

TT No.86: *Chris Freer* - Sat October 9th 2010; **Harlow Town v Wingate & Finchley**; Isthmian League Div. 1 North; Score: 1-0; Attendance: 282; Entertainment value: 1/5.

I wouldn't really class myself as a fighting man but I've always had a fascination with war. Not that I necessarily view it as a good thing but sadly an inevitability and if you're born of the wrong generation you have to get involved. My dad fortunately only saw the back end of WW2 but my great-grandfathers won commendations in the First, so my family background has always given me an interest in the subject, since my youth in fact - well, that plus trainspotting and birds-nesting!

As a youngster I was taken to the Imperial War Museum in London and still have a vivid recollection of the Spitfire hanging from the ceiling. I was impressed then but wonder if my son, of a similar age, will find the same things as awe-inspiring as I did. Someone I have my doubts. A sense of history and the perils of the real world seem to pass kids by as they immerse themselves in fantasy gaming and their own personal soap opera that is social networking.

Red Dot Day on East Midlands Trains is a chance to put it to the test as I snap up a couple of cheap tickets and tell the lad we're going to London. I suspect he's slightly disappointed to find there's not a Chelsea match involved, but he's up for it anyway. I tell him we're going to the Imperial War Museum and that facial expression that indicates that he doesn't know where I'm coming from is all-apparent.

East Midlands Parkway station is a new-build in the middle of nowhere. I'd hazard a guess it's only busy on promo days like today, and there's certainly a few people ready to board the 7.30 to the 'Smoke'. The reservations signs are not working and some chap gives me two options regarding the seats we've occupied. I don't have a chance to ask him about the second option before he's assured by other passengers that everybody's in the same boat. Nobody's standing and it's a storm in a teacup.

We arrive at the Imperial War Museum just as the doors open and, sure enough, the good old Spitfire's still there. The lad seems interested, particularly in the weaponry which he's trying to match up with the ones he uses in Modern Warfare on the X-Box. The tank like the one featured in Indiana Jones also catches his eye. He's less than impressed by the smells within the reconstructed Western Front trench exhibit. I tell him that a group of museum workers are force-fed baked beans all night before being let out shortly before the public arrive. He's not convinced.

Our next port of call is Liverpool Street station and the Hamilton Hall pub. I've promised him two things on this trip. The second will be that the match we go to will undoubtedly have a classic hot dog on the half time menu. The first is that

he'll get his sausage fix at the nearest Wetherspoons. The first part of the bargain is delivered.

The rail journey to Harlow takes about thirty minutes on the Stanstead Express, full of tourists and a big smelly gorilla who plonks himself and his fast-food lunch on our table as if we're in HIS seat. The joys of public transport. From Harlow Town station it's a leisurely half-hour stroll to Barrows Farm, home of Harlow Town FC. There are advantages of having your whippersnapper son for company. Much like taking a dog for a walk, you can do things that would ordinarily attract disapproving stares. We amuse ourselves by plucking overhanging damsons from bushes and leaving them on the road for passing cars to squash. Hilarious!

The Barrows Farm stadium of Harlow Town is a recently-built complex and very impressive if you like your grounds nice and shiny. The main changing rooms and bar (two of them) construction has seating attached and forms the main stand, whilst opposite is a fair-sized covered terrace. Although the rest of the ground is flat standing, there's ample room for extending spectator facilities in the future and, with the right backing and players, you'd expect this club to attain a higher level. In fact, in terms of entry fee, I reckon they think they've already arrived. I may have been spoilt by paying a fiver for Level 9 footy recently, but £9 for me and £5 for the lad seems a bit steep for Level 8, even though we are fairly close to London.

Sadly, the attractions of real ale don't appear to have reached this part of Essex. It's an all-keg bar and the food on offer is also predictable. The lad's OK with his hot dog - which has to be 'real' and not out of a tin - but I'm not up for chips and the cobs don't look that appetising. My son is also a bit miffed that Harlow seem to have official ball-boys, as he reasons that should be HIS job.

Ah yes, the game. Well, it's a clash with fellow promotion-chasers Wingate & Finchley and I'd like to say it's a great game. I'd like to, but I can't. There are inspirational flashes of action, but too much of it is bogged down in midfield. When the ball is moved out to the Harlow right flank, their new winger Ferguson - who we christen Guttierrez because of a certain likeness in hairstyle - shows promise but his final delivery is somewhat wanting. The only goal of the game - scored by Harlow - arrives immediately after half time and is one of the very few highlights of a tepid game.

The Harlow Kop choir try to keep things on the boil, but with former Football League defender Leo Roget marshalling Town's defence with an expletive-packed mixture of guts and determination, the visitors just don't look up for the fight. Perhaps a trip to the Imperial War Museum might do them some good.

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

07/20