

TT No.152: *Chris Freer* - Sat April 27th 2013; **Potters Bar Town** v Witham Town; Isthmian Division One North; Score: 2-2; Crowd: 71; Entertainment value: 4/5.

I like to think I have a pretty good geographical knowledge of the UK. Years of trekking round these isles seeking out good pubs and visiting breweries has helped, as has my ongoing quest to visit every football ground in the top 8 levels of English football (not to forget the top 4 in Scotland too). So, I've been to a lot of places, could probably get a 99% success rating when asked to point them out on a blank UK map, and would hope to get this category if I ever appeared on 'Pointless'.

Still there are one or two places I've never been to, but I do know them by reputation. Sadly, that's usually because of some atrocity or disaster which may have become synonymous with the name, like Aberfan or Dunblane for instant. Or Potters Bar, where I recall there was a serious rail accident some years ago. As one of the most northerly of the Isthmian League grounds I've yet to visit, I'd been looking at ways to get there without the need to travel into London. East Midlands Trains often offer cut price deals on their Nottingham-Norwich route, and a £10 return to Peterborough was too good a deal to miss. Just £20.20 return from Posh to Potters Bars seemed reasonable, and in the possible event that their game might be postponed (given our wildly unpredictable weather) where better a drinking town to be marooned for the day than Peterborough?

There is some rain around as I set off today, especially in Peterborough where I land about 9.00am and head for the Draper's Arms, a Wetherspoon's just five minutes, walk from the rail station. There are bouncers on the door which seems a bit premature seeing as Posh's home game today against Sheffield Wednesday doesn't kick off until 5.20, but there are tables to be had and I settle down for a brekky and a nice glass of orange juice - the beer can wait for later.

The cheaper rail deal to Potters Bar means I must travel with Capital One Connect, which of course calls at every station in between, and takes just over an hour. Mercifully I cat-nap most of the way. When I arrive at Potters Bar it's not that big a station. There's a plaque on one of the platforms dedicated to those killed and injured in the accident, which happened in 2002, longer ago than I thought.

Out into the streets, and conscious of some pretty threatening dark cloud clumps circling the horizon, I head off in the direction of my first port-of-call, a McMullen's pub in one of the town's suburbs. It necessitates a long uphill trek for about a mile or so, taking me past the local Wetherspoons, and into Little Heath, where the robustly-constructed Builders Arms is set amongst large prosperous houses. It's a spacious and well-furnished hostelry where the majority of the clientele are there to 'do lunch', but the friendly bar-chap recognizes my Midlands accent and explains he is from Worksop in Notts - so we speak the same language! There are three McMullen's beers on handpump, and I go for an AK which is the

perfect colour for a beer (none of your straw-coloured nonsense) if a little under-powered at 3.7%. A good swilling bitter nonetheless.

Another mile walk, this time downhill, takes me to a road called 'The Walk' where most of Potters Bar's sporting venues seems to be based, including the Cricket Club, the Tennis Club, and Potters Bar Town Football Club, whose Parkfield home is now less glamorously known as the Pakex Stadium, due to an all-encompassing sponsorship deal (the name is on the shirts too!) The stadium includes a changing room/clubhouse complex set back from the pitch, while a longish main stand features four rows of seats straddling the halfway line on one side, and there's a squat covered stand with two rows of bench seats opposite. Given its design, construction and position (low slung and with views obscured by the dug-outs) I'd have to say this would only be of practical use if the heavens were to open and standing spectators could view it as a place to scurry to. Behind one goal is a small kit covered terrace, more of which later.

There's a Carnivores snack bar outside the clubhouse, inside which there's live TV footy and a bar which, although not offering any cask beer, does have bottles of Fullers London Pride in the fridge - not a bad alternative to the proper stuff.

Today's game is against play-off bound Witham Town. With the home team having had a reasonable season, despite coming up short in the play-off stakes, it looks likely to be a well-contested game. The Essex team have bought a few fans along, including one chap wearing the shirt who sets up camp in the kit-terrace behind the goal, securing his three flags before starting up his one-man choir. A couple of other characters join him and we almost get harmonies!

The game itself is compelling without ever threatening to be a classic. Despite there being little at stake aside from pride, there's a competitive, argumentative edge which sometimes descends into hilarity, like the visiting No4 constantly asking the referee to explain why he has been penalised despite it being perfectly plain for all to see. The result - a 2-2 draw - is settled with a quick exchange of goals in each half, on both occasions Witham equalizing within 5 minutes of going behind. A five-minute frenzy at the end fails to provide a winner and it's a fair result.

So today Potters Bar, tomorrow...? Who knows, probably somewhere just as exotic. Scanning next Saturday's fixtures, I see there's a full programme in The Northern Counties East League. Where's me beach towel, Barton upon Humber, here I come!

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

Have tick list, will travel...

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