

**TT No.220: *Richard Panter*** - Sat 2nd April 2011; **Exeter City** v Dagenham & Redbridge; Football League Div. One: Score: 2-1: Attendance: 4598 (133 away); Admission: £16; Programme: 104 A5 pp: Match rating: \* \*.

Catch 92; Is This A Dagger I See Before Me?

At some 204 miles Exeter City's St James Park is the third most distant football league ground from Hathern Towers. It was a leisurely three and a half hours from door to parking space on a rather pleasant dry, warm and eventually sunny day. Midway across the edge of the Somerset levels I noted the first swallow of the year as it laboured over the M5. It was also noticeably greener the further south I progressed, according to current natural history lore spring moves up the country at walking pace so this gives credence to this theory. Warm, pleasantly sunny and a new ground within to be ticked off. This is why I enjoy ground hopping so much.

I had to park about half a mile away from the ground due to the not unreasonable parking restrictions for non-residents. As I neared the venue, I was surprised that it was as tightly hemmed in by houses as it was, on television it looks surrounded by plenty of open land. As my selected choice to watch the game from, the Big Bank terrace was pay at the gate, I had time on my hands so I wandered around the perimeter.

The club shop and hospitality areas are in the rear of the new cantilever stand which spans the entire eastern side of the pitch. Rather strangely the changing rooms are still located in the heart of the old main stand which spans about half off the opposite side of St James Park. To progress to the away end, I had to negotiate a gitty (narrow pedestrian walkway) to St James Road. In the corner of the site there is a rather grand old building which the club use as their centre of excellence. This magnificent Victorian structure puts the Red House at Tottenham Hotspur in the shade. The away terrace lies to the left of this. This is very shallow and open. However, it does have a magnificent view of the Big Bank. 133 noisy men from Essex took station here. Continuing my perambulation, I was very conscious of the undulating nature of the area. The ground stands amid a man-made flattened area. I eventually arrived at the rear of the green coloured old main stand and this does look to be a relic from a bygone era. The pitch of the roof is the same angle on both sides but due to space limitations at the rear it is about three quarters shorter than the pitch facing side. I was most enamoured with a bill board advertising *The Walking Dead* an American television series soon to be screened on Channel 5. This was directly behind the road facing rear of the stand. Next up is a further gitty which leads to the south entrance of the Big Bank. In this area the club store their tractor and related grounds keeping equipment. They also make good use of the extremely deep and steeply banked railway cutting.

Tour completed I purchased a copy of Vol. 94. No 23 of the Grecian the clubs monumental 104-page programme. I will be able to give a fuller report after I have read it, which will be a few days! One point of interest in it is a picture of the RP recommended Wilbutt's Lane Chip shop at Rochdale, this was heavily patronised by Exeter fans recently.

At this point I needed the little boy's room. I noticed that the gate at the top of the home terrace was open and a toilet was just inside there so I popped in. When I came out, I thought I would have a look at what I could see of the ground. Well I was in. I took loads of pictures of the empty ground walked unchallenged up and down the terrace, then strolled out. Now I must say that it is a good job I am an honest person. I could easily have stayed in the toilet block for fifteen minutes then walked into the ground without paying.

Subsequently, I then paid my £16 and re-entered the Big Bank Terrace. Due to the bowl like construction of the ground, from the east side one enters the terrace halfway up it. A stroll to the top offers a superb view of the pitch, the rest of the ground, the well-established houses which surround the ground, the city centre in the near distance and the rolling Devon hills in the far distance. On this sunny spring day, the pitch looked verdant in the extreme, as did the bud bursting trees and bushes of the area. The old and new stands looked resplendent in such vibrant light and the sky was blue and dotted with Arizonian like little fluffy clouds. What could spoil the afternoon? The first half of the match in fact!

It was desperately bad. The Daggery came for a point and the Grecians seemingly were glad to let them have one. It was dire. The second half didn't improve until late on when City removed forward Richard Logan from the bench. Dagenham had taken the lead from a poorly cleared corner and looked to be heading home three points richer. However, Logan was a man possessed he was a real threat to the visitor's defence. City equalised from a corner and took the points with a fantastic header from Logan. He was my man of the match by a long way. Rather unusually all three goals were from headers. In all honesty though it was a really dull and turgid match. But at least I enjoyed the ground and have a really good programme to read.

So, there it is 34 of the current 92 to go. Probably Oldham Athletic next.

07/20