

TT No.141: *Chris Freer* - Saturday January 7th 2012; **Burnham v Slough Town**; Southern Division One Central; Score: 1-1; Attendance: 414; Entertainment value: 4/5.

Like many a smug, self-satisfied man who feels that he's 'been there, done that' I'm quite fond of talking about the good old days, even descending into 'When I were a Lad' territory on occasions, although I always appreciate a good slap when I do, just to bring me to my senses. I could waffle on for hours about the places I've visited throughout the UK, usually to see a brewery, maybe a cracking real ale pub, or more likely a football a ground. However, up until today, I'd never been to Slough.

There used to be a feature in the Dandy (I think) comic about random British cities. I recall one week reading about Hemel Hempstead having something to do with Henry VIII. Another week it was about Slough, a name that in my formative years I had no idea how to pronounce. So, I called it Sludge. I read recently that residents of this fair city are so fed up with people taking a dim view of the place because of the dowdy name, they were thinking of adding 'on-Thames' to it. I suppose Sludge-on-Thames does have a bit of a ring to it.

Another good reason for going to Slough for the first time is that I get to travel from Paddington station. This evokes strong memories of 'When I were a Lad' as my dad once drove all the way down there from our Leicestershire village just so I could spend a couple of hours logging steam train numbers for what I think must have been Western region locos (someone point out this crass error if I am wrong). Before I discovered football around 1963, train-spotting was my joint favourite hobby along with dirt-tracking on my bike around the local streets. We'd mark out a course with rocks in the Summer, but in the Winter, this was done for us by the local dogs whose 'deposits' stood out like beacons in the crisp and virgin snow. We'd refer to each turd by name - and usually could guess which local mutt had left it. In fact, thinking about it, in those days, if you could enjoy yourself for a day and arrive home without some trace element of dog-dirt on your shoes or trousers, it was an achievement to be wildly celebrated.

So having booked a cheapish London rail deal before Christmas, and mulled for a couple of weeks over exactly where to go to see a game, I am happy that the sun is shining on today's visit to Slough - or Burnham to be precise, as they are at home to their very near neighbours - and League leaders - Slough Town. But first I must visit Slough itself.

To be honest, in the 50 years or so since I first discovered that Sludge - sorry Slough - existed, I probably haven't missed much. They are 'tarting-up' the roads near the railway station (is the Olympic Torch coming this way?) but the slight detour through the shopping centre and out onto the high street hasn't delayed me from anything. All the usual shops, lots of people talking in Eastern European

languages, and a Wetherspoons. I decide to walk a couple of hundred yards further on to the end of the concrete jungle and the first old building I come to is the Good Beer Guide listed Rose & Crown pub. It's quite small and homely but I'm the only in and I feel that I'm unfairly keeping the landlady awake. I purchase a pint of Bingham Space Hoppy IPA, brewed in nearby Twyford, which although quite pale has a nice crisp kick to it. At 5.0%abv I probably couldn't drink many, though.

So, having been to Slough, I retrace my steps through the concrete and back to the station before making the 4-minute rail journey to Burnham. From Burnham station there is then a good half-hour, generally uphill, walk to The Gore, on the far side of Burnham village. About ten minutes from the ground is The Bee, a former Brakspear's hostelry now stocking various Marston's Group brands on hand-pull. It's a busy old pub but I don't linger as I want to get to the stadium in good time for a programme, as I sense a reasonable attendance today.

The Gore is the kind of home I presume homeless Slough Town would aspire to. Fully enclosed, with a small covered terrace on one side, opposite a large, modern admin and hospitality complex on the back of which is tacked a fairly substantial main stand. It's a smart arena with scope for expansion, and you wonder if a satellite village like Burnham can come up with this, what has been the delay in much larger neighbour Slough, where the Town have endured nomad-hood for almost ten years?

The smart clubhouse bar is full of Slough fans, but a quick assessment of the beer situation shows all the usual keg draught and pilsner bottle suspects being present and correct, but there being nothing for the cask or craft drinker. The little food hatch inside the ground has chips, but I decide to give it best.

With over 400 fans - at least three-quarters wearing the yellow and black of the visitors - inside the ground, the game kicks off and the home side, although nearer the bottom of the league than the top, decide there are bragging rights to be played for, and they give as good as they get early doors. After an early run-in with the Slough fans barking behind him, the linesman wisely decides to turn a blind eye to a couple of blatant offsides, and Slough look to dominate. However, they are rocked by a goal on 31 minutes by Burnham which follows a number of near misses, and at half time the home team are good value for their lead. Town come out fighting in the second half, and after an early equaliser you wouldn't bet against an away win.

But it doesn't turn out like that. Burnham recover to have the better chances in a see-saw second half and despite a brief Slough onslaught at the end, it's probably the visitors who are looking at a point gained, rather than two lost. In effect, they could have been looking into a 'Slough of Despond'... geddit? Or is that a Sludge of Despond? Hang on, I'll just check my back issues of the Dandy...

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

Always top dogs...

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