

TT No.44: *Chris Freer* - Saturday December 7th 2013; **St Ives Town v Daventry Town**; Southern Division 1 Central; Score 1-1; Crowd: 213; Entertainment value: 0/5.

One of the purposes of my blog, you may recall, is to highlight the availability or otherwise of vegetarian-friendly cuisine at our football grounds. As someone who has 'consciously avoided eating meat' since 1984, I am well aware that there are different types of self-confessed 'veggies', ranging from those like myself - who eschew red & white meat but are happy to tuck into fish-based products and animal-rennet cheese - right up to the die-hards who won't even wear leather shoes. I'm very much of the 'each to his own' viewpoint.

My teenage daughter has recently gone a step further than me by shunning anything 'that had a face on it' and so tuna is now off her menu. If I ever catch one of those things it'll be all mine (evil cackle!). Sadly fishing - one of my great boyhood passions - is one of many of my former hobbies and pastimes that took a back seat to other pursuits in my middle years. I used to be very active in CAMRA, got involved in the local music scene in Leicester, watched Forest on Saturdays, played football on Sundays, and generally even had little time for my then girlfriend. Little wonder she became a thing of the past, as did going fishing!

Now, as my family approach maturity and will inevitably adopt their own agendas, I can start to look once more at some of the things I might like to re-visit. And places. Such as today, and the Cambridgeshire town of St Ives, which I once visited in the 1970s to go fishing. Tenuous link revealed!

Set on the Great Ouse, this charming town now boasts a Step 4 football club, the team now playing in Southern Central after having secured promotion from the United Counties League at the end of last season. They made the headlines in my local paper, the Loughborough Echo, at the start of last season when an over-enthusiastic reporter - noting that Quorn and Shepshed Dynamo had been moved into the same division - declared them to be based in Cornwall. Doh!

My journey today involves three legs by using the railway - interrupted by a Wetherspoons brekky in the excellent Drapers Arms in Peterborough - and a final bus trip from Huntingdon to St Ives. My first port-of-call in town is the Oliver Cromwell, a nice cosy albeit-foody low-beamed back street local where I cause an immediate stir by ordering a pint of Elgood's Black Prince, a beer the assembled natives had all been eyeing suspiciously as I walked in. Further enquiries reveal it to be of 8.7%abv, a bit weighty for a first pint of the day. I change my order to a Greene King Abbot Reserve, another killer at 6.5%abv, and nip back for a half of the Elgood's beer before I move on.

Next, I call into the town centre and locate the Royal Oak which turns out to be a good pub to watch sports TV, after the landlady has managed to eject the family with the screaming kid. I plump for an Oakham Black Hole Porter - rare for Oakham

in that it isn't a golden beer - which at 5.5%abv continues my high gravity trend for the day. The beer is a little fresh and not quite cellar-conditioned enough but at least the pub is busy, unlike my last pre-match stop, the Elgoods-owned Floods Tavern just down the road. I realise I have been in here before, to do an interview for a drinks magazine I was working on, but the decor has been changed to modern cafe-bar. A few souls drift in and out but there's very little atmosphere, although my Black Dog Mild passes muster.

From here there's about a 15-minute walk to the Westwood Road home of St Ives Town. The ground is dominated by a clump of buildings of a certain vintage running down one side of the pitch, with a small seated stand opposite. This latter structure seems in need of a bit of TLC with rows of seats roped off for safety reasons. Having done my fair share of walking today I decide to risk one of the available others.

A brief visit to the clubhouse reveals no cask beer although there are bottles of Old Speckled Hen in the fridge, while the snack bar is serving chips. Having struggled to find any decent meat-free fodder at most of the grounds I've visited this season, I now stock up on Pork-less Pies and veggie Scotch Eggs at the nearest Holland & Barrett store, so I don't have to stuff myself with greasy chips as a last nutritional resort.

And so, to the game, unusual for me in recent weeks in that in St Ives and visiting Daventry Town I get to watch two teams in serious play-off contention, so I expect a certain level of quality. I am to be sadly disappointed. 90 minutes of turgid football during which I manage several micro-naps - I'd like to blame the beer - barely punctuated by a goal for each side, the home score from a goalmouth scramble on 70 and the equaliser 5 minutes later from a speculative grubber which eludes the keeper.

Who was that team where the fans used to chorus 'We only Sing When We're Fishing...'? In hindsight, I know what I'd rather have been doing today.

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

Always making a splash....

04/20