

TT No.149: *Chris Freer* - Sat January 30th 2010; **Civil Service Strollers v Spartans**; East of Scotland League Prem Division; Score: 2-2; Crowd: 100+; Entertainment value: 3/5.

So, when is a ground not a ground? That's the question I'm posing to myself after another Saturday away-day blighted by the weather. Does it need to have paid access, a keep-out fence, floodlights and at least one terrace or stand? Or can it just be a roped-off part of a large playing field? No question about it, it has to be the former, is my first school of thought. Then I look at it again. It's the long-standing - half a century - home turf of an East of Scotland Premier Division side who regularly compete in the Scottish Cup ... and they issue programmes.

I've seen a bit of debate on forums about the various criteria hoppers use to determine a new 'tick' on the list. I suspect some of the guys boasting around 1,000 grounds **MUST** have included one or two park pitches amongst these. I can recall visits with Barrow Town in the Leicestershire Senior League back in the 1970's where I've stood on my fair share of village greens, but I don't include these in my running total.

I wouldn't have this dilemma if it hadn't been for Dunfermline. "We have just been caught out by the weather..." says manager Jim McIntyre on the OS. **WHY!** Everybody knows it was going to be sub-zero, and haven't you got under-soil heating? I suspect the two coachloads of QOTS supporters heading to the ground are just as p*ssed off as me.

Up until the point where I realise, I have a decision to make, I'm enjoying a pleasant day up in sunny Edinburgh. The usual Wetherspoon's veggie brekky (with toast) accompanied by a pint of Tryst, in the very impressive Standing Order, followed by a Glencoe Stout from the Bridge of Allen Brewery in the cosy Halfway House hostelry on the steps at the back of Edinburgh station, and I'm looking forward to the game. I know that one of my alternatives, at Cowdenbeath, has gone, but I'm pretty confident that Dunfermline, with their alleged under-soil heating, should be OK, and I have a final standby in Livingston. Then I notice on the I-phone that pitch inspections are taking place at both venues, so there must be some doubt, then?

Just after 1.00 I find that both are indeed off. I check the East of Scotland League fixtures. It says that Edinburgh City's game at nearby Edinburgh University **MIGHT** be on, but that the pitch is definitely playable at Civil Services Strollers, albeit with a 2.00pm kick-off. But where is the ground? Out on the banks of the Firth of Forth according to their less-than-informative website. But how to get there? I wouldn't know the bus routes, and I don't do taxis. I reason that I have no other pressing engagements, so I might as well set off on a long walk, guided by the GPS on my I-phone.

My meandering route takes me past an all-weather pitch where a match is imminent. A chap looking on says it's Penicuik v Spartans but not the first teams and, yes, he too had been considering going to the Strollers game, but if I was walking, I'd have to get a move on. I'm aware of that, but he does point me in the right direction. Forty minutes later I can hear the familiar strains of a football match in progress and I have arrived. There's no admission fee, and a club official informs me where to find the programmes.

I survey the scene. There are several games underway, with the nearest being the Strollers v top-of-the-table Spartans. There's more than 100 people gathered round watching - beats most the gates in the North East Counties League in England for instance, despite their tidy stadiums - and although the ground is bone hard, it's no different to what it would be like under a baking hot summer sun.

I catch most of the latter stages of the first half, which ends up goalless and pretty scrappy at that, and retire with everybody else to the clubhouse to get warmed up. It's spacious with SKY TV, a bar with no decent beer, and a food hatch doing a good trade in tomato soup and various fast food combinations, including chips and curry.

The second half starts with three goals in quick succession, the visitors going in front, Strollers bundling in an equaliser, then going behind again to a decisive break. The game has quickened up and a few tackles go flying in, but it looks like the spoils will go to the league leaders until a late up-and-under eludes the visiting keeper and ends up in the back of the net courtesy of part of somebody's anatomy.

I set off for the four-mile 'stroll' back into Edinburgh, still debating whether this counts as a 'proper' ground or not. I'm sitting enjoying a pint of Deuchars (unusually for me as I generally loath golden ales) in a pub near the station when I come to my decision. I weigh up all the pros and cons, think how many miles from home I am, consider my aching legs and throbbing feet, glance at the match day programme, and put another tick on my board.

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

In search of that elusive veggie pie (and a decent pint!).

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