

TT No.202: *Chris Freer* - Sat March 31st 2012; **Hythe Town** v Eastbourne Town; Isthmian League Division One South; Score: 3-2; Attendance: 203; Entertainment value: 3/5.

Good sit-coms usually generate a clutch of catch-phrases but the one that has regularly sprung to mind this week has been 'Don't panic, Captain Mainwaring!' as I try to negotiate my way around a local road network clogged with drivers queuing to get another pint of petrol inserted into their over-flowing fuel tanks. So, David Cameron is the new Corporal Jones, then? Who'da thought it?

Good job that there are other forms of transport than the motor car. In fact, I'm heading down to Warmington-on-Sea territory today, using the good old train and bus for the first time in three weeks, as my pre-booked tickets give me a get-out clause from ferrying the hobbling wife around. My trip to the south coast starts out with a (very) early morning train from Long Eaton which I've booked through Megabus, and it works out a lot cheaper than going through East Midlands Trains. The down-side of course is the early start. Hopefully my train won't end up queueing with a load of other trains at a locomotive re-fuelling station as the panic-buying epidemic extends to public transport!

I get my first chance for ages to walk through early morning London en route from St Pancras to Charing Cross, and I decide a breakfast is called for. When I do eventually find my chosen 'Spoons - the Montagu Pike on Charing Cross Road - I am amazed to discover that, although breakfasts are on the agenda, a pint apparently isn't, as they don't sell alcohol until 10.00am. So, who brought that rule in? Surely not company boss Tim Martin, outspoken opponent of the 'nanny state'? There's a beer festival on, all of the pump-clips are looking at me, there are no signs announcing this rule, and yet I'm being told I can't be trusted to drink a pint of beer with my breakfast, even though I've been up since 4.00am and just might fancy one.....

The train to Folkestone costs me £30.20 (scandalous) return and gets me there at just before 11.00. I walk the 800 yards or so to the bus station and hop on a Stagecoach that trundles along the south coast in the general direction of Hythe, a place I've only ever read about in books (more of that later). Doubtless it passes through Warmington-on-Sea but I don't see anybody panicking. Time for that much-delayed first pint of the day, which I take in the smartly-refurbished White Hart on Hythe's very compact High Street. The Old Dairy Copper Top is a nice malty, ruby red bitter served in a very attractive branded pint glass. Very civilized.

Next, it's the award-winning and much-lauded Three Mariners free house which is situated to the south of the town centre, just across the waterway bridge. It's just being opened by a very shapely lady as I arrive, and although I like the ambience of the place - despite the music being a little loud and unnecessary - the two pints are not at their best, being a tad on the murky side. Maybe my early arrival means

I get the remains of last night's pipes. Serves me right! The Royal Tunbridge Wells Dipper Bitter has a slightly sour tang to it (maybe it's supposed to have!) although the Kent Brewery KGB is a much better drink.

My last pre-match port-of-call is the Red Lion, close to the bus stop. Another smartly redecorated pub - actually it's a residential hotel - with lots of family food trade, there are several interesting beers on and I go for a Gadds No5, an excellent malty brew from Ramsgate.

En route to the ground, which is just to the west of the town centre, I get a chance to have a look at the terminus for the Romney, Hythe & Dymchurch Railway. I mentioned earlier that I'd read about Hythe in books. I've no idea of the name of the book, but it was a hand-drawn effort from the 1950s about a small boy and his father traveling around Britain exploring the unique railways, one of which was the RHD. Although my own father and I did a bit of rail-touring in the 1960s, we never actually got to this one. So, as I peer through the fence at the striking lines of the small but perfectly-formed 4-8-2 'Hercules' puffing away in anticipation of another purposeful journey, I view it all through my eyes as a boy. Sniff.

The Reachfields home of Hythe Town Fc actually looks older than it is. Developed to allow at least a one-step terrace all around the ground, much of it is covered, and there is an excellent view from the upper part of the main stand. The spacious clubhouse bar is devoid of anything interesting to drink, sadly, and I have to make do with a cone of chips from the snack bar, but I've really had my fill of food and drink earlier, so am ready for the game. It's a bit cooler than of late, with a good stiff breeze blowing from end-to-end, but the two mid-table teams - Hythe's visitors today are Eastbourne Town - serve up some entertaining and sometimes downright comical fayre to keep us interested.

Four goals in a ten-minute spell midway through the first half are shared. Twice the home team go in front through well-taken strikes, only to gift the visitor's equalizers with defensive lapses, the second going in off the striker's backside after Hythe's keeper takes just that little bit too long to clear the danger. The diminutive referee does his best to steal the show, blowing up for all manner of offences, either real or imaginary, and the second half is more huff-and-puff, although both sides have opportunities to nick it before Hythe finally take the initiative and win it 3-2.

My journey home from Dad's Army country allows me time for a beer in Folkestone and I drop into the Pullman, an up-market bar/restaurant where 'classical' is the muzak of choice. There are a number of beers on tap, but I decide it's time for a pint of Harvey's Best, probably the finest cask bitter money can buy.

So please let me know if you ever get wind of a Harvey's drayman's strike - I might just have to start panic drinking!

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

Football for the panicking classes....

