

TT No.162: *Chris Freer* - Sat February 13th 2010; **Boreham Wood v Cray Wanderers**; Isthmian League Premier; Score: 2-4; Attendance: 128; Entertainment value: 3/5.

I suppose if I wasn't running round the country actively watching football every Saturday afternoon, I'd be sprawled on the couch enjoying the Sky Soccer Saturday experience. Some people express a view that there's too much footy on telly. Not me, I can't get enough of it, ever since the days of the old 4.45pm teleprinter and the second half coverage of some key match on BBC radio (way before 5 live).

Star Soccer on Sunday afternoons was always essential viewing, despite Hugh John's commentary making the most exciting, atmospheric encounter sound like a humdrum park kickabout. Another programme I particularly enjoyed was Quiz-ball on Midlands ATV, where two teams representing local clubs - each consisting of two players and a celebrity - would answer lame general knowledge questions in order to score a goal. Sometime during the show, one of the otherwise unoccupied footballers got to demonstrate his real talent by chipping a ball through a hoop (I think). Star man was always Leicester's Frank Worthington who could do it 9 times out of 10. What a player!

I'm thinking about TV as I travel down to London courtesy of East Midlands Trains. I've decided that my pre-match pub crawl today will take in some of the Covent Garden pubs mentioned in a recent article in Beer, the CAMRA magazine. All have been used as sets in various Doctor Who episodes and it gives me an opportunity to venture into part of London I don't normally visit.

My first surprise of the day is to find that the Lord Moon on the Mall - a Wetherspoons hostelry - is actually open at the appointed hour. A previous inability to unlock its doors when it's supposed to had caused me to contact the company in question. I received a courteous reply and sure enough, whenever I've subsequently passed the pub early doors, it's been open. Today I plan to breakfast in that very establishment but sadly it is not to be. They do not have enough staff, and when pressed, the spokes-girl is unable to say when the missing cook is liable to turn up. So, some things don't change.

I discover another Wetherspoons in Holborn. The Shakespeare's Head has a good range of beers, and despite being busy the staff serve me my brekky in double-quick time. From there I move on to the Nags Head, a McMullen's house, and end up at the Museum Tavern near the British Museum, where I'm eventually asked if I would like to share my table. In other words, can you clear off because we've got diners waiting. I was going anyway...

The rail journey from St Pancras to Elstree & Borehamwood takes about 20 minutes, and you can use a Zone 1-6 travelcard to get there (£7.50). About ten minutes away is the Hart & Spool, a very busy if somewhat compact Wetherspoons

house actually showing live football. The first pint pulled is duff but they offer me another and that's spot on.

From here it's a further ten minutes to Meadow Park, just a stone's throw from the BBC's Elstree Studios. Boreham Wood's ground is a tidy affair which looks capable of staging footy at a higher level. There's a sizable main stand on one side, a narrow strip of stepped covered terracing down the other side, and raised uncovered terracing behind either goal. The camber on the pitch is wicked! The club bar is outside the ground, but doesn't sell any proper beer, and I also draw a veggie blank at the snack bar (apart from the ubiquitous chip). Definitely not up to the level I experienced at Tooting the previous week.

I arrive pitch-side to the sight of a home player lowering his shorts in front of a lady with a hand-held camera. I'm not sure what it's all about, although I presume it's all done in the best possible taste. Boreham Wood are fourth with Cray somewhere below half way, but the visitors make the most of defensive uncertainty to go two up before the break, the second courtesy of a goalkeeping howler. There's commotion behind me as a guy comes into the ground escorting a player from a nearby pitch who's in some distress.

Transpires he's dislocated his shoulder but they have the misfortune to come up against Mr Jobsworth, the resident steward, who when he finally does go off in search of the nearest physio, comes back apologetically, but alone. With a burst of expletives, they disappear to phone an ambulance whilst Mr Jobsworth explains himself to all and sundry.

After the break a third Cray goal seems to have settled things but Wood plug away and with Mario Noto pulling the strings set up an interesting finale. It's all in vain, however, as a fourth Wanderers strike sees the game out. It hasn't been Match of the Day stuff, probably more Star Soccer, but I can't complain about six goals and a bit of a medical drama into the bargain.

All that's left now is to head back into St Pancras for a couple more beers and my Saturday night curry buffet, but first I take a different route back to the station, past the bit of the Elstree Studios that houses Albert Square. Sure enough, peaking over the back-garden fences of local residents, is the unmistakable frontage of the Queen Vic. I say frontage as most of the buildings on the set are virtually two-dimensional, not unlike the fake town in Blazing Saddles.

What a let-down, hey? Take it off air I say, and replace it with more essential viewing, like a new series of Quiz-ball. Frankie, get 'yer' boots on!

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

In search of the ultimate pre-match veggie and real ale experience....

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