

**TT No.42: *Chris Freer*** -Saturday October 3rd 2009; **AFC Wimbledon** v Kidderminster Harriers; Conference Premier; Score 0-1; Attendance: 3,601; Entertainment value: 2/5.

As a pedantic ground collector, Wimbledon gives me a problem. I have a folder with three programmes in it. One dates from 1989 and is fronted 'Wimbledon Football Club'. The second is from 2004 and is again headed 'Wimbledon Football Club'. The third is from 2007 and is headed 'MK Dons'. They're in the same folder for it appears to me that - despite the name change, and the three different grounds in question (Plough Lane, National Hockey Stadium and Stadium MK) - they were issued by the same club. However, I am very aware that die-hard fans of the new 'AFC Wimbledon' will dispute this, and doubtless bestow on me a 'fatwa' of sorts, but I have to make a decision as to how I order my collection, and therefore the three are likely to stay in the folder that I have marked 'MK Dons, formerly Wimbledon'.

I now have a new folder marked AFC Wimbledon, and I have taken until this season to put anything in it. This is because AFC Wimbledon play at Kingstonian's ground .... or is it the other way round? Websites say that AFC hold the lease, but one suspects that if they pull out - and there's talk of it in today's programme - it will revert to being Kingstonian's once more. Certainly, the more prominent signage around this impressive ground belong to the Isthmian League side.

Either way, I've decided today is the day to complete my '160' and having followed my usual routine - early morning 440, Willow Walk brekkie - I get to walk from Victoria to Waterloo for a change, and marvel at the tourists as they swing their cameras on masse to take pictures of two mounted policemen ambling down Whitehall. They'd have a field day snapping away at a local derby!

I travel to Norbiton station, from where it's a ten-minute walk to two 2007 Good Beer Guide pubs (I'm saving up for the 2010 edition) these being the Canbury Arms (foody and a bit arty-farty) and the Willoughby Arms. This latter is the kind of pub any decent footy fan would want in their town. A front bar for the drinkers, and a rear saloon laid out like an auditorium, with not one but two big screens to show live action. There's a pool table at the back, football table in the yard, and real ales from local independents. On the wall are press cuttings showing that the national media is aware of this place and its sport-obsessive landlord. It's a gem, and in walking distance of AFC's adopted home.

At the ground I notice there are two bars, both accessible from outside. At least one of them has a handpump, dispensing a seasonal ale from Theakstons - no LocAle scheme here, then. Just inside the turnstile is a food van. I note that there are veggie sausages available, three to a roll for £3.50. I go for the less pricey veggie-burger at £3. Another food kiosk further round the ground has pre-packed sandwiches.

Kingsmeadow is a Football League stadium in waiting. It reminds me a little of Burton's old Eton Park ground, roomy with lots of character but maybe not quite big enough for the higher echelons. There's more than three and a half thousand in for today's clash of two 'up-there' teams, with a fair few from visitors Kidderminster. I have a laugh on entering the stadium to see that the Away turnstile leads directly into the same part of the ground as the adjacent Home turnstiles. What's that all about then? Presumably they have a different ticket stub to tell them apart from the AFC supporters, although I would hazard a guess that their overwhelmingly red & white garb might be the real giveaway.

The teams emerge and I clock a couple of Kidderminster players I recognise. Robbie Matthews was at Notts County and is one of those veteran Pro's, who can boss a forward line. Alongside him is Barnes-Homer who impressed me when playing for Halesowen a couple of seasons back, and I felt then he'd go far. Well he's got as far as the Conference, and scores the only goal of the game, a neat turn and placement when presented with the ball eighteen yards out. AFC have much of the possession but rarely look capable of scoring, whilst the visitors play on the break and have other chances but seem content with the 1-0. The crowd go home disappointed but not disheartened. I think they know that the Football League is just around the corner, though whether at this ground or not is another matter.

After the match I have time to kill so head back to the Willoughby to watch the Live game, Man U v Sunderland (If 'Man U' were my team, I'd have the respect to call them Manchester United, unlike many of the people who profess to being 'a Man U fan'). There's the usual smattering of Reds supporters in attendance (well, we are in London, after all) and I take great delight in cheering the Sunderland goals, just to help wind 'em up. I leave early and end up missing the inevitable 'own goal' equaliser (cue betting scam enquiry) in an effort to find my way back to the station, which I do with the aid of a passer-by and the satellite positioning device on my I-phone, with seconds to spare. A bit like AFC really; they know where they're going, they just need enough time to get there.

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

Footy for the real ale, veggie stadium-collector.

06/20