

**TT No.80: Dean McClean** - Sat 6th October 2007. FA Trophy Preliminary Rd: **Chipstead** v Tooting & Mitcham; Res: 1-1; Att: 203; Admission: £8; Programme: 36pp, £1.50; FGIF match rating: 2\*.

A warm, almost summer-esq, afternoon took two keen travellers to the leafy Surrey commuter suburb of Chipstead. Listed in the Domesday book as *Tepestede*, its assets listed as: 3 hides; 7 ploughs, 1 mill worth £1, woodland worth 5 hogs. It was rendered £8.

An easy four-hour drive from deepest Lancashire, saw us arrive in good time, via the M40/M25 and to J8, A217.

This really is a suburban utopia, for most people anyway. I'm here for the football though it is hard to escape the fact we are deep in Rugby Union heartland.

England's magnificent victory over Australia was the popular choice of many of the locals, as by 2pm the social club was full to the rafters. Indeed, I'm sure many were unaware that Chipstead's debut in the FA Trophy, against high-flying Tooting and Mitcham, was imminent.

The ground is fairly basic in truth and it's obvious most of the improvements made have been very recent, to lift the ground up to the very stringent Ryman's League ground grading. Entering the ground by the side of the social club, two young ladies take my eight quid to enter (very steep in my opinion) and £1.50 for the 36-page programme (a classy effort this one, which more or less ticks every box for an issue at this level). On your right is the near goal where a small covered terrace seems to be popular with the locals and Tooting fans as both mingle before the game. To the left is an uninspiring kit stand, slightly improved by the black and green seats, but I really do hate these stands. The remainder of the ground is open and hard standing, while a wire fence, covered by black sheeting (to stop rubberneckers no doubt), encloses the ground, which can be quite tight in places and negotiating fellow spectators can be quite difficult.

Chipstead have had many a success over the recent years and last year's Combined Counties League championship enabled the club to join the Ryman League for the first time in its history. With over 200 players involved under the Chipstead FC banner, aged from 7-18 years, the foundation of their success has been built upon their youth policy. Indeed, last season's championship winning squad contained no fewer than 12 players previously involved with the club's youth teams. At present, two ex-Chipstead youth players, Leon McKenzie (Coventry City) and Steve Sidwell (Chelsea) are currently playing professionally.

Located high above ground, a stiff breeze crosses the ground and threatens to force me into putting my winter coat on, though thankfully the sun eventually rears its welcome head and the rest of the afternoon is a pleasant one.

In all honesty, today's game was for the most part a tetchy affair, littered with free-kicks and other stoppages (including for the referee who had to retire from the game due to injury). Really, it was the best decision the official made all afternoon and although I'm not one to criticise referees, he really did struggle to control a hard-thought game always on a knife edge. In fact, the recent league meeting was by all accounts a "tasty affair" and the replay on Tuesday will not be for the feint-hearted I am sure! After a goalless first half, it was the visitors who took the lead and most expected them to go on and wrap up the game. However, Chipstead responded superbly, deservedly drew level and had the best chances to win the match in the closing stages.

Shame I can't attend the replay.

06/20