

TT No. 13: *Chris Freer* - Sat September 13th 2014; **Redhill** v Carshalton Athletic; FA Cup 1st Qualifying Round; Score: 1-0; Attendance: 100; Entertainment value: 2/5.

There comes a time in every parent's life that you have to give the kids a bit more leeway. Notwithstanding that I was cycling all over my home county from when I was about 10, I deemed the 'right' age for my kids to be about 16. They have now reached that milestone. Indeed, if we lived in Scotland, they could be voting! So, it's probably time to loosen the reins.

What it does mean, however, is that I no longer need to spend £41 per match to accompany my lad to Chelsea games. To be fair I have enjoyed the entertainment over the past seven or eight seasons, but always at the back of my mind I'd be thinking "I'm in London, I should be ticking off a new Isthmian League ground." I'm sure you know the feeling.

So today is the day he will attend his first Dad-free match at Stamford Bridge, albeit with his mate Alex who has just moved down from Sheffield to Brighton and intends to be a regular at the 'Bridge'. After driving from home and then getting the tube from Stanmore, Victoria station seems a good place to meet up.

After clucking about like Mother Hen and showing them which tube trains to catch to get to Fulham Broadway, making sure they have money for programmes, and giving them bottle tops to put on the drinks they buy at the ground (Chelsea being one of those places where you buy a bottle of pop, and they hand it to you sans-top - cue massive lakes of coke washing under the seats) I watch them disappear into the distance and realise I have a little more of my freedom back.

That liberty today is taking me on a short rail hop to Redhill, not far from Reigate and a relatively recent arrival to Step 4. Armed with my Tube Day-Travelcard, which will take me as far as Coulsdon South, I buy a Senior-Railcard-discounted ticket from there to Earlswood which costs me the princely sum of £3.05. As the ticket man at Victoria says, "Blimey, we're almost paying you!"

There are two pubs quite close to Earlswood station, the nearest being the slightly down-at-heels-looking Chestnut Tree, and then the slightly-better-situated Joshua Tree. I don't have time to call into either but CAMRA's What Pub website reports both as selling cask beer. From the station it's a 15-minute hard walk to Redhill's Kiln Brow stadium, which sits alongside the busy A34. You can get to it down that road, or take a slightly more scenic route through a housing estate, and then a woodland path where squirrels, rabbits and even a Jay cross my path.

Access to the ground is via an ample car park which you suspect wouldn't even bulge for a local derby against South Park, capacious as it is. I enter the stadium to the sound of a tannoy blasting out hard-core gangster rap music with industrial language well to the fore. The pitch-side signs warning against using bad language

suddenly seem a bit ironic. The clubhouse bar appears well protected, behind a guarded gate, which probably explains why out of a crowd given as 100, only about ten of us are in there for a pre-match drink. In my case this is a refreshing pint of Robinson's Trooper, which the bar lady fetches from elsewhere. I presume this to be direct from the cellar, rather than from Stockport, where 'tis brewed.

I decline the opportunity to buy a raffle ticket when it is revealed over the tannoy that all prizes are in fact lumps of meat donated by a local butcher. Two of the eventual winners are standing near me, each congratulating the other on the quality of the dead flesh they have just won, the type of animal being probably undetermined. "It's not horse meat," says the tannoy reassuringly. That's narrowed it down a bit, then.

I settle down to survey the stadium, which consists primarily of flat standing all round, with a small covered area in one corner, and a seated stand on the halfway line. The sun is shining, it's FA Cup day, and Isthmian Division 1 rivals Carshalton Athletic are in town.

The game itself is interesting, possibly mildly entertaining, without ever reaching the heights. Both teams are evenly matched and have their chances, but it takes a close-range prod home from Redhill's fabulously-monikered Tyrone Pink on 55 minutes to settle the tie.

I arrive back at Victoria to get the low-down on Chelsea's almost-demolition of second-placed Swansea, which sounds a bit more exciting than my game. But at £33 cheaper through the turnstiles, and a new tick to boot, I have to thank the kids for finally loosening my reins!

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

Take me to the Bridge!

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