

**TT No.85: *Chris Freer*** - Sat March 29th 2014; **Anstey Nomads v Barrow Town**; East Midlands Counties League; Score: 2-1; Attendance: 76; Entertainment value: 2/5.

You know those "I remember where I was when so-and-so died" occasions? For most people it's probably JFK or John Lennon, but for me it's the actor Steve McQueen. Not especially because I was a big fan of his, but mainly due to a long-running disagreement with a friend of mine who was with me on that fateful day, about which pub we were in when we saw the sad news splashed across the front page of The Sun. I recall it was the Anchor Inn in the Leicestershire village of Kegworth, but he maintains it was another boozier just down the road. Either way, I know 'roughly' where I was on the day Steve McQueen passed away.

I mention this because they've just celebrated the 70th anniversary of the actual Great Escape, the Hollywood blockbuster version of which starred - amongst many other A-Listers - the aforementioned Mr McQueen. By way of commemoration, fans of perennial strugglers Notts Country (sic) have been using Great Escape imagery to good effect as they strive for League 1 survival with a late season's rally. Oh, that my village team could emulate that surge.

As you may know from previous posts in my blog, I spent some of my formulative football years in the Leicestershire village of Barrow Upon Soar where the local team, then called Barrow Old Boys, were creating waves in the Leicestershire Senior League. Local chaps to a man, they would be known to generously patronise the village hostelrys before turning out to steamroller the opposition.

In subsequent years, having been forced to move out of town to comply with league rules and now known as Barrow Town, they have moved up the ladder to a point where last season they fell just one place short of being promoted to the Step 5 Midland Alliance. As usually happens, the manager departed for (higher) pastures new, taking the best players with him, and leaving a club now rock bottom of the division. With just a handful of games left, they must beat second-bottom Anstey Nomads today to have any chance of survival. So, is the Great Escape really on?

Having sat with him to endure an excruciatingly bad performance by the once-mighty Reds against Charlton in midweek, I think it only fair to prolong my pal Nick's agony for a few more days by transporting him to this veritable feast of anti-football, softening the agony by nipping into the Navigation Inn at Barrow for a beer, and then on to the Great Central Railway at Rothley (where it's Deltic Day!) en route.

Then we arrive at my new ground 523 in good time for kick-off. Actually, it should probably have been new ground 50 or so if I had ever recorded any of my numerous previous visits to this stadium. As I ran a pub in nearby Leicester for a number of years, this was a ground I came to if ever there was a spare evening to fill. But today is my first official (ie. buy a programme) visit.

The Davidsons Homes Park sits near the edge of the village on the road to Cropston. Spectator accommodation is primarily a few rows of seating tacked onto the front of the clubhouse, with an area of covered flat standing opposite. Modest, but in fairness comparable to the facilities at Barrow's Riverside Park. The clubhouse itself is comfortable enough, although it doesn't offer any cheer to the real ale or British bottled beer drinker. There is a food hatch outside but it's mainstream burger fayre although chips are on the menu.

Because of his links in local sport, Nick inevitably bumps into a few people he knows, and quickly spots that Barrow have wheeled out veteran striker Rob Pitman for the occasion, as they chase down a four-point deficit with just four games to play. That's a tall order for a team that has only won 3 games all season, and taken just 2 points away from home. Nomads, one place off the bottom spot occupied by the visitors, have much the better of the first half and go in two-up. It looks ominous for Barrow, but they show up for the second half and after Pitman blasts them back into the game with a thumping free kick, they have opportunities to take the spoils.

It's not to be, their season-long failings in front of goal dogging them to the last, and the Great Escape looks doomed. Steve McQueen must be turning in his grave.

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

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