

TT No.60: Chris Freer - Saturday October 1st 2011; **Stirling Albion** v Brechin City; Scottish League Division 2; Score: 1-0; Attendance: 555; Entertainment value: 2/5 (generous!).

Apparently, according to the wife, I get more and more like Victor Meldrew each day.

OK maybe I do have a propensity to stand on a soapbox, to point out the error of people's ways, to take issue with third party selfishness, to occasionally put my foot in my own mouth, and to cock things up when there's a fair chance that I can, but does that make me Victor Meldrew. Personally, I don't believe it....

I am a bit grumpy this morning, however, when I see the weather forecast for Scotland compared to the rest of the UK. Wall-to-wall sunshine in England & Wales, persisting it down north of the border. I don't believe it! I enjoy a steady early drive to Crewe with very few other cars around, although I do incur the wrath of an oncoming motorist as I ever-so-slightly misjudge an overtaking manoeuvre past a line of lumbering HGVs - bloody lorry drivers, should be banned from the road! At Crewe station they're expecting a special train to arrive, and a brass band strike up by way of welcome. At 7.45am! Wouldn't these people rather be in bed?

My assigned seat on the Virgin train has no window, is facing backwards, and has a leering loony opposite so I move to somewhere more agreeable, hoping that the forecasters have got it wrong and I will arrive to a Glasgow bathed in sunshine and awash with those shapely lasses I mentioned last week. Sadly, it's not be, and my short hop to the Crystal Palace is under the protection of my world-weary umbrella. I had planned on experimenting a bit this week, going to a different Wetherspoons - there's half a dozen in the city centre - and afterwards maybe not the Pot Still, but I end up in both, a victim of my own comfort zone.

The Strathaven Craigmill Mild in the Crystal Palace is tasty enough, but just like last week, way too warm. I think this pub might have a cooling issue, unless no buggers else drinks mild in here. Everybody should be forced to! And another rant of mine, Wetherspoons breakfast butter sachets. Normally rock hard and un-spreadable, having been fished straight from the freezer. This pub decides to do it a different way by keeping them in the oven. I undo the sachet and a thin hot liquid pours out. I don't believe it! Numbskulls!

Some of my drinking companions are wearing blue Rangers shirts but have clearly come across from Ulster for the footy. I'm not that fond of the Northern Ireland accent, but there's a bit of banter going on between the lads from across the Irish Sea, and the local girls. I contemplate this and wonder if, to the Scottish ear, the Northern Irish accent comes across as sensual and seductive, such as an Italian or French accent might to an English Lass. Sadly, it just reminds me of Ian Paisley sounding off.

The Pot Still has discovered life other than Kelburns this week and only has one of their beers on - Red Smiddy - alongside Deuchars and something that's just expired. The Smiddy is OK but once again over-warm. Maybe I'm drinking too early. Having said that, half of Scotland is up for a morning session today, having watched their rugby boys lose to a stuttering England. Hey, it happens, get over it!

It's about 40 minutes by train from Glasgow Queen Street to Stirling and when I alight it's still raining and so my broly and I set off for the ground, a 20-minute or so walk away from the town centre through retail park land. When I do reach the Forthbank Stadium, I find it attractively set opposite a large leisure centre complete with a glass-fronted swimming pool - a letch's paradise! The Stadium itself comprises two sizeable seated stands with a small area of uncovered terracing behind each goal - quite a nice little set-up. Judging from what I have heard, and from the programme notes, life's a bit of struggle for Albion at the moment and they are desperately looking to hang on to what they have. I wish them luck.

Pausing only to note that the macaroni pie is once again not in evidence - luckily I stocked up on a veggie Scotch Egg at Holland & Barrett earlier - I survey the banks of seating in the West Stand and pick my spot, hoping not to find myself sat next to the ground moaner, like at Airdrie last week. An official bottle spotter is in action at the front, sweeping the crowd with his eyes and rushing in to confiscate any drinking vessel not standard club-issue. I keep mine safely tucked away and swig it in the toilets.

In true Scottish league style, the players rush out, the ref tosses up, and we are kicked off all within a minute, and for the first half hour we have a decent game. The home left-winger is on fire and sets up the 17th minute opener, although we have already had chances at either end. When the whistle-happy ref wades in with a straight red for the Brechin No.9 after a bit of innocuous pushing and shoving, the writing is on the wall for the visitors. It kills the game. City decide to shut up shop and try to pinch it on the break, Albion run out of creative ideas, and the last hour is very, very ordinary.

Which is when the bloke-behind-me gets busy. He's the loudest voice in the ground. The Albion manager and the home number 7 incur his wrath. I daren't look round in case he picks on me, too. There's a non-stop tirade of honest but aggressive assertions as to the competence of the manager's substitution policy and why the apparently out-of-his-depth right winger is still on the pitch. When it does look likely that our man gets his way and the last sub is warming up, the home No5 goes down with a game-ending injury and the number 7 is spared again. The tirade continues. I finally pluck up the courage to look round and I see it's a bloke with a long beige coat and a flat cap. It's Victor Meldrew! I don't believe it....

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

You'd better believe it!

