

TT No. 188: *Chris Freer* - Saturday March 13th 2010; **Ramsgate** v Chatham Town; Isthmian League Division One South; Score: 2-3; Attendance: 188; Entertainment value: 3/5.

Any amongst you who read my rant about postponed games a post or two back might well have drawn the conclusion that I am a bit of a conspiracy theorist. Spot on. Ever since I've been old enough to think clearly, I've never really accepted the official line. Moon landings? Pah! Robert Maxwell? Still out there! Twin Towers? Don't even go there!

I fear it may well have been my pronouncements on these and other dubious historic events that nipped a burgeoning friendship with another well-respected Long Eaton-based groundhopper in the bud. Either that or my manic driving on the way back from a night game at King Lynn. Whichever, he never contacted me again!

My thoughts turn to this as I sit in Churchill's in Ramsgate earwiggling a group of blokes doing what drinking blokes do best - putting the world to rights. They've already cleared up the death of Marilyn Monroe (murder by the CIA) and are moving on to Lady Di. I did get to see the Princess of Wales once, when I was doing photography for a print magazine. I remember being amazed at how she'd been trained to get out of a not-quite-stationary car, press the flesh with half a dozen dignitaries, and disappear inside the security of a building, all in space of ten seconds. Not that there probably were any dissident snipers in Loughborough back in the late 1980s, but it's best to be safe, hey?

Churchill's is the last of my three Good Beer Guide pubs in this seaside town. Earlier I have been swallowing the local brew, Gadd's, which is a tad too hoppy for my tastes. Even earlier still, I manage to find a pub in Smithfield Market, London, which opens at 8.00, and serves its house beer in shiny tankards. At nearly £4 a pint I'd want it in silver. They ask if I would like to do breakfast, but a quick look at the meaty and pricey menu convinces me that the nearest Wetherspoons should be my next port-of-call. The Penderel's Oak in Holborn is not busy and the staff also seem to be asleep, albeit on their feet, but the brekky hits the spot.

I travel to Ramsgate at high speed, courtesy of South-Eastern's bullet-train which shadows the tracks of the Eurostar. Sadly, it runs at low level through Stratford, so I don't get to see how the new Olympic arena - surely to be christened the Sebastian Coe's Folly Stadium - is coming along, though the cranes moving on the skyline would indicate it's not quite finished yet. I've paid £31.50 for the privilege of getting to Ramsgate and I start to wonder why it is that the nearer you get to Europe, the more per mile it costs. You can travel the width of Scotland for the price of a tot of whisky, but they skin you by the yard (sorry, metre) in Kent. Could it be some sort of conspiracy?

Ramsgate's Southwood Stadium is a brisk ten-minute walk from the town's railway station. Set in a suburban area, the ground is showing its age, although the cover behind either goal is of the cantilever variety, protecting the otherwise crumbling raised terracing. The main stand along one side gives the appearance of being an old covered terrace with benches subsequently affixed. The fourth side is a narrow strip of flat standing. The club house is outside of the ground and consists of a small lounge and adjacent - and much bigger - function room. There's Sports TV in both rooms but sadly no proper beer to report. I don't fancy Guinness so settle for an orange juice, saving myself for a real drink later. There's a snack hatch outside the clubhouse and also one between the main stand and club shop in the ground. Against my better judgement I select chips - the only non-meat offering - and suffer indigestion for the rest of the day.

Both Ramsgate and their visitors today, Chatham Town, are mid-table and for the first half hour they are both doing their league positions justice. Most of the 188 crowd are nodding off before the eventual first shot of the game heralds a last fifteen minutes of entertainment, if not always for the best of reasons. A dust-up between two opposing players is shortly followed by a six-man scuffle in the centre circle, the ball being fifty yards away. The ref doesn't know who to caution, so puts the onus on the miscreants to own up. Nothing forthcoming, so he books the nearest two. Meanwhile there's bodies lying everywhere as a Chatham breakaway opens the scoring, although we're not completely sure about that until ref restarts the match with a centre spot kick-off. More man-on-man action sees the ball in the net at the other end but the man-in-black has already blown for the foul. No problem, the free kick is deflected in and it's 1-1. We have a game at last.

The referee is up to his tricks again early in the second half, pacing out just eight yards for a free kick and then saying 'That's fine' to a grateful wall. A home header goes in but Ramsgate complacency is shattered when Chatham equalise soon after from a swift breakaway. A draw looks nailed on when a Rams striker blazes over from three yards, but a late winner for the visitors upsets the locals who go home grumbling, very possibly about the manager, the referee and anybody else who might be involved in a conspiracy.

Me, I just accept the official line. It says 2-3 on the scoresheet, and I have no reason to disagree with that.

There's more on my blog at <http://flynn123.wordpress.com> From the only veggie in football...

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