

TT No. 10: *Chris Freer* - Sat August 18th 2012; **Rotherham United** v Burton Albion; Football League Division Two; Score: 3-0; Attendance: 11,441; Entertainment value: 4/5.

I'm not sure if my young, teenage son is typical of all children of his era, but his failure to grasp any sense of time or urgency is amply supported by an inability to appreciate distance. Not quite "are we there, yet" but not far off. Today we're heading 'oop north' by train, as I've promised he can rendezvous with his old school chum, who has just moved to Sheffield.

Now from our place to the Steel City is probably no more than 45 miles or about 40 minutes as the car or train flies. He remains convinced his friendship will suffer from the huge distances involved, and is also concerned he might easily get bored en route. So, we go in search of some suitably footy reading matter - the more pictures the better - and he brings his new android phone/games machine for added comfort. For me, experienced in the concept of lengthy train journeys in search of my footy fix, 40 minutes to Sheffield is virtually a quick 'on and off' job. The 12-hour, no refreshments, no flushing toilets, rail trek to the European Cup Final in Munich in 1979 was just a tad more challenging.

We're heading north because I've got a ticket for the opening game at the New York Stadium in Rotherham, the first competitive fixture at the newest Football League stadium in England. I'm completing the 92 for the umpteenth time, and returning to a town where I last saw meaningful action watching Darlo at United's old ground, Millmoor.

Having left the lad with his mate at Meadowhall Station, the short five-minute journey into Rotherham Central takes you right underneath the imposing main stand frontage of the New York Stadium, which is an impressive sight, and must make die-hard Millers' fans want to cry and dance in rapid succession.

Four years after being forced to leave their old home and play in an athletics stadium in a Sheffield suburb, the club is back in town. I must be one of very few people with fond memories of the Don Valley Stadium, pitching up there for my only visit after a substantial session around Sheffield's pubs. Lapsing in and out of consciousness during the pre-match build up, I came to just in time to see what looked like one of the Chuckle Brothers appear on the pitch. Surreal!

Barely a quarter of a mile away from the New York Stadium, Millmoor stands virtually intact, a new stand partially constructed and the playing surface immaculately maintained. All the signage proclaiming this to be the home of Rotherham United is still there. It's just as if the misguided owners of this old stadium are just sitting inside thinking: 'They'll, come back....'

I offer this observation to a fellow blogger I meet in my first port-of-call of the day, the Bridge Inn near the railway station. We make hopping small talk as we

attempt to discern which of the beers in this Old Mill owned pub is worth drinking. The Traditional Bitter is on form but the other Old Mill brews leave much to be desired. I exit in search of another of the brewery's pubs, the nearby Kingfisher which was a second home to me on my many visits with Darlo. It's still there, closed. Oh well, Wetherspoon's it is then.

My rudimentary map fails to locate my first choice - the GBG-listed Bluecoat - but I stumble across another, the snappily-titled Corn Law Rhymer, which is not too busy and has a selection of Acorn Brewery beers with which to wash down my veggie all-day brunch. The first of these is a Gorlovka Imperial Stout, a cracking pint of some 6.0%abv, which might have something to do with my 'coming together' with the pavement whilst checking out Millmoor an hour or so later. When I do eventually locate the Bluecoat it is rammed to the gunnels and so I return to the Rymer for another, less powerful, pint of Acorn.

The approach to the New York Stadium is free of any other structure, so the design and aspect can be appreciated for several minutes. Having acquired a ticket for the away end - today's visitors Burton Albion are one of my 'pet' teams due to me having run a pub in the town during the club's Nigel Clough, Eton Park days - I take a stroll around the outside of the building, noting things that are not quite finished. There's an empty retail unit for instance which could be well suited to a real ale bar for visiting supporters, an idea of mine I suspect won't ever see the light of day. The bar-code recognition system at the turnstiles is not operating, and I am asked to show my ticket through the glass. Hey, even the Olympic Stadium had teething problems!

The food bars in the concourse are advertising Potato, Cheese & Onion Pasties which I'd like to try but am still stuffed from the Spoons lunch. There's no beer worth drinking, although curiously you can buy wine by the glass. Should I enquire of the vintage....?

I settle into my seat, which because of segregation has no direct route to the nearest toilet. The steward standing next to me is blocking line-of-sight for many, but refuses to move or sit down, doubtless because it would be more than his job's worth. A marching band of pipers plays some pre-match ditties and a near-capacity crowd get ready for an historic kick-off.

It doesn't take long for the home team to establish their superiority, taking a two-goal lead from a soft penalty award, and a second strike, courtesy of powder-puff defending following a long throw a-la-Delap. For the rest of the half visiting Burton scamper around earnestly looking for an opening, whilst United's occasional break-outs always look threatening. The balance of power shifts decisively after a Burton player reckons, he'd like an early shower, and from then on, it's a question of how many. The Burton keeper performs heroics as he keeps the second half tally down to a single deflected strike, and as the home fans sing, dance and clap, the Albion supporters file disconsolately out.

I started this post talking about distance. I can end it by saying there was a considerable distance between Burton and Rotherham today - something called a Country Mile. To Me, To You....

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

Always worth a chuckle...

04/20