

TT1314-70

TT No.70: Chris Freer - Saturday February 15th 2014; **Chalfont St Peter v Uxbridge**; Southern Division 1 Central; Score: 1-1; Crowd: 78; Entertainment value: 3/5.

Floods used to be a way of life when I was a kid, probably because we lived in a part of the Soar Valley that filled up with water after so much as an hour or so of drizzle. They say problems mean opportunities and that's how it was for us, donning our wellies and wading in to push out cars at a tanner a throw. Loadsamoney!

I'm living on former flood-plain land at the moment but there are some good defences on the Trent and, anyway, for some reason the river near here has yet to show any signs of bursting its banks. Much as I sympathise with those suffering throughout other parts of the land, my main problem with the interminable rain has been its effect on football fixtures in the lower league.

After deciding for the previous two Saturdays not to use my pre-booked rail tickets to London - quite wisely as it turned out - I have the same dilemma again this week. My ace contingency is Barnet - surely a Conference fixture at a new ground like the Hive must be a little bit weatherproof!

It's 4.30am when I arise and for the umpteenth time, I wonder why I put myself through this when I could be snug in bed for another three hours or so. But the 5.29am from Long Eaton to St Pancras waits for no man and at £1 a throw courtesy of early booking through Megabus, it's worth getting up for. Hurricane-force winds are predicted for London, but fortunately my chosen walking route to Liverpool Street - for some reason I reckon that games to the east of the city have more chance of being played - affords me the bonus of the wind at my back and I make it in record time.

The Hamilton Hall Wetherspoon's at Liverpool Street Station looks ominously breakfast-free on my arrival and, sure enough, their food delivery is late. I pause for a coffee before continuing in the direction of London Bridge, arriving at another Wetherspoon's, the brilliant Crosse Keys on Gracechurch Street. Brilliant because this is invariably a permanent mini beer festival with up to 20 cask beers and lots of craft stuff at any one time.

I walk in just as they open the front door - I used to hate that when I was a pub licensee - and set up shop for my usual veggie brekkie and a couple of pints while I read the paper and keep an eye on the pitch inspection updates on my I-phone. My chosen pints are Portobello Star, an amber but slightly citrusy 4.3% ale, followed by The Bruery Oatmeal Stout, at 5.5% very creamy but somewhat heavy on the vanilla.

As is the norm at present, most of the pitch inspections get the thumbs down but it looks like the Southern League match at Chalfont St Peter is on. Good news, as this

was my original target game, but now I'm the wrong side of London. Fortunately, the sole member of staff at an otherwise deserted Cannon Street station - as it's in the 'City' of London nobody catches trains from there at weekends - guides me through the process of securing a rail ticket to Gerrards Cross which includes cross-city travel on the Tube.

I arrive at Marylebone station in good time to partake of a pint in the Victoria & Albert which is situated on the concourse. The choice is limited but Fullers London Pride is always worth a punt and it passes half an hour before my train to Gerrards Cross. The station at the latter is a good couple of miles from the Mill Meadow stadium of Chalfont St Peter, but it's the nearest station, I'm always up for a walk, and there are a few pubs en route. I stop at two of them, the foody Three Oaks where there is an area set aside for drinkers, and the more modern Village Hall, where there's a kid's party in full swing in one room, but TV football in the main bar. The beer in both pubs is Rebellion IPA, locally brewed and an OK pint though not a session-able one to my palate.

A swift rain shower comes and goes but that is the only precipitation I see all day, and when I arrive at Mill Meadow the pitch looks fine, and ready for action. The ground has an impressive seated stand behind one goal, something of a Heath Robinson affair at the other, and some sheltered standing in front of the clubhouse where myself and most of the other 77 punters take up residence. Next to and slightly behind the clubhouse is a small but upright older stand which is not currently used.

The clubhouse itself - which clearly doubles as a kiddies creche in the week - is not blessed with any proper beer or veggie food so it's lucky I've already had my fill of both.

Today's visitors are neighbouring Uxbridge, and with both teams hovering just above the relegation zone, a classic is not expected. We do get a reasonably entertaining - for a variety of reasons - game which finishes all square, with just two first half goals to show for a lot of huffing and puffing. The visitors have chances to win the match when their second half substitute - a newcomer to the club and built in a raw John Fashanu type of mould - nearly gets on the end of a few things but can't quite make a name for himself.

As I head back to the railway station via Chalfont St Peter High Street, I encounter a flooded road, where the local brook has overflowed and invaded a couple of pubs. For just a brief, minute thoughts of wellies and tanners flash through my mind. Unfortunately, the Police have already closed the thoroughfare, denying motorists the opportunity of attempting to drive through and doubtless failing miserably. Tsk, just how do they expect a boy to make any honest money these days?

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

Well worth wading in for...

04/20

