

**TT No.195: Chris Freer** - Tuesday March 31st 2009; Southern League Midland Division; Bury Town v Bromsgrove Rovers; Score 0-0; Attendance: 234; Entertainment value: 2/5.

A business trip to an East Anglian brewery (not Greene King) gives me a great chance to take in a ground that I've scheduled for this season, but up until now have not managed to fit in. The only issue is I have my business partner and brother-in-law Simon for company. He likes a good game of footy (fellow Forest fan) but has yet to be introduced to the delights of non-league groundhopping. I tell him it is all free beer and cheerleaders. He seems unconvinced but agrees to forego his evening watching 'Friends'.

We arrive in Bury St. Edmunds in search of the legendary 'Nutshell', allegedly the smallest pub in the country. We share it with a quiet beer-savouring chap, a student with a pointy beard who thinks we're impressed with his inane macho prattle, and a young biker couple heavy with leathers. The pub is full.

A short walk across the town centre and we find Ram Meadow on one side of a giant car park. Arrive after 6pm to avoid charges. The programme seller is just inside the entrance and is doing a roaring trade as 234 people file-into the ground, nearly all of them within five minutes of the kick-off. The programme retails for £1.50 and although heavily laden with advertising, still manages to include at least one page of editorial or factual info per two-page spread - admirable!

The bar has a pool table and two sports TVs, one of them big-screen, but doesn't sell any beer (not what I'd call beer anyway). There are Greene King adverts all around the ground, but only chilled smooth-flow IPA available. I stick to Lucozade. I draw a similar blank at the snack bar. I could have cheesy chips if I wanted (I don't want) but there's nowt else for the likes of me.

The stadium is tidy if a little ancient. The small but erect main stand is interesting in that there are supporting struts for the roof, but none of them impede the view. The small covered stand opposite is equally unusual, in that it consists of two rows of wooden benches, with complementary footrests. Behind each goal is a small covered, stepped terrace.

Bury are the team in form, being just outside the play-offs with games in hand. Three of their strikers are on or around 20 goals each for the season and the club's total of 77 goals in 32 league games is only bettered by leaders Leamington. A goalless draw is therefore a nailed-on certainty and we aren't disappointed! The entire game is played at 101 mph; there's a lot of individual skill but no real quality. The referee - a Basil Fawlty imitator in looks and mannerisms - is fussy to an extreme, and he joins the rest of us in testing our neck muscles as the ball seems to spend an eternity in the air. When it does come down there's a modicum of goalmouth action, with the visiting Bromsgrove keeper always keen to punch

even when a catch is on. We half expect him to punch out his goal kicks, just for good measure.

There's a heart-stopping moment when one of the home team's Reed brothers - a matching pair - goes down injured but there's a huge sigh of relief when it turns out to be just a dislocated Alice band, which he quickly re-adjusts. His brother straightens his in sympathy.

So, it's a goalless draw and Simon is wondering what happened to the free beer and cheerleaders. I tell him they'll probably be at the next match. The next day he's on the Bury website looking at facts and figures. I sense another convert coming along nicely.

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

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