

TT No.166: *Chris Freer* - Saturday March 7th 2009; **Stratford Town v Studley**; Midland Alliance; Result: 2-0; Attn: 231; FGIF Rating: 3/5.

There are occasions when my chosen profession (graphic design - licensed trade) takes me to towns & cities I wouldn't normally visit. Take Stratford on Avon, very touristy, very limited number of interesting pubs, and a football club languishing in the lower regions of the Midland Alliance, not one of my priority leagues. But I'm here for a Trade Show and Conference so it's an opportunity to check out what life is like in the ninth tier of English football.

Fresh from two days of gluttony I start the day where I finished off the last - drinking a beer. It has to be Wetherspoons at this time of the morning, and the Stratford offering (the Golden Bee) is blessed with a gathering of the sort that I had the chain tagged within days of yore - the effers and the blinders swigging from bottles of 99p San Miguels. I purchase my ale and retire to a quieter corner.

I've a companion today in my old Forest-loving (not tree-hugging you understand) mate Nick, whose visit to Soham with me earlier in the year has stirred within him cravings for non-league footy he never knew he had. He collects me from the town centre and we head out to Tiddington, for it is in this one-horse village a couple of miles outside Stratford that the Town has been moved, so as not to upset the tourists, presumably.

The Crown pub has a passable selection of ales and a big telly, which is showing the Cov v Chelsea cup tie. We settle into a corner and annoy the natives by talking throughout the game. Then it's the 200 yards or so to the Knights Lane Ground. There's a game already underway on an adjacent 3G pitch, the Town's A team in a Nursing Home Cup third round tie to be played to the death. We retire to the club house to discover nothing for the cask beer fan so hit the ground. The prog is on sale at the turnstile. It costs a £1, and is reliant on lots of stats with editorial at a minimum - standard stuff.

The stadium consists of rows of seating tacked on to the back of the club house, with a large free-standing roof to ward off the elements. Other than that, it's flat standing all round. The snack window shows a little more variety than most with 'Famous Pies' on offer. Unfortunately for Nick they're too famous as there's none left, save for the Balti, which is too spicy for a traditional Sunday Lunch chap like him. I'm tempted by the chips and curry but being stuffed from breakfast decide not to subject my body to any further abuse.

The game kicks off with the home team dominating the opening stages, taking one of three gilt-edged chances to put visiting Studley at a disadvantage. We're both impressed by the quality of passing football on display, although Nick - a purist to the hilt - is disappointed at the red and yellow card count - nil - and the absence of a mass brawl such as the one he enjoyed at Soham.

Half-time brings us the bonus of a penalty shoot-out on the 3G pitch, and we marvel at the ability of second-string players - many of whom have clearly been involved in the disappearance of the 'Famous' pies - to hit the back of the net with unerring accuracy. A coaching session with the England team would soon knock that out of them!

The second half gets underway with former league player Paul Hall pulling the strings for Stratford and they survive a dodgy patch to secure the points with a second strike from the home number 9, a chap with the unlikely Warwickshire name of Jozsef Jakab - you'll be telling me Gustav Holtz was English next!

There's more on my blog at <http://flynn123.wordpress.com>

It's life from the real ale, veggie food and footy trivia loving angle...

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