

TT No.237: *Chris Freer* - Saturday April 9th 2011; **Concord Rangers** v Horsham; Isthmian Premier; Score: 2-0; Attendance: 162; Entertainment value: 3/5.

Some wit once wrote "Nostalgia, it's not what it used to be..." and I reckon he had a point. I experience it every day, with my kids. Whereas me and my dad, and probably his dad before him, had common interests - climbing trees, fishing, bird's nesting, trainspotting, building trolleys - my offspring spend much of their time staring at screens and tapping on keyboards. And while I used to love listening to my pater telling me tales of his time in the RAF - I became something of an expert on WW2 aircraft recognition as a result - my pair don't sit still long enough for me to excite them about my days as a punk, or a born-again mod.

Talking of which, my coach trip to London today is just a second chance in more than 30 years to catch up with an old friend, who I shall refer to as Wayne R.W, mainly because that was his pen-name as a correspondent of my quasi-Mod fanzine of the late 1970s. He's dug out original copies from his attic - my own manuscripts having long since disappeared - and we arrange to meet for breakfast in the Hamilton Hall, the Wetherspoons at Liverpool Street station. I arrive to find the kitchen shut and the place overrun with footy fans heading for Brisbane Road, White Hart Lane and Roots Hall. No quiet brekky for me today, but I settle for a couple of pints from the beer festival as Wayne and myself indulge in a bit of nostalgia about gigs by the likes of Squire, Secret Affair and another band we can't quite remember the name of.

Aside from being the guy responsible for recruiting most of the actors for the successful series of adverts which helped to win the World Cup for Qatar, Wayne's other claim-to-fame is that his mod band, The Numbers, were one of only two acts ever to be banned by the Marquee Club on Wardour Street. Something about a brawl, I think....

Reminiscing over, he heads off to greet some Americans visiting his East End gaff, while I wander down to Brick Lane to do some research for a family visit to the Capital in a couple of weeks' time, and then I get the train out to Benfleet, as today I am heading off to Canvey Island. Ah, yes, Canvey, birthplace of Dr Feelgood, the band that probably got me into the hard-driving pub-rock sound that developed into punk. My copy of Stupidity and the single 'Roxette' still get the occasional airing when I crank the old record player up. Happy days...!

Benfleet station essentially serves Canvey Island, courtesy of bus connections which depart from outside the main exit. Me being me, and it being such a nice sunny day, I decide that the three-plus mile walk to the Thames Road home of Concord Rangers is a far better bet than a ten-minute bus ride, and I set off accordingly, pausing along the way just long enough to check out that the large King Canute roadside inn - about a mile from the ground - has a couple of

handpumps serving Marstons EPA, and to blag a bag of chips from the local chippy, having missed out on my brekky earlier.

The wind is decidedly chillier as I near the coast, just a couple of hundred yards past the ground. The turnstiles aren't open when I arrive, so I kill time in the modern clubhouse where the live game is on TV but the beer choice revolves around the usual suspects, with nothing real and no local bottled ales either. I settle for a J20 and watch Wolves get a spanking whilst awaiting kick-off time. A large lady appears in the bar and asks directions for the changing rooms, into which she promptly disappears. There is much speculation amongst the natives as to what her role might be, ranging from the prospect of her being today's ref, down to some star-player's personal masseuse. It's generally agreed she must be the Horsham club secretary.

The team from the old Sussex brewing town (remember King & Barnes?) are today's visitors, and sitting towards the wrong end of the table aren't expected to put up too much resistance against Concord's fight for an Isthmian Premier Division play-off place. Points will be very important at this stage of the season with several clubs - including local rivals Canvey Island who Rangers must visit on Easter Monday - being still in the mix, and the home side dominate a first half without much joy before finally edging ahead just prior to the break. The Horsham keeper Mark Zawadski keeps his side in the game with a string of good stops early in the second half but a second is inevitable and Rangers take the points they crave.

It's a competitive game but I do feel for the referee, a portly gentleman of my vintage who has a decent game but is harangued for most of the match by both benches, most of the players, and in particular the Horsham captain, who's warned about his behaviour in the first half, picks up a booking for a shirt tug, then gets his second yellow for a deliberate handball. He then tells the ref he's a "f*cking embarrassment" at point blank range before belatedly quitting the field. So much for the Respect campaign. It wouldn't have happened in my day... but hey, that's nostalgia for you.

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

Living on an island...

07/20