

TT No.252: *Chris Freer* - Tuesday April 19th 2011; **Biddulph Victoria** v Coalville Town; Midland Football Alliance; Score: 0-2; Attendance: 189; Entertainment value: 1/5.

It's a sad fact of life that nothing stays the same for ever. I realised that when researching the Leicester pub scene for a proposed book in the 1980s. As I wandered around the back streets of the city looking up at every ancient building in the hope of spotting some tell-tale evidence of past licensed victualling use, I bemoaned the fact that some classic pubs had shut, and were now closed for good.

I suppose it's the same with football. My RIP page lists 47 grounds where I have at one time or another watched competitive soccer being played but for whatever reason are now no longer required. Of those 47 most have been demolished, redeveloped, or await their fate, whilst a few others are still gainfully employed but for some alternative purpose. One or two more will disappear in the very near future, and like most stadium enthusiasts I will no doubt attempt to visit each and every one of them prior to the axe finally falling.

Tonight, I have a chance to take in the last home game to be played at the Tunstell Road 'home' of Biddulph Victoria FC. The slight difference here is that it is the club itself which is disappearing. The fate of the ground remains uncertain.

A mid-table side in the Midland Football Alliance, Biddulph are in their death throes. The lengthy programme notes in an issue packed with statistics detailing the club's recent history explains the club's take on a dispute with the local sports & social club which presumably own the ground. Doubtless there is another side to the story - there usually is - but the sum total is that this is the last home game of the last season for the club, and the team have a chance to go out with a bang, their opponents tonight being title-chasing - and FA Vase finalists - Coalville Town.

I have not one child in tow tonight but two, my ball-chasing lad being joined by his Chelsea-supporting chum, and they have bought along their own ball for good measure. We're amongst the early ones to arrive at the ground, about ten miles north of Stoke-on-Trent on the A527, and its clear early doors that there won't be enough programmes to go round. The club have decided to make it a free admission night, and almost 200 people - including a sizeable chunk from Coalville - turn up to watch the game. Having first popped my head into the nearby social club - strictly members-only says the sign - to check that there's no decent ale on tap (there isn't) we wander into the football area of a complex that also boasts tennis courts, a bowling green, full-size cricket pitch, and floodlit five-a-side court, which the lads make a beeline for.

I check out the snack bar, which seems to major on meat and potato pies although you can get chips, peas and gravy, before surveying the ground. It's more-or-less flat standing all round - one side just a rope bordering the cricket pitch - with a quaint covered stand set at a slight angle behind one goal. Those choosing to sit

there run the strong risk of vertical spectators blocking their view of the action. The opposite site of the ground to the cricket pitch borders housing and so a tall net is employed to catch 'ave-it!' clearances launched in that direction. It makes viewing the game from that side akin to being an away fan at most Dutch Eredivisie stadia.

Coalville are here looking for points in their quest to overhaul league leaders Tipton Town and, despite a pitch with unpredictable bounce, play enough good football to edge ahead early doors and add a second prior to half time. Biddulph have more substitutes tonight than they did on Saturday during their 0-6 thumping at Westfields (where they had zero) and they need them as first the centre-half limps off with a torn hamstring, and then their goalie cartwheels over a Coalville striker before coming to earth on his head. The ref blows immediately - disappointing the callous Town striker who gleefully despatches the ball into the empty net - and there is concern for the welfare of the youthful custodian.

The game is held up for a half-hour or so whilst an ambulance is summoned from Stoke and the keeper heads off for a precautionary inspection and a bed for the night. There's no further score and the game - which had died as a spectacle sometime earlier - ends with the points going to Town. The word on the stricken keeper is that he will live to fight another day. Coalville are off to Wembley and their fortunes are on the up. By contrast, Biddulph Victoria FC have three more away games to complete their season and then the club's name will be consigned to history.

And the Tunstell Road ground? Well, it'll be added to my RIP page next season as I re-adjust my blog pages to reflect summer changes. It'll join the Withead Stadium and maybe one-or-two others which will either be lost and lamented or maybe find some other use. Life goes on and I'll still go down the pub on a Friday night. Assuming they don't close it down of course....

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

Always look on the bright side of life...da-do etc.

07/20