

TT No.170: *Chris Freer* - Wednesday February 24th 2010; **Frome Town v AFC Totton**; Southern League Division One - South & West; Score: 1-1; Attendance: 172; Entertainment value: 4/5.

'Never mix business with pleasure' did someone once say? Well I've been doing it for years. My business takes me to all parts of the country to meet customers. It's sheer coincidence that there's always a new ground conveniently situated nearby, and with - surprise...surprise, - a game on that very night!

Sometimes you take your chances on the weather playing its part, such as my trip to the North-West the night before. Unfortunately, Ramsbottom United's pitch was having none of it and steadfastly refused to thaw out. So a thoroughly disgruntled Simon and I had to drive back through the falling snow, our readies still in our wallets, and an opportunity wasted.

Today I drive the three hours or so down to rural Wiltshire, during the day keeping an occasional eye on the Frome Town forum. They're making positive noises, but despite the subsequent pronouncement that the match is definitely on, I view the driving rain with suspicion as I head into Somerset and this tidy market town. My first port-of-call is to the stadium where there are ominous puddles in the centre spot and goalmouths, but two hours before the kick-off the bar is open and the residents seem unruffled by the steady downpour outside.

As if by magic the deluge stops and, heartened by this development, I decamp to the Griffin pub in town for a pre-match pint of Milk Street Gulp, this being the brewery tap. I get back to the AlderSmith Stadium - previously more quaintly known as Badgers Hill - with about an hour to go until kick-off and things are looking much brighter.

Despite only having spectator facilities on two sides, the ground does have a lot of character, especially the bar complex with its covered veranda behind one goal. The main stand down one side is split between seating and terracing whilst the other two sides are flat standing. Curiously, you can't walk all the way around the ground, as the area in front of the changing rooms is off-limits.

The bar is quite comfortable and spacious, complete with big screen TVs, a pool table and Sharps Doombar on handpump. The catering facilities consist of a burger van at the side of the pitch, but a quick scan of the menu reveals no cheer for the very hungry veggie. The lady in charge of the cooking considers my plight and comes up with a double fried egg cob (roll) with fried onions which, although not exactly fitting in with my new-found health food regime, hits the spot on a damp February night.

Tonight's game is a top-of-the-table clash between fifth-placed Frome, and visitors AFC Totton who are second. I'm hoping to see a bit of style so am a tad worried when the ball is booted right out of the ground with only the second kick of the

match. In fact, plenty of other balls go the same way during the ensuing 90 minutes, but the two teams still find time to offer up a fast and competitive conflict which could go either way. In fact, for much of the first half, the much-vaunted visitors offer little as an attacking force, and it is somewhat against the run of play when they sneak into the lead just before the break.

For much of that half we've enjoyed - if that is the right word - the monotone wail of a very vocal and rather stout gentleman with a huge vocabulary consisting of the word 'Totttttonnn' delivered with as much repetition as his larynx will allow. Behind him, a fitness club sunk into the walls of the clubhouse is pumping out a disco beat with the gyrating limbs of ladies of all shapes and sizes silhouetted against the windows. It's a marriage made in hell.

The break brings respite, however, as the dancers pack up and go, Totton-man moves to the other end, and the rain starts up again. Within six minutes Frome are level, as indecision in the visiting defence following a disputed free kick gives leading scorer Hulbert a clear sight of goal. The game in this half is much more even, but despite much huffing and puffing, the better players in each team are good enough to preserve the status quo, and 1-1 it stays.

The teams have done the business and it's actually been a pleasure to watch.

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

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06/20