

TT No. 19: *Chris Freer* - Saturday October 4th 2014; **South Park** v Hythe Town; Isthmian Division One South; Score: 2-2; Attendance: 94; Entertainment value: 3/5.

I mentioned in my last blog entry about places in the UK that I generally look forward to visiting. There are precious few that I positively hate. Even Dire-by has some great pubs! But as a youth I developed a rapid disdain for the town of Reigate - and I'd never even been there! First Love, you understand; a girl with whom I was besotted at the time was sent by her catering company employers to fill a vacancy in the leafy environs of Surrey. To me it might as well have been another world, as I had no means of getting down there to visit and so the relationship ground to its inevitable conclusion. Damn town! Now, almost 40 years on, I am about to make my first visit to the place, though I suspect my 'long lost love' has long since moved on.

The weather forecast isn't good but as I arrive in the 'Smoke' at the ungodly hour of 7.25am I decide it's pleasant enough to make the near three-mile walk to Liverpool Street where my first stop will be the Hamilton Hall. This is not one of the biggest Wetherspoons but tends to be amongst the noisiest, popular as it is with footy fans heading out to matches in East London and Essex. Today I eschew the usual breakfast order in favour of just a glass of fresh orange juice, which then causes the heart of a lager-craving construction worker to miss a beat as it's set down in front of him, the barmaid having temporarily forgotten where I was standing.

From here I time it to arrive at the nearby Crosse Keys at just after 9.00am (as that is when they open) where I order my breakfast, albeit against my better judgement after encountering stropky bar staff. A pint of the excellent Nethergate Priory Mild - full-flavoured at 3.5% abv - helps to soothe my irritation.

After a detour to the Tower of London to witness the sea of poppies being created in the moat, I head towards the Shard and London Bridge station from where I catch my train to Reigate (boo!). It's raining on and off but I avoid the worst of it by pub-hopping my way from the centre of town down to the South Park area, first of all taking in the Blue Anchor, just a few doors up from the Pilgrim Brewery, whose Crusader it sells. It's golden (natch) but not overly citrusy which is a bonus. I pass several interesting-looking pubs in the middle of town before arriving at the Venture Inn, a large imposing two-bar hostelry with wooden floors which sells mainstream beers but with the added attraction of Harvey's Best Bitter (hurrah!)

It's umbrella time now as I head off in the direction of the ground, down a steep winding hill, just detouring to take in the cosy, well-decorated Barley Mow - the nearest pub to the stadium - which just sells one cask beer, Courage Best, a bland brew of which my example is a little past its best. No worries, the rain has eased and I head more or less across the road and down towards the Whitehall Lane

ground of newly-promoted Isthmian League Division One club, South Park. The ground and its clubhouse are separated by a cricket pitch, and despite conflicting advice from the same club steward about where to buy a programme, I make the purchase and retire to the bar. This is large and very modern, being stylishly decorated, and with the mother of all flat-screen TVs showing the sport. And although there's no cask beer, there are bottles of several British beer brands - including Hogs Back - in the fridge.

The stadium itself is tidy enough. There's a seated stand behind one goal, but most punters tend to congregate on the covered stepped terrace in front of the changing rooms, this complex also housing a small Tea & Snack bar at one end. Being peckish despite my Wetherspoons brekkie, I order a chip butty and receive enough chips to fill three! They are, however, a bit on the spindly side.

Today's game is against Hythe Town, one off the bottom of the table, but you wouldn't know it as, after surviving a dodgy first ten minutes, they take the game to their hosts and deservedly secure a first half lead. It doesn't look likely that South Park will do much about it until the game is suddenly turned on its head in the space of two minutes, with goals either side of the hour mark. But just as it seems that Hythe Town will leave pointless, a cross is converted on 88 and they take a share of the spoils.

"Damn Town", say the locals. Just like me, 40 years ago in fact!

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

Love lies limp....

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