

TT No.62: *Chris Freer* - Saturday November 17th 2012; **Crawley Down Gatwick v Eastbourne Town**; Isthmian League Division One South; Score: 2-1; Attendance: 102; Entertainment value: 2/5.

Regular readers of my blog will know that I never let a romantic weekend stand in the way of a good football match. Chances are that if I'd have got married during the football season - although I obviously minimised the risk by choosing a day in late May - it would have had to be on a Saturday morning or some other spare day. My fellow Forest fan Nick recalled to me only this very morning how he'd got hitched 18 years ago today, when we both should have been watching the Trickers take on Chelsea. Tsch!

Brighton comes close behind North Yorkshire as a favourite 'bolt-hole' for the missus and I, as she loves shopping in the Lanes and Laines, while I'm happy to sit supping pints of Harvey's Best Bitter (my Numero Uno quaffing ale) in my favourite tied house, the Lord Nelson on Trafalgar Street. Sometimes we even combine the two pastimes, and we both sit in the pub! With the kids getting older and having more options for weekend sleep-overs, we're getting a bit more confident in booking these mini-breaks, and when I saw that Frankie Boyle was appearing at the Brighton Dome on a Saturday night in November, a seed of a plan started to formulate. Of course, it had to be two nights away, there had to be a decent pub for lunch en route, plus the most important factor, a nearby Saturday afternoon game.

And so it comes to pass that the wife and I - who I shall henceforth refer to as the wife - trundle our way down the M1, travel clockwise round the M25, and then hit the A roads heading first for the Sussex town of Crowborough, to seek out the Cooper's Arms, the landlord of which I've met at a number of beer judging events. His pub is a little off the beaten track, but he professes a healthy 80/20 wet/dry trade ratio, with punters traveling far and wide for his Dark Star beers plus guests. He also has the biggest cat you ever did see, a Maine Coon from the USA, an animal bred to vanquish hordes of rats and throttle squirrels. The wife vows that we must have one, despite the fact we quite like squirrels and have only ever seen one moth-eaten rat anywhere near our twee little suburban garden.

From here it's a short journey into Lewes, my excuse being to visit the many antiques shops which are often featured on lunchtime TV, but my prime purpose really being to raid the Harvey's Brewery shop for some decent take-home. And then onto Brighton, and our guest house in the cosmopolitan Kemptown district of the city, and an enjoyable night on the ale. The following night we are entertained by that all-round family-friendly jester Frankie Boyle, who only swears a tiny bit and tells at least one joke in the best possible taste. He's on and off stage with the minimum of fuss and performs no encore. He's had your money now feck off!

In between those two nights of merry-making I wave goodbye to the wife as she heads off - credit card in hand - with that serial-shopper's glint in her eye, and I climb into the motor, say adieu to that hard-earned parking space - never to be enjoyed again - and pootle up the A23 in the direction of Gatwick Airport, diverting off just beforehand and head for the quietish village of Crawley Down, wherein reside relative Isthmian League newcomers Crawley Down Gatwick FC. Their home ground is part of the Haven Sports Centre, where the two bars are split today between those attending the footy match against Eastbourne Town, and the other hosting a jumble sale of car boot proportions. Hence the car park is already rammed when I arrive a good hour before kick-off and I have to leave the motor by the side of the road.

The football-friendlier of the two bars has live footy on the big screen, a hatch selling plated food - fish finger and chips anyone? - and two handpumps, featuring the inevitable Doom Bar and ... wait for it ... Harvey's Best Bitter! Well it would be rude not to. I'm a fan of this club already!

The ground itself is quite tidy, with flat standing all around, a seated stand on one side, and a small covered terrace - the 300 Club Supporters Stand - behind and to the side of one goal. There's a burger van near the entrance to the clubhouse bar, but it sells nothing for the veggie.

The home team are having a fairly decent season so far, despite a couple of recent reverses, and appear favourites to put one over on visiting Eastbourne Town. It certainly looks that way for most of the first half, which despite not being anything like an epic, contains enough action to keep the mind occupied. A well-taken strike from the home team's No10 Luke Blewden on 22 minutes is the difference between the sides at the break. An honest start to the second half draws the visitor's level on 55, courtesy of a handling howler from the home keeper. And that seems likely to be the end of it until, right at the death, a swift break down the wing results in the cross being neatly converted by Crawley Down's 'super-sub' to take all three points.

It's the last laugh to the home team, and there's no time for an encore. I thank you...

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

Frankie says.

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