

TT No.192: Chris Freer - Sat March 28th 2009; **Dartford** v Tonbridge Angels; Isthmian League Premier; Score: 2-2; Attendance: 1,380; Entertainment value: 4/5.

It's London Calling again as my assault on the Isthmian Premier continues with another look at form-team Tonbridge Angels, this time at fellow play-off hopefuls Dartford. For the first time in ages wet weather looks likely to scupper my usual plan to walk through London, but I arrive at St Pancras and the rain is holding off. Although getting a one-day Tube travelcard is an attractive option, I always feel that having forked out to get to the capital, I should at least see a bit of it, even if it is only the bit that runs from St Pancras to Victoria.

Today I share my journey with tourists, joggers and dossers - native Londoners are probably still in bed. The flags leading up to Buckingham Palace are from some country I don't recognise. I hazard a guess at Morocco but it's just as likely to be Fiji or something. My breakfast at the Willow Walk is interrupted by the arrival of a score of Burberry boys, probably en route to Wembley for today's meaningless friendly against... err, probably Morocco... or is it Fiji?

I make my first planning cock-up for ages when I get off the train to Dartford at Bexleyheath station, then realise my find-the-pub map lists Bexley. Uh oh, wrong train entirely. A quick flick of the GPS on my iPhone and I'm back on course, heading for a pub that supposed to open at 11.00 but doesn't. Their loss. I head to the nearby Robin Hood & Little John hostelry in Bexleyheath and stay there for a couple. I like this pub and it's no surprise to learn it's a recent London CAMRA Pub of the Year winner, a real session sort of place.

A short rail hop, and I'm in Dartford where darkening skies persuade me to leg it the mile or so to the ground. I can see the stadium on the side of a busy road but can't spot an entrance, until a passing couple point out a set of fancy Anfield-style gates at the top of the road. I believe Princes Park won a *Groundtastic* award and it's easy to see why. A continuous roof, lots of wood and attractive landscaping. I buy a programme from the club shop, and ask about the clubhouse. I'm directed through the doors to Reception, where I pay my entrance fee and climb the stairs into a spacious but packed bar. This has a big TV plus a separate balcony which faces away from the ground, giving a fine view of a lake and 3G pitches, but not the match - shame I think as I sup my pint of Fullers London Pride, one of two draught real ales on sale, along with bottles of Deuchars and Old Peculiar in the fridge.

I survey my programme which has a pretty drab cover, but is quite chunky for £2. There's a fair bit of info in it but lots of ads too. About average for the division. I'm in search of food and I see a snack bar behind each goal. The choice isn't massive but they do have Pukka Pies. In my carnivorous days I always thought they were

the best, and I spy with glee that they have the Cheese & Onion Pasty, complete with crusty pastry. Lovely!

The game kicks off in a squally shower - they persist throughout the afternoon - and visitors Tonbridge are ahead in two minutes. Dartford don't take it lying down and are soon level, and should be in front, save for a poorly taken penalty. Tonbridge capitalise by retaking the lead, and the first 20 minutes is 5-star stuff. Things settle down a bit prior to the break but within two minutes of the restart Dartford are level again, and its ding-dong until the end, with both keepers making cracking saves. The draw is a fair result.

I must say a thing or two about my traditional post-London match routine. It's a walk - you guessed - back through the West End, picking up a bottle of water (40p, much cheaper than at St Pancras) from the Tesco Express opposite Russell Square tube station, then call in at the Humeira curry house on Judd Street opposite St. P (next to the Skinners Arms). On Saturday evening they do a buffet for just £5.95 and although there's not a vast choice, you can't fault the price. After that it's round the corner into the Euston Flyer, one of my favourite pubs. It's loud and brash but there's an unbeatable combination of big screen Sports TV, decorative barmaids and the full range of Fuller's beers - what more could you want? It's probably why I come to London so often!

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

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