

TT No. 139: *Chris Freer* - Sat January 1st 2011; **AFC Sudbury** v Heybridge Swifts; Isthmian League Division 1 North; Score: 2-1; Attendance: 303; Entertainment value: 3/5.

'Music Was My First Love' sang John Miles in nineteen-something-or-other and to be honest it's been pretty instrumental (you see what I did there?) in my life too. Not top spot, of course, but well up there, maybe in to first three (hang on, say four, I was forgetting about beer....).

I can chart (did it again!) my life through various stages from the Shadows, the Beatles, Marc Bolan, progressive rock, punk, mod revival, new wave, indie, right up to present day, with just a few things passing me by. It's also led to me meeting up with a lot of new friends over the years, including Nick, my travelling companion today, who readers of my blog may recall first contacted me trying to book a punk band I was managing for his local village hall, anticipating the Shock! Horror! he would cause. Finding out he were comrade Forest fans, we've been pals ever since, despite families coming along.

The long haul to away fixtures always used to give us plenty of talking time, recounting classic matches and gigs of yore, and today is no exception as we make the relatively steady but mile-hungry journey to Sudbury in Suffolk, one of the very few New Year's Day fixtures on my radar. We recount tales of bands we've seen live over the years and try to recall the line-up at the Punk All-Dayer at Leicester's De Montfort Hall in late '77 (The Cortinas and Wayne County for sure, and Nick thinks the Adverts were there too.)

In Sudbury we have a quick look for the Mauldon's Brewery Tap but it doesn't jump out at us, and as Nick is nursing the mother of all hangovers - accumulated on a cultural tour of his village on New Year's Eve - subsequently declaring henceforth allegiance to the Temperance Society anyway, we head straight for the ground, which is accessed from the A131 Chelmsford road, south of the town. It's a relative new build, and sports a very impressive administrative block, with changing rooms, two-storey club house with viewing balcony, club shop (seemingly not open) and plush bar. Greene King beers are on tap, and I select a Rockin' Rudolf. Nick decides he needs to find an antidote for his hangover and plumps for same.

A word about Greene King. Many latter-day CAMRA members seem to consider them to be the new Anti-Christ of the beer world, like a 21st Century Watneys. True, their brands seem to be everywhere, and it's a shame in a brewing town like Sudbury that they can't find shelf-space for the local brew, but GK beers are actually not that bad a drink. There, I've said it.

I leave Nick sipping his medicine, and check out a snack bar we passed earlier. The menu lists 'Veggieburger' and I want to clarify whether I am dreaming or not. Sure enough, they actually do sell them, and the five-minute wait whilst they cook one up is well worth it, although I would have liked a few onions to (I suppose I should

have asked). Also, on the list is Scampi in a Basket. Last time I had that served up I was probably listening to John Miles!

The ground reflects the clubhouse complex, being smart and functional, with a main stand tacked to the front of the admin. block, plus a small but sturdy covered terrace opposite, and shallow covered standing areas behind each goal. We take up position to the side of the dug-outs as Nick anticipates the usual punch-up that tends to entertain him whenever we go anywhere. And he is not to be disappointed today, as an early melee right in front of us results in much vigorous pushing and shoving, accusation and counter-accusation, a classic bit of sham-collapsing by a couple of protagonists, and a rash of yellow cards which bode well for later.

Away manager Wayne Bond, with calves to match those of our hero Stuart 'Psycho' Pearce, indulges in a bit of playful banter with the vocal locals in the covered terrace behind him, and it's classic lower-league stuff. Nick has also clocked that the visitors - Heybridge Swifts incidentally - have a lady physio, but as she also looks like Stuart Pearce, his interest rapidly wains.

Both teams trade early goals, and the action continues when the home centre forward - having been booked in the earlier fracas - proceeds to take out the keeper and we have a reduction in the number of players. With Swifts on the ascendancy, it looks grim for Sudbury, but as the second half tempo subsides, they ride their luck and pinch it with a 25-yarder near the end.

The fans in the covered terrace chant 'Yellows' and the name of their home team, which sounds to our ears like 'Submarine'. Yellow and Submarine? There must be a song title in there somewhere...

There's more on my blog at <http://flynn123.wordpress.com> - fanfare for the common fan....

07/20