

**TT No.45: *Chris Freer*** - Tues October 6th 2009; **AFC Fylde** v Trafford; Northern Premier League Division One North; Score: 0-3; Attendance: 186; Entertainment value: 3/5.

Who said never mix business with pleasure? Not me, that's for sure, as I contemplate the thrill of a night out in rain-sodden Lancashire following a business trip to Preston. My long-suffering brother-in-law and business partner Simon is in tow. Having recently had his appendix removed, I feel it is my duty to treat him to an evening on a draughty terrace at AFC Fylde, one of those grounds you really need to get to by car.

After stopping off for a cheapo meal at the Wetherspoon's in Preston - sadly devoid of all but a couple of token cask beers - I recognise the pub across the road - the Old Black Bull - as being the place I watched an England qualifier last year. Unfortunately, they'll be no return visit tonight, as I'm behind the wheel so it's straight off to Warton on the road to Blackpool, passing by Preston's Deepdale - with its fantastic floodlight architecture - on the way.

I'm not quite sure why Kirkham & Wesham football club decided to rename itself AFC Fylde, as my maps don't show any metropolis with that name nearby. Then again, I was rubbish at geography at school so it's doubtless the region of Lancashire that encompasses the village of Warton, outside of which sits Kellamergh Park. Access to the ground is via a pub car park (novel!) and down a winding track that leads to the middle of a field. Here sits the ground, surrounded by a six-foot high concrete wall. It's a very wet night and we need to ask if the game is on. Once inside we are reassured to see that the pitch is designed to shed water. Simon gets chatting to one of the club officials who says that £40,000 was spent on the pitch drainage system in the summer after lots of problems last year. It pays off because on a night when nearby Bamber Bridge have their game called off, this one's definitely on, much to my relief.

One of the most striking features of the stadium is the use of two huge containers to provide hospitality facilities. From the outside they are rugged, metallic and green. From the inside you'd think you were in a modern office suite, with carpets, stylish furniture, flat screen TVs showing Sports News, and in one of them a neat but basic bar. Sadly, no real beer, not even in bottle. The other container is used for sponsors, and we have the pleasure of watching them tuck into their half time buffet as we wander around the ground.

The move from our cosy seats in the long but narrow main stand is to check out the snack bar which gleams behind one goal, especially as the attractive blonde that bought the buffet to the sponsors was last seen disappearing back into it. Unfortunately, she brings me the bad news that, despite the sign stating the contrary, there actually aren't any cheese and onion pies on sale. Neither are there any peas, so my cash stays in my wallet. Simon munches on his chips.

The game is between 13th placed AFC Fylde, resplendent in their new white kit, and visitors Trafford FC from Manchester, a good six places further up the table. It's one of those typical Northern Premier League games, played at 110mph with no lack of individual skill but a general absence of fluid team play. The home side are seeing most of the ball but you suspect that the visitors are just waiting for their moment to strike, which they do ten minutes from the break. Within 20 minutes of the second half starting they've tripled their lead, courtesy of two players called Scott. The gaggle of Trafford fans sitting near us sing their songs, not surprisingly mainly about players called Scott. There's not a peep from the home contingent.

I take a last lingering look at the snack bar - fantasizing about cheese and onion pies you understand - and we make for the soggy car park and our long trek home. Me thinking how fortunate to be able to tick off one of the most awkward grounds to get to, and Simon wondering why his sister ever took up with me in the first place. I know he enjoyed it really...

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

Cheese & Onion pie hunters of the world unite!

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