupied by a small wood behind the Chris Evans stand, along with a full-size grass pitch (at

90 degrees to the present pitch), new clubhouse, pavilion and changing rooms. Despite independent planners recommending the scheme go ahead, Surrey Heath Borough Council's planning committee recently knocked it back by seven votes to six. There were concerns it would have a detrimental effect on Crabtree Park, a designated Green Space, and possibly lead to contamination by exposed landfill. Efforts to get developers, led by Pace Soccer Centres, and objectors together on neutral territory have failed. So, it's war, war not jaw, jaw. Whether the planning decision is subject of an appeal remains to be seen. No surprise in any of this; in Britain today NIMBYs (Not in My Back Yard) are being replaced inexorably by BANANAs (Build Absolutely Nothing Anywhere Near Anywhere). Crabtree Park, laid out on a former landfill site beyond the small wood, isn't terribly attractive. I know because I strolled round it, pre-match. That said, I understand completely how residents believe urban jungles such as Camberley need all the green lungs they can get. Surrey Heath Borough Council, which owns Krooner Park and Crabtree Park, is piggy-in-the-middle.

**THE GAME:** Boiled up to an exciting finish after a tepid start. Both teams were at their best playing down the Krooner Park slope. Westfield led deservedly at half-time thanks to a beautifully-worked 33rd-minute goal from Shane Cheeseman, who got ahead of his marker at the near post to flick home a low cross from the left. Camberley had to clear off their goalline twice before, having ridden their luck, producing a strong last half-hour. This was due mainly to substitutes Nathan Motley and Jamie Hoppitt, who mounted numerous thrilling raids along the wings. An ill-advised challenge on Hoppitt in the 86th minute gave Manny Quarshie the opportunity to equalise emphatically from the penalty spot. Camberley went close to stealing victory with the last kick but Westfield keeper Craig Bradshaw denied them with a superb diving save. The teams, patently evenly matched, also drew 1-1 over at Woking earlier in the season.

**THE PROGRAMME:** All the basic elements present in a very tidy issue from editor Andrew Vaughan. Design unspectacular but good use of colour and statistics. Twenty-four pages is perfectly adequate and a sensible cover price, too.

**THE VERDICT:** Decent way to end a near two-month break from the association version of football.

04/20