

TT No.66: *Chris Freer* - Sat 8th October 2011; **Bedfont Town v Romford**; FA Trophy Preliminary Round; Score: 4-1; Crowd: 82; Entertainment value: 3/5.

When I was a little younger than I am today, essential noise was a big part of my life. If I didn't have my home or car stereo blaring at full blast I must not have been feeling well. I'm sure the neighbours would have appreciated that. As I add a few more candles to the birthday cake, I'm maybe a tad more sensitive to bedlam than I used to be. There was a time that, at every music gig I attended, a position at the front right by the speakers was the only place to be. Granted, my ears would be ringing a bit for the next day or so, but that only told me I'd had a good night and was ready for the next one. A few months back I did the very same thing at a Space Ritual gig, and then was seriously concerned that I done my eardrums some permanent damage. Happily, they recovered later in the week.

I suppose one of the advantages of trawling round the lower leagues, encountering crowds in their tens as opposed to thousands, is that the level of noise is not that oppressive. A little more genteel, akin to village cricket maybe. There are exceptions of course, and I'm heading for one of those today.

My 6.30am National Express 440 to London starts out from Loughborough with all notions of a quiet doze straight out of the window as Student Boy swings into the seat behind me and immediately starts up on his phone. He drags some hapless chum from his slumbers to tell him a tale - audible to the whole bus - of how he was kicked out of some seedy drinking hole or other for having the temerity to touch the assistant manager's pint. I should have turned the knife by informing him that us publicans would use ANY excuse to eject an arsehole from licensed premises.

My day is not quite going as planned, as my arrival in Victoria coincides with that of half the population of the world, and the tube ticket office is overrun with Johnny Foreigner trying to communicate to the impatient ticket clerk where EXACTLY he wants to go. Here's a suggestion. Why don't London Underground employ visiting English Language students at weekends and sit them each behind a separate desk marked with a header saying 'Spanish', 'Italian', 'French' or 'Chinese'? That way non-English speaking tourists can queue at the appropriate desk and be dealt with swiftly and efficiently by someone who speaks their language. If tourism is SUCH a big deal for London as a city, why not organise it smoothly. The Olympics will be a massive test of whether or not they can get it right.

My love affair with the Willow Walk, Wetherspoon's 'other' pub at Victoria Station, begins to wobble as the manager informs me there are no veggie breakfasts to be had this morning. Something about a Linda McCartney sausage shortage and the Americans panic-eating. I storm off indignantly and head for Hammersmith, where I know there are a couple of other, Wetherspoon's, plus another pub I want to

check out. Food first, and The William Morris, right opposite Hammersmith tube station, is big and relatively empty, so I order up a Veggie Brunch (too late now for Brekkie) and check out the beers in Wetherspoon's latest Beer Festival. I select a Kalamazoo Black Silk, a 4.0% porter brewed at Marston's by a guy from Bell's Brewery in Michigan, USA. To my tastes it's more like a mild, maybe a slightly hoppier flavour.

From here I take a ten-minute walk up Shepherd's Bush Road into deepest Brook Green to the Havelock Arms, which - according to the pub website - has a Sambrook's beer on tap. I met the guy who runs this brewery earlier in the year, and with his ales winning some rave reviews, I want to give it a try. The publicity for the Havelock describes it as a 'gastro-pub' which immediately puts me on the defensive. I like earthy pubs and I respect restaurants, but when they overlap at the arty-farty end, they're not usually for me. The Havelock is in a residential area, and essentially a spit-and-sawdust environment with mis-matching furniture, but is unashamedly geared to eating. I have no argument against pub operators, whether individuals or groups, running their business towards making money from food - hey, I've just been in Wetherspoon's - but you get the impression in this kind of place that unless you're slobbering all over the menu - 'monkfish cheeks' et al - you are persona non grata. AND they don't have any Sambrook's! I quickly sup up my jug of Dark Star Hopstar - not bad for a golden ale - and depart. I suspect I am no loss to them.

Today I'm heading out west to the edge of Heathrow Airport, hence the noise I referred to earlier. A Zone 6 Travel card (£8) and half an hour on a Piccadilly Line train takes you to Hatton Cross station, from where it's a ten-minute walk into Bedfont and the 'Orchard' ground of Bedfont Town FC. I marvel at the calmness of the horses in the roadside fields, who calmly continue to graze even as a fully-loaded Jumbo Jet thunders just 100 feet above their heads - and mine! Yes, this is flight-path-city and the stadium is more-or-less under it. Prepare for a noisy game!

The clubhouse at Bedfont provides a bit of tranquility. Sadly, no decent beer - and I idle away half-an-hour by chatting to a fan of visiting Romford and checking out the situation re their new stadium. I'm informed that the plan has some good points - they have the land earmarked - and some bad points - they don't have any money. It all seems to be riding on somebody who knows Frank Lampard trying to persuade him to invest some readies. Or maybe even Joe Cole, an ex-Romford lad. It all sounds ever-so-slightly hopeful to me. I enter the ground and check out the snack bar for half-time reference. They do have chips, but I had them earlier in Hammersmith, so its choccy-bar time instead.

The stadium boasts a decent pitch, and a couple of fairly small but smart stands. One seats 50 in 4 rows, and looks really cute, the sort of stand you want to take home to meet the family. Behind each goal are converted bike-sheds, which deputise for covered terracing. There's another ground next door - Bedfont Sports of the Combined Counties League - and for a while both tannoy systems seem to be competing with each other for dominance. Seems to me there's a battle going on for who bosses the 'manor'.

Having got promoted to the Southern League last season, Bedfont Town are not exactly setting the world alight, with just two wins from their first 11 league fixtures. Today's game, in the FA Trophy, is against homeless Isthmian North side Romford, who have made a better start to the campaign, lying sixth in their table. The first half is an entertaining and fairly evenly-matched affair, with the home side edging it 2-1 mainly thanks to some generous Romford defending. And when Bedfont go 3-1 up early in the second half I'm expecting one of my better games. Somehow, it doesn't pan out like that. The match starts to get niggly. There's foul and retribution going on, the Romford fans behind the goal are starting to get a little verbally over-involved with the home players, and it's no surprise when one of the teams - Bedfont - is reduced to ten.

The referee isn't having too bad a match, but the Romford fans don't see it like that, especially when Town break away to score a fourth. The mis-timed tackles continue, players tumble around at death's door, there's a lot of shouting and pointing, and the Romford boys jump up and down, gesticulating and mouthing all the more. At which point another Jumbo jet with its roaring engines passes overhead, and drowns it all out. Ah, peace at last!

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

C'mon feel the noise!

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