

**TT No.152: *Chris Freer*** - Sat February 6th 2010; **Tooting & Mitcham United v Ashford Town (Middx)**; Isthmian Prem; Score: 2-3; Attendance: 212; Entertainment value: 2/5.

They say it's a sure sign of age when your memory starts to let you down, but how do quantify memory? Mine's as good as ever - I can recite the 1966 World Cup winning team (yeah, I know, everybody can) and the Leicester City line-up from the 1969 FA Cup Final, not to mention Forest's two European Cup winning teams. But then I do worry about myself from time to time. Like two weeks ago when I ended up on the wrong tube train, and today I'm walking through London and I suddenly realise that all the maps I meticulously crafted during the week, featuring today's game plus all the various weather contingencies, are still sitting on my bedside table.

It's just lucky I remembered I was going to London! The wife suspects I've got a second family down there, but I tell her not to worry as I'm just going for a couple of drinks with Tigers Woods, then I'm off clubbing with John Terry.

I'm a glutton for punishment though because, despite a few arthritic pains and a blister on my left heel, I decide that a rain-free morning can only herald a steady stroll from St Pancras through London on my way to a breakfast appointment at the Willow Walk in Victoria. The place is busy with Brighton fans heading to Leyton Orient but I have time for a couple of jars before the short rail journey to Mitcham Eastfields. This station is not the nearest to Imperial Fields, but is better placed for the pubs, only one of which I can remember the name of. The White Lion of Mortimer turns out to be a Wetherspoons, but not one of the flashier ones. Worn seats, peeling paintwork and an earthier clientele give this more of urban local feel than you get with most pubs from this chain, but the beer - King's from Horsham - is palatable.

I check the I-phone for other local hostelries and the Ravensbury Arms flags itself as a mecca for real ale drinkers. When I arrive at this out-of-the-way roadhouse all I find are the usual suspects, Greene King Ruddles, Courage and one other so bland I can't remember the name. I select the Courage and wonder if I have it. When I get to the ground, I must have covered another two miles walking round Mitcham, so am happy to find a roomy bar with live TV footy, and two handpumps, one selling Youngs Bitter and the other Hogs Back TEA. Better still, the adjacent food servery has 12" pizzas, with at least two veggie toppings, for only £3.95, served by a small but perfectly formed young lady.

United's ground is of 2002 vintage and is certainly impressive. The considerable bulk of the main building not only features the bar, but also other hospitality facilities - there are lots of partying kids about - and it's clear that 'The Hub' is what it is. Pitch-side there's a huge cantilever roof over the main stand, and with steeply banked terracing with minimal cover behind each goal, only one side of the

stadium is undeveloped. There's not a huge crowd today but a vocal knot of home fans - whom I dub the 'Tooting Popular Front' for reasons that may be lost on any under thirties reading this - keep up the banter, even if most of the vitriol is reserved for the ref.

The afore-mentioned man in black does his level-best to snuff out any chance of this being an exciting game, and it's fair to say that the five goals the match does conjure up have more to do with both goalkeepers being found wanting than any cohesive attacking play. The visitors Ashford Town (Middlesex) are gifted two in the first half and, despite being pegged back either side of the break, nick it near the end. Irrespective of the score-line, much of the play is uninspiring, and several of the Popular Front find the Ladies hockey match being staged behind the home end to be of far more interest.

When we arrive back in the bar most of said young ladies - still in hockey kit - have taken up residence which ensures a healthy posse of forty-something men lingering over their post-match pints. Meanwhile I'm trying to remember the route to the station. Memory eh? At least with its real ales, veggie food and multi-screen sports TV this is one stadium I won't forget in a hurry. Unfortunately, the match itself has already activated my memory erase button.

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

Footy for the real ale drinking veggie.

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