

TT No. 106: *Chris Freer* - Sat November 26th 2011; **Montrose** v Berwick Rangers; Scottish League Division Three; Score: 3-5; Crowd: 328; Entertainment value: 5/5.

Like most kids of a certain era, the arrival of the weekly comic through the letterbox was an occasion of some rejoicing. I would pore over every column inch and chortle at the same old well-worn jokes and puns that my dad probably did a generation earlier. My bible was the Dandy - my brother was a Beano man - but we both graduated up the scale until I got into the Eagle, whereas he had the Jag - the new kid on the block - which I seem to recall featured the 'Football Family Robinson' on the cover.

The Jag only lasted a year before it joined up with its stable-mate the Tiger, but the Football Family carried on with their interesting notion that every player in the team must be a Robinson. Maybe if we could get Joe, Carlton, Ashley and Andrew to find another seven footballers called Cole, we could yet see that concept become a modern-day reality. Then again, perhaps not.

I mention all of this because I'm spending the weekend at the new home of my old pal formerly known as Eagle Bobster, the Boston publican, who now contemplates semi-retirement from his gaff on the Scottish coast, overlooking the Tay estuary and the city of Dundee. Henceforth then to be known as the Fife Bobster, he has promised to accompany me on my annual Berwick Rangers awayday - to nearby Montrose - and afterwards give me a guided evening tour of the delights of his adopted home town, Dundee, whose main claim to fame apart from a cake is that it is the base for D C Thomson & Co, the publishers of both the Dandy and the Beano. Which probably explains the larger than life sculpture of Desperate Dan with sidekick Minnie the Minx which takes pride of place in the city centre.

My day starts with the trouble-and-strife whizzing me up to East Midlands airport at an ungodly hour for the short hop to Edinburgh. By 9.15am I am in the Alexander Graham Bell tucking into a large veggie breakfast and the first pint of the day, Houston Slainthe, a deep red malty brew, and the start of a two-day session that will see me exclusively partake of Scottish ales. From here I Wetherspoons hop - these being the only Edinburgh establishments serving ale at this time of the morning - to the Counting House, where a pint of Orkney St Andrews Ale passes a half hour or so before my train to Dundee is due.

Bobster has already tipped me off about Club 55, a Scotrail initiative which allows over 55s to make a return rail journey anywhere in Scotland for only £19. My only beef is that the ticket clerk issues me one without asking for me to prove my age - the cheek! An hour or so later of a very scenic rail journey, we pull into Dundee and the Fife Bobster is waiting on the platform. Pleasantries exchanged, we contemplate Montrose and the game ahead. Within half an hour we are in the windswept coastal town and find ourselves blown in the direction of the Market Tavern just up the hill from the station. It's a busy pub with Sky Sports on TV

(Stoke v Blackburn) and a beer range limited to Harviestoun Bitter & Twisted and Isle of Skye Hebridean Gold. Despite my general aversion to golden beers, I decide to give each of them a blast, as my journey has worked up something of a thirst.

The wind carries us along for another ten minutes and we are at Links Park, home of Montrose. Despite languishing near the bottom of Division Three, the home team have just run First Division Ayr United close in a recent cup tie, so it's definitely not a nailed-on three points for visiting Berwick, although the Bobster and I remain quietly confident. There seems to be about six other people here following the Wee Gers, and we are a bit conspicuous in the sparsely populated covered terracing behind the goal, which provides 100% protection from the gale force wind battering the ground, but not the local loony who keeps making a beeline for me.

Those choosing to sit in the main stand, or stand behind the other goal, are hardy souls indeed. Bobster checks out the snack bar and reports that every single pie in the display cabinet is of a meaty derivative and so snack time for me is a Twix bar.

Windy it may be, but the game is packed full of entertainment. In Noble and Gribben, Berwick at last seem to have found a striking duo on a par with the near-legendary Hutch and McCutch of recent promotion-winning days. An early setback is overcome and the visitors go into the break 2-1 in front, courtesy of a Gribben brace. The local wags are out in force. "D'ya want me to bring ye a pie, keeper?" asks one of them to the portly Berwick custodian. As in the first half, Montrose race out from the blocks and level it up at 2-2, only for Rangers to find another gear with Noble slotting in two more, the second a personal tragedy for the home keeper who spills a straightforward through ball. "That's right, hang yer head in shame, yer c**t...." offers an understanding local voice as the goalie wallows in his misery.

There's still time for both sides to bang in another one each and at the whistle Bobster and I are celebrating our finest ever Berwick away victory, 5-3 being the final score.

Back in Dundee we set about exploring the city's Good Beer Guide listed hostelries which include the Town, a grand old building with a good range of beer, but a bit food-orientated; the Counting House, a typical large open plan Wetherspoons; the Duke's Corner which promises a lot but delivers little, as none of the cask ales are on (Good Beer Guide editor Roger Protz please take note); the Phoenix which is a cracking pub if you can get a seat but a bit of a crush if you can't; and the Bank Bar which is a bit small and dead, on this night anyway. We take time out to go for a Thai meal - the cheaper Indian being full - and kill time before the last bus by becoming leeching, old men in the Capitol, a Wetherspoons-by-day, Lloyds-by-night fun bar where inebriated bright young things make fools of themselves exclusively for our entertainment.

Having retired for the night across the river into northern Fife, at Chez Bobster, my first task the next morning is to walk back across the Tay estuary bridge, about a mile and a half long, and no mean feat with a Force Eight gale blowing directly

into my face. With a brekky in the Counting House under my belt, the train journey back to Edinburgh is soon out of the way and I head off to my afternoon's entertainment, an East of Scotland Youth League match between Craighyston and Lothian Thistle. I arrive to find no sign of life at the ground - despite having checked with the club secretary on Friday. The sun is shining, the wind has abated, the pitch looks immaculate, but no-one's at home. I've trudged all the way out here, missing out on valuable drinking time, and no bugger can be arsed to turn up!

Maybe there's some mileage for a comic character in all of this. Ever-So-Slightly-Pissed-Off-Chris! I'll have to give DC Thomson & Co a call - they might even give me my own statue in Dundee city centre...

Footnote: I spent the late afternoon in the Gordon Arms in Edinburgh watching Liverpool v Manchester City. During the minute's silence for Gary Speed, the whole pub went quiet and burst into a round of applause at the end. Respect.

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

All things in perspective....

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