

**TT No.48: *Chris Freer*** - Sat September 11th 2010; **Friar Lane & Epworth v Willenhall T**; Midland Football Alliance; Score: 5-0; Attendance: looked like 50 or so; Entertainment value: 3/5.

The good thing about deciding to target a local league this season is that I get to revisit some of my old stamping grounds, like Coalville last week. Today I'm heading for Leicester, another place I know quite well. In fact I lived here for six years in the early 1980s, in which time I worked all hours for a print company, ran two pubs, watched every Forest home game (and some away matches too), played Sunday football and trained two nights a week, was the local secretary of CAMRA, researched and compiled (with others I hasten to add) the last Leicestershire Beer Guide to be produced, wrote and published a Leicester-based music fanzine, went to gigs at least twice a week, and fitted in local non-league football to boot. If I had any spare time, I spent it with my then girlfriend. Sadly, I didn't have a lot of spare time. After several years of this she departed. 'Unreasonable behaviour' she stated. I agreed but generously said I wouldn't hold it against her...

One of the nearest grounds to where I was living was the Knighton Lane East home of Friar Lane Old Boys, or FLOB as they were then known. My first two visits to this stadium were in 1975 and 1976 when FLOB were prominent in the FA Vase. More than 2,000 people crammed into the place - mostly gathered on the railway embankment down one side - to witness epic encounters which saw the team twice on the verge of Wembley. It was not to be and here we are 35 years later with barely 50 souls bothering to wander down to the 'Fanatics Park' to see the recently re-monikered Friar Lane & Epworth.

The more astute readers of my blog will notice that I'm recording today's visit as a 'new ground'. For some reason, when originally cataloguing my stadia collection, I omitted former Leicestershire Senior League grounds such as this one - Oadby Town and Anstey Nomads also spring to mind. And as I have never collected a programme from previous games at these venues - a must for me nowadays - I'm just going to have to do them again!

Today's game is against my current favourite opponents, Willenhall Town. Having seen them ship ten goals in my last two games, I reason that I could be in for another goal-fest today. When I arrive at the ground, just to the south of Leicester city centre, I see the same old tired and weary West Midlands faces, already making their third visit to the former 'hunting' county this season. As I park up, I catch the eye of a very attractive blond in the car next door. I'm under no illusions. She's probably wondering who the hell the old bugger driving the lid-down sports car is.

There's just time for me to check out the clubhouse before the game and unfortunately, I can report no real ale or any interesting bottled beers, although

there is a decent sized pool table and live footy on TV. And how we chortle as a Rooney-less United leak two late goals against the Bluenoses of Everton.

From the clubhouse it's a decent walk across the car park, past a training pitch where a couple of purloined bus shelters are employed as dugouts, then through a modern turnstile block into Fanatics Park. I survey the scene and notice that some things do change. The ancient main stand - covered terracing when I was here for the Vase games - now sports some seats, and the railway embankment is fully fenced off. The pitch could also benefit from a lawnmower. The chatty man in the snack bar tells me he's just got back off holiday - fortunately I have knowledge of the 'Lesta' dialect - and that he's only got time to do burgers, but he has got lots of them. I know I'm wasting my time asking how many veggie ones he possesses so I don't bother. The Willenhall fans tuck in. The blond walks past and settles down by the halfway line, lovingly blowing kisses at one of the players. Ah, a WAG!

Willenhall have made a few changes to their line-up today but not much is different. I do feel sorry for them. They have some skilful players but their team game is rubbish. Friar Lane are not having a great season themselves but their constant raiding - especially down the left - rips holes in the visiting defence and the referee is compelled to award a couple of subsequently converted spot kits, which are all the home team have to show at the break. Either side of half time Willenhall do begin to exert an influence, but a third for Friar Lane on 58 minutes kills the match as a contest in more ways than one. Bizarrely, with two of his men prostrate in the goalmouth, Town's manager withdraws another player and with only one more sub left, something will have to give.

The left back soldiers on for five minutes before collapsing, whilst the keeper - the veteran chunk I mentioned last week - can only offer token resistance against a fourth goal before hobbling off. Four down, all subs used, no recognised keeper, down to ten men... apart from that it all looks good for Willenhall. A fifth on 71 seems to satisfy Friar Lane who take the foot off the gas and my prayers for another six-goal game (after my first two of the season) go unanswered.

The blond stays right to the end, faithful to the last as her beau gleefully disappears into the communal baths for some celebratory male bonding. Reasonable behaviour indeed!

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

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