

TT No.96: *Chris Freer* - Sat April 26th 2014; **Godalming Town** v Taunton Town; Southern Division 1 S & W; Score: 0-1; Attendance: 131; Entertainment value: 1/5.

Saturday 26th April - exactly 45 years to the day that I sat down to tape-record (from the radio) the FA Cup Final between Leicester City and Manchester City. Sadly, it's probably a sign of my advancing years that I can still recall almost all of the players featuring in that Final in 1969, yet probably couldn't name most of the 21st century's winning teams and the years in which they triumphed.

Around that time, at the end of the 'Swinging Sixties', I was starting to consider what I might do for a living after the torture of my latter schooldays ground to its inevitable conclusion. Despite my love of steam trains I had no desire to become an engine driver (contrary to the old adage) and although telling my head teacher I wanted to become a farmer - for some inane reason - my perceived talent for knocking together a comic, or a fictional newspaper or football programme for a game between two imaginary teams (in an imaginary league) led me down the path towards journalism. I wrote to every newspaper in the vicinity but by the time the call eventually came I'd already accepted a job with a printing company and decided not to go back on my word.

Fortunately, that vocation led me indirectly back into the world of the written word and I now make a living scribbling about - and putting together publications for - the drinks industry. Oh, and I do this blog as well. And after all these years I still get a buzz when I see a piece of my work out there in the big wide world...

Today my target game is down in Surrey, and another one of those grounds that I've had on standby for the past couple of seasons. Now, I finally look like making it. A quick check of the club's Twitter feed reveals that last night's heavy rainfall hasn't put the match in any doubt and I arrive in Godalming ready for a lunchtime session. When I say Godalming I really mean the satellite conurbation of Farncombe, which is where the Wey Court ground of Godalming FC is situated. Until quite recently this part of the world was under several feet of water and although the pitch was apparently playable, facilitating access for players and supporters would have involved assembling a flotilla of Dunkirk proportions.

Between Farncombe railway station and the ground there are three pubs worth checking out and I begin at the Freeholders, a Fullers house which sells a very nice pint of London Pride. It's quiet but it's early, although there a few more customers at my next stop, the slightly more twee Three Lions, a Shepherd Neame pub serving a trio of the Kent company's finest brews of which the Kent's Best is the one I prefer. It's a proper copper-coloured bitter and tasty with it. Just down the road and almost on the doorstep of Wey Court is the Leathern Bottle, a homely free house with two beers on tap, Marstons Pedigree and Hogs Back TEA, another good honest pint brewed in the traditional style. The pub is showing live BT Sport, which serves to remind me once again how Michael Owen's voice is one of life's

great irritants. And so on to the ground, which is just getting back on its feet after the recent disastrous floods. The clubhouse bar is currently housed in a temporary home as is the snack bar, which at least serves up a decent portion of chips. The sturdy main stand appears to be guarded by two stewards, but they seem to just be on hand to afford a smooth access to the pitch for the players whose changing rooms are behind. The only other cover is a small Heath Robinson terraced affair set well back behind one goal, handy when a sudden cloudburst arrives later in the game.

Today's match is effectively an end-of-season encounter with the home team hoping to say goodbye to the Southern League South & West and its long-distance games such as the one with today's visitors, Taunton Town, who have been bussed 132 miles to get here. The match is a forgettable encounter to the point that I miss the only goal of the game whilst in conversation with an old boy from Somerset who, though he has a good tale or two to tell, is more of the talking rather than the listening type. So my contribution is minimal. Things liven up a bit on pitch after the break but one of the day's two highlights for me is a fly-past by a Spitfire. A sight and sound for sore eyes indeed.

And the other highlight? Well, as I thumb through the match programme, what should I find but a two-page article by yours truly lifted from my blog via the "Football Grounds in Focus" website to which I often contribute. I puff out my chest and tell anybody who cares to listen. Sadly, nobody seems to want to. Oh well, not to worry, at least I'M impressed.....

There's more on my blog at <http://flynn123.wordpress.com> and that's it for 2013/4!

04/20