

TT No.211: *Chris Freer* - Saturday April 18th 2009: **AFC Hornchurch** v Horsham; Isthmian League Premier Division; Score: 3-0; Attendance: 397; Entertainment value: 1/5.

For the second time in a week I'm off to London, this time with train tickets booked some time ago. I'm in the capital so often that the wife is accusing me of having a second family down there. I tell her I've got one in Holland too but I only see them once a year....

My early morning walk, this time takes me through the City (St Paul's et al) for a Wetherspoon's brekky at the Cross Keys - which looks like it was a bank at one time, not surprisingly - and on towards the East End where my first pub is now a curry house. Serves me right for relying on a 1977 edition of the Good Beer Guide. Actually, it's a 2007 version but it's still just as out-of-date. The second pub is open but it's a very ropey pint of Fuller's. I buy a rail ticket from Fenchurch Street station and discover that a one-Day travelcard covers bus, tube AND rail within the Greater London area. That's a bonus - I can get back to the Euston Flyer for the FA Cup semi between Arsenal and Chelsea that little bit quicker (than walking, that is.)

My plan this week is to get to the ground early enough to ensure getting a prog. I don't want another scare like I had on Monday at Tonbridge where they'd run out and I had to go scrounging. It's only a ten-minute walk from Upminster station to Hornchurch's ground, so there's just time for a pint of Ringwood's Old Thumper at the nearby Crumpled Horn pub, which looks like a Wetherspoon's but isn't.

The ground is in a residential area and boasts a pitch within six lanes of a running track. It's a bit like the Berwick Rangers Shielfield Park (although there it's a speedway track) in that there's little point standing behind each goal because you'd need binoculars to see the action. Bridge Avenue makes up for that in having no less than SIX stands, none of them massively substantial but there's a decent chunk of covered terracing on one side.

Programmes are on sale just inside the main gate and cost £2. I'm a bit unnerved as the manager's column refers to today's game being against Harrow Borough which was supposed to have been played last Thursday - am I two days early? The presence of green & yellow (ughh!) Horsham shirts in the bar reassures me. There's no real ale on tap but they do have bottles of Fullers London Pride in the fridge. Funnily enough, even though I hate keg or smooth draught beers, I'm not so finicky about the bottled stuff and will quite gladly accept it pasteurised. There are three TV screens in the bar showing the Darlo match (commendable), but it's a poor showing on the food front, with plenty of dead animal on offer but nothing for veggies.

The pitch is rubbish. I think my lad's team would refuse to play on it. It's lumpy, the grass hasn't been cut, and there's less than a yard either side between

touchline and running track - an ankle turner if ever I saw one. The sun is shining and butterflies are dancing on the crash barriers. For most of the first half that's the best entertainment, aside from a one-minute cameo appearance from a home sub (Christopher Lee no less) who is stretchered off almost as soon as he enters the fray.

Hornchurch have a Rory Delap clone and Horsham's defending is so inept that the first goal comes via this route. It's pretty easy for the home team who don't really have to show any particular talent to win the match, taking it 3-0 without actually breaking sweat. The Horsham fans must be considering it a fairly wasted journey, and I'm beginning to think that my own afternoon could have been better spent.

I head back at full speed to catch the second half of the FA Cup semi at the Euston Flyer. The place is full of Everton fans in town a day early for their own semi the following afternoon. I get chatting to a couple of the older guys who remember the days when Forest (my team) were more than a match for the 'Toffees' (heady times!). Outside, there's a good old dust-up going on between younger supporters with too much ale in their bellies. It's handbags stuff but sadly it's probably the only entertainment I've had all day.

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

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