

**TT No.47: *Chris Freer*** - Sat September 4th 2010; **Coalville Town** v Willenhall Town; Midland Football Alliance; Score: 5-1; Attendance: 135; Entertainment value: 4/5.

The Owen Street ground of Coalville Town is fairly near the centre of this Leicestershire 'village'. I know the place from 1977, when none of the pubs were boarded up and at least once a week I could be found in BlooBlo's - the local club - where punk nights were in their infancy. Charged with the task of editing local fanzine Terminally Blitzed, I would turn up with like-minded associates and attempt to interview the band of the day. Thirty-three years have passed but I still remember rubbing shoulders with Andy Partridge from XTC, the 999 boys, the Slits girls and Jimmy Pursey from Sham, to namedrop but a few. I'd get tanked up on lager and then deliberately chuck it all back up before making the ten-mile drive home to bed. Shameful days...

The Owen Street ground is pretty much typical of Level 9 football. It's neat and tidy and you can spot the things that will need sorting if this club is to go a level higher - another turnstile, harder hard standing, external fencing that doesn't allow a clear view of the game from outside the ground. The difficulty in the latter relates to the biggest thing in Coalville these days - the 'hill'. This enormous man-made structure - possibly railway embankment, possibly slag-heap - dominates the ground and affords a panoramic, almost air-born view for the odd soul with the energy to venture up there and save himself a few quid.

And why bother today, when simply wearing a Premier or Football League shirt qualifies for half-price entry. It's national 'Non-League Day' and Town are offering this incentive to anybody who turns up wearing some club colour or other. I dust off one of my vintage Forest shirts, the lad is naturally already wearing the Chelsea top which he eats and sleeps in, and we get in for nearly half price, the maths not quite adding up. The clubhouse is inside the ground and is actually two clubhouses stuck back-to-back, the other half serving the adjacent cricket club. We're fairly early and the place is quiet. Drink is restricted to lager and cans, whilst the crisps - much to my lad's disdain - are definitely not Walkers. We check out the snack bar and he is equally disappointed that hot dogs are not on the menu. We settle for chip butties.

Just before kick-off the local noise boys turn up, having clearly spent their cash in some external hostelry as opposed to the club bar - perhaps real ale drinkers to a man - and proceed to provide some entertainment throughout the game. My lad refers to them as 'the drunks' and makes sure that his route to the toilets/snack bar involves giving them a wide berth. They seem harmless enough and have a love/hate affair with the visiting keeper, a chunk of a veteran who - apparently - bears a striking resemblance to a gentleman featured in a recent Northumbrian man-hunt.

Oh yes, the game.... Coalville Town, second in the Midland Football Alliance table, are up against second-bottom Willenhall Town, who I saw get a second half turning over at nearby Kirby Muxloe two weeks ago. I said then that they lacked a bit of heart, and after going a goal down in barely the first minute, they surely have another hill to climb. Taking of which, at various points in the game, the vitriol of 'the drunks' is turned against anyone who appears on the afore-mentioned man-made structure, on the basis that they must indeed be cheapskates seeking a clandestine view of the action. That some of these cheapskates are kids barely six years old seems lost on them and the chanting is relentless.

Coalville regularly have the beating of Willenhall's game-but-woeful defence and contrive to miss several clear opportunities before a fortuitous penalty makes it two at the break. But when the visitors break away and nick one back early in the second half, there follows a spell of dominance by the West Midlander's in which you expect them to level it up. Sadly, for them, the climb is too steep and their leaking rear-guard fails to deal with Coalville's skilful raiders who restore the two-goal cushion. Tails are up, heads are down and it's a question of how many, 5-1 being the final score. The drunks are ecstatic and start waving their shoes in the air, doubtless a local custom perhaps hailing from those good old punk days of yore.

I take a last look at the hill - now devoid of climbers - and make an unusually sober exit from Coalville. I last came here as punk. I now depart as a groundhopper - Anoraky in the UK indeed...

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

'Get a grip on yourself...'

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