

TT No.30: *Chris Freer* - Sat September 3rd 2011; **Metropolitan Police v AFC Hornchurch**; Isthmian League Prem Division; Score: 0-2; Attendance: 171; Entertainment value: 0/5.

Football teams attached to companies used to be commonplace in the middle of the last century. My dad would tell me of the exploits of Brush Sports in Loughborough who I believe even managed to reach the First Round of the FA Cup just after the war, and I know from experiencing the Leicestershire Senior League as a child that factory teams like Cottons, Bentleys and Midland Woodworkers would often visit Sileby, where I spent my junior school years.

Whether these 'works' sides were ever destined for greater things, or simply just absorbed themselves into the local community under a new moniker, I wouldn't like to second guess, but a scan through the top seven levels of English football would suggest just Vauxhall Motors with any strong links by name and stadium location to its industrial heritage. Unless of course you count Metropolitan Police.

I speculated last week whether any of the current crop of footballers playing for former Colliery Welfare clubs in Yorkshire were actually pit men. I suppose given the state of the mining industry in the UK nowadays, that would seem highly unlikely. But I wonder if any of the lads on Met. Police FC's books will be pounding the beat on Monday morning.

There's always seemed to be a love-hate relationship with the police when it comes to being a football supporter. In truth, at most of the matches I've ever been to they've done such a good job I've never noticed they were there. There are exceptions, of course, such as the time I was amongst a large crowd of men, women and children watching Wolves play a night game at Roots Hall, and being funnel-herded at the end of the match up one narrow staircase when others remained unused nearby. The crush was so great that people were crying out in panic. Just a month later 96 people died as a result of apparently similarly misguided crowd management at Hillsborough.

Today I'm making my first London trip of the season and although their prices have been creeping up, travelling by National Express coach is still a cheaper option than rail these days, providing you can put up with some of the irritations you end up sitting near to. At least on a train you have other carriages you can move into! I arrive at Victoria just in time to order a breakfast at the Willow Walk, one of my favourite Wetherspoon's. I'm a little surprised to find a strong police presence outside, given that there are no Premier or Championship fixtures today. Judging by the attire of the gentlemen that they watching, I suspect a contingent of England fans have just arrived back in town from Friday's game in Bulgaria.

Metropolitan Police's ground in East Molesey, Surrey, is served by two rail stations, nearby Thames Ditton, and the slightly more distant Esher. Connection to both from Victoria is facilitated by changing at Clapham Junction. I choose Esher which

for some obscure reason is a whole pint cheaper than Thames Dutton. It's also handy for a slight detour to enjoy that pint at Marney's Village Inn, which as the name might convey is a cosy free house overlooking the village duck pond. Their portfolio of cask beers is not that adventurous, but a drop of Fullers is never a bad option, and it lubricates my journey through golf country, made more hazardous by a multitude of acorns falling from the trees and bouncing all around me!

Access to Metropolitan Police's impressive stadium is a little like last week at Nostell, in that you enter the main administration building and wander past the restaurant and bars before emerging on the other side to seek out the turnstiles. I make the acquaintance of a gateman possessed with a charisma by-pass who sells me a programme and eschews polite conversation, so I feel compelled to return to the bar before tackling him again. It's busy with visiting Hornchurch fans who alternate between marvelling at the varied selection of lunchtime meals and complaining about the slow service at the bar. When the barman does catch up, he sells me a pint of hand-pumped Long Hop, sadly for Marston's, a very nothing kind of beer - where's that Burton snatch!

Whilst 'savouring' this I have a look around and note that the substantial sports complex site - which I presume is exclusive to serving officers and their friends and family - also includes a swimming pool, cricket ground, rugby pitch, tennis courts, kids' playground... you name it. The football stadium itself is fully enclosed and features two-step terracing all the way around, with cover the length of one end, and a substantial main stand on one side. All it seems to lack is home supporters, as the majority of those in attendance - which I would record here if I could get the useless Ryman website to load - are wearing the red and white of visiting Hornchurch. Not that the Hornchurch team ARE wearing red and white today, instead choosing to turn out in purple and black against a team playing in blue, to the bemusement of most of those present.

I have to say the pitch looks immaculate and worthy of an exciting game of footy. Unfortunately, as has been my lot during the course of this season so far, the fayre on offer is decidedly poor and the first 70 minutes passes with nothing in the way of entertainment to record, certainly on the pitch anyway. For much of the second half I am distracted by the antics of a couple of junior school kids, who find their way onto the terrace roof to rescue several wayward footballs. The local steward - sorry, Crowd Safety Officer - rushes around in a Health & Safety flap, whilst I conjure up images of my own youth, when their adventurous actions would not only have been encouraged by all around them, they'd probably have been chucked up there by the groundsman. In Victorian times, this would doubtless have been their relaxing Saturday job, after a week scraping out soot-encrusted East End chimneys!

Twenty minutes from the end a misjudgement by the home keeper sees him sprawled outside the penalty area as the ball nestles in the back of his net. A couple of minutes later he mis-punches a cross and the same result ensues. Hornchurch have been slightly the better of two disappointing teams and take the points. Never a case of smash and grab, but to call it a game of football might

conceivably be an offence under the Trade Descriptions Act. An imaginary police constable appears on the scene. 'Allo, Allo, Allo. What is going on 'ere then? '. Sadly, nothing officer, arrest the lot of 'em...

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

Not appearing on Crimewatch UK...

07/20