

TT No.8: *Chris Freer* - Saturday August 13th 2011; **St Neots Town v Beaconsfield SYCOB**; Southern League Div. 1 C; Score: 4-2; Attendance: 366; Entertainment value: 5/5.

I don't consider myself to be old - although I do concede I'm heading in that general direction - but there's something about a steam locomotive in full flow that still excites me and takes me back to my youth. We'd cycle miles in those pre-teen days just to be on hand when the 'Royal Scot' went about its daily business, just in case we'd not 'copped it' before. En route we'd occasionally (depending on the time of year) remake the acquaintance of a particular bush or tree that we knew intimately, to check whether the resident chaffinch or magpie was nesting in its usual spot again, before then testing out the swings on the nearby 'reccy' to see if we could get anywhere near the top (we never did).

I don't cycle much (as in 'at all') these days and a pair of increasingly dodgy feet determine that I will set my sights a little less ambitiously in 2011, but I forget all of that as we pull into Peterborough station just as 60103 Tornado comes into view. This is the steam locomotive that was built relatively recently by skilled enthusiasts from original plans, and really looks the part as it gets up speed with about seventeen coaches in tow. What power! and what a sight! It inspires me to go the extra mile in Posh and visit the Wetherspoons that's NOT closest to the station!

The Colleges Arms is pretty much identical to 500 or so other 'Spoons. Open plan, upstairs toilets, and a gaggle of sixty-year-old cheap ale drinkers propping up the bar. I've surveyed the pumps that I can see and ordered a nice golden Cairngorm Tradewinds before I realise - when the gaggle moves away - there are actually more interesting beers on offer. Ah, the impetuosity of youth! The large veggie breakfast hits the spot and I move on. Next port-of-call is the Wortley Almshouses, an imposing-looking building just down the road from the Oakham Brewery Tap. The Almshouses is an interesting if somewhat austere hostelry, patronised by groups of old men - even older than me - who discuss the state-of-the-nation over a glass or two of something cold and fizzy. The brewery in residence is Samuel Smith's which gives me a rare opportunity to renew my acquaintance with Old Brewery Bitter, the only cask beer on offer. It's not a bad colour for an ale but slightly sweeter than I like it.

Just time for a pint in the Brewery Tap where I anticipate a gold-fest of Oakham Brewery ales. I'm not to be disappointed as I politely ask the bar-chap if he's has any darker brews and he points me to the Bateman's Mild. Now I don't dislike the latter, but there's something wrong with this pint. I've drunk enough Bateman's DM to know there shouldn't be a perfumery tang to it and after struggling through a third of the glass, decide to give it best. Whilst contemplating what to do I casually look up at the Oakham Ales beer list, under which is a description of each beer. It reads 'Golden - Pale Gold - Pale Gold - Light Gold - Golden'. Fields of

Gold, eh? Oakham Ales truly likes to give its drinkers the widest choice. I choose to bugger off, and determine to never darken (!) its doors again.

£6 return and a half-hour's train journey, gets me two stops down the East Coast Main Line to St. Neots, where I can recall once going fishing. Not that I get to see the heart of this pleasant rural town, as it's nearly two o'clock and despite appearing on Google Maps as if the rail station is virtually next door to the ground, it turns out to be a good fifteen-minute walk down the road, under the bridge and up through the new housing estate to Rowley Park. I'm instantly impressed by the home of St Neots FC. This club is clearly on the ascendancy as is evidenced by the facilities here, and its dominance of last season's United Counties League.

The pitch is immaculate, sprinklers appear from the surface at frequent pre-match intervals, and there's an astroturf running strip for the linos. A compact main stand is flanked by a large, changing rooms complex on one side, and a clubhouse bar on the other, whilst there's shallow covered terracing behind each goal, and adequate space for another stand down the other side. I suspect that this is something for the not-too-distant future.

My only disappointment is a bar devoid of anything worth drinking, although the very lovely bar-ladies do allow me to top up my I-phone battery whilst I peruse my programme and slurp my J20. The food hut is equally a let-down. There are chips, but if I want a pie (and Pukka at that!) it has to be a meat one. Lucky my brekky is still doing its job.

Town have been busy in the close-season reinforcing the squad for a higher level of football, and with the likes of former Villa and QPR man Stefan Moore, and ex-Peterborough striker Shane Tolley in the ranks, are expected - at least by the locals - to go straight through this division. Another young starlet is playmaker Junior Konado, who is interesting Posh. Visiting Beaconsfield SYCOB finished bottom of this division last year, and were lucky to be reprieved, so it's with some degree of confidence that the Saints fans behind the away goal greet the SYCOB keeper with suggestions that he may get severe backache before the end of the afternoon.

For almost the first hour that's not the way it works out. Town are playing some slick, inventive team football which looks likely to prevail, but Beaconsfield have done their homework, flood the midfield, and free their diminutive but pacey strike-force at frequent intervals. After 55 minutes they are two up and the Saints seem to have run out of ideas. This is when you need your big players to step up to the plate and after Tolley slots home an instant reply to SYCOB's second, the writing is the wall. With Tolley and Konadu pulling the strings, we are treated to a final half hour of irresistible attacking football by the home team and although the visitors won't lie down and still create the odd chance or two, it's only ever going to end one way. It finishes 4-2 and we have been thoroughly entertained.

I feel sorry for Beaconsfield. They put in so much effort and at 2-0 up must have thought they'd got it in the bag. But, to use an analogy, the 'Tornado' that is St Neots in full flow hit them, and they clearly 'ran out of steam.'

They say football is a young man's game. Well I've been watching it for 45 years and I still get the buzz when experiencing a five-star show like today. Throw in a bit of train-spotting and it ranks as the perfect day out. Shame about the beer, though.....

You'll find a bit more about the matchday experience on my blog at <http://flynn123.wordpress.com>

All train-spotter's welcome....

07/20