

TT No.37: Chris Freer - Sat September 10th 2011; **Corby Town** v Guiseley; Conference North; Score: 0-1; Crowd: 580; Entertainment value: 1/5.

Here's a good question. It's common knowledge that Berwick on Tweed is the only English town with a football club playing in the Scottish League, but does anybody know which Scottish town has a side turning out in an English league? The answer's Corby, of course! Did I not mention it was a trick question?

For those unfamiliar with working class history, it's legend that half the population north of the border moved southwards looking for work in the not-too-distant past, with the steel-manufacturing centre of Corby in particular doubling in size overnight to the sound of swirling bagpipes. It's rumoured that, wherever Glasgow Rangers are playing, there'll be shedloads of coaches from Northamptonshire heading in that general direction.

Just recently Corby Town FC has acquired a brand spanking new football stadium, which is why I'm heading south today but not going anywhere near London. The rail link to Corby is effectively a branch line - although connecting to the capital with an hourly service - so I have to break my journey at Kettering. From my early days as a rail traveller, I've always looked out for floodlights, and there were always three sets that reassured me on every journey to the 'Smoke'. Those of Luton and Hendon are still visible - the latter maybe for not much longer - but the third ground was Kettering's Rockingham Road. Recent news that Kettering Town FC has decamped to the former Rushden & Diamonds stadium is worrying, as I'd hate to see this local landmark disappear.

I start the drinking day in Kettering by calling at the local Wetherspoon's for some brekky and a pint of Loddon Russet, which is not in brilliant nick. The Rugby World Cup is on the box, and some of the customers seem to have hit the ale early as obscene language is rife, being bawled from one side of the pub to the other. The staff appear to be impervious to it, despite the presence in the pub of family groups. Sadly, the dark side of town centre Wetherspoons. I move on to the Alexandra Arms which I'm not sure I've ever been to before. It's a beer tickers paradise just off the town centre and a chap standing at the bar recognises me from the Wetherspoons earlier. "Another bloke come in here for a bit of peace and quiet," he observes.

I decide to opt for the Locale beers - 'when in Rome' and all that - starting with Nobby's Claridges Crystal which, despite being so pale it's almost white, is not as citrusy as I feared and is actually quite a refreshing pint, and then J Church Brewing's Parson's Nose, a more traditional bitter which the pump-clip crown states has won gold at some CAMRA event or other. "Brewed on site here", says the landlord helpfully. So fresh there's a lump of something fermentable at the bottom of my glass! The delights of craft brewing. Not a bad beer but I'd hardly call it an award-winner.

Time to decamp to Corby and the ten-minute rail journey. From the station there's a long meandering trek to Rockingham Triangle which I'd estimate at about two miles, as it takes me 45 minutes walking time, interspersed with visits to two hostelrys en route. The large Raven roadhouse is about half way, and although sporting four handpumps, the only clip not turned round is the one for Pedigree. I'll have that then. Nearer to the ground, and on a retail park which is unusual for Wetherspoons I think, is the Samuel Lloyd, which is busy but seems to be on the ball with regard to service. I plump for Grainstore's Ten Fifty, as I've heard it's produced by ex-Ruddles men to the original recipe of County. Maybe it is, but the fact that it almost certainly hasn't been hard-pegged for the 12 days that the old Ruddles pub landlords used to give it, means that old fruity, winey mouthfeel sadly isn't there. Just another Ten Fifty beer, in fact.

Five minutes from here is Steel Park, built adjacent to the old ground at Rockingham Stadium. Somebody in charge at Corby Council must like football. Where else would you have a perfectly acceptable sports stadium - albeit with a running track - and decide that it's not good enough for the local football team, so we'll build a better ground alongside? I'm not knocking it, it shows positive thinking, but the fact that the old stadium now looks forlorn and unloved in times of austerity seems strange logic. That said, more power to Corby.

Steel Park has a grandstand which straddles the halfway line and a substantial covered terrace which occupies the whole of one end. You can see that there is plenty of space to expand on this should the Steelmen go further up the league ladder, which underlines the forward-thinking in Corby. At the other end of the ground is an old hospitality complex which provides popular bar facilities, but a quick check reveals no cask ale or craft bottled beers. Likewise, the two food huts have sizeable menus, but the only things for veggies are chips, beans and curry sauce, although the latter has run out by the time I arrive on the scene.

The game itself, between fifth-placed Town and visiting third-placed Guiseley, is no classic. Occasionally I find my attention drawn to the egg-chasers visible just over the fence, where one side is getting a whipping. Whenever I look across, they seem to always be standing hands on hips whilst an opposing player is shaping up for a conversion. When my gaze returns to Steel Park 'action' the midfield pinball is still underway. Indeed, penalty area activity is minimal, and on the rare occasions when a goal looks possible, both keepers are on tip-top form.

The game hinges on two incidents in the space of two minutes. On 76, Corby's right winger thunders in a shot which has goal written all over it. The Guiseley keeper has other ideas and makes a stunning save. A couple of minutes later the ball is at the other end and in a rare moment of skill a Guiseley midfielder dances through the defence and clips the ball into the net. A Guiseley red card near the end is academic, although it does lead to several minutes of sustained goalmouth pressure as Corby look vainly for a leveller.

On my way back to the station I pass the Corby branch of the Glasgow Rangers Supporters Club, with a suitably-attired gentleman - shirt proclaiming his love for

Tennents - standing outside having a fag. Presumably in some part of Glasgow there will be a Corby Town Supporters Club. Possibly.

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

Not drinking Tennents...

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