

TT No.34: Chris Freer - Sat November 8th 2014; Brightlingsea Regent v Great Wakering Rovers; Isthmian Division 1 N; Score: 4-1; Crowd: 126; Entertainment value: 4/5.

Everybody loves a day by the seaside, even in those months where the weather is a bit inclement. I look back now and I marvel at the places my folks booked for our family holidays when we were kids, bearing in mind those pre-Internet days. Yes, like almost everybody who lived in Leicestershire in the 1950s, we did do the inevitable Butlins at 'Skeggy' (according to my mum, the soon-to-be TV comedian Dave Allen was 'our' Redcoat) but we also stayed at cottages, farms, chalets, caravans - and even a houseboat - in various off-the-beaten-track coastal towns and villages, in all parts of England and Wales, which they'd see advertised in the local paper.

Strangely enough, we never ever went to the South East of England. Whether it was the thought of having to drive through or round London I couldn't say, but most of my visits to the coastlines of Suffolk, Kent and Essex have been while pursuing my current hobby, the subject of this blog. A couple of years back I experienced Southwold for the first time, and today I'm off to one of the classic 'Cinque' ports, Brightlingsea in Essex.

As usual I'm on the early morning Megabus train out of Long Eaton, and into the 'Smoke' where I yomp to Liverpool Street and breakfast in the Hamilton Hall. As today is deemed a 'match day', fried eggs are off the menu (they possibly being viewed as a potentially dangerous weapon) and so it's the scrambled variety with one of those dodgy veggie sausages. My love affair with the 'Spoons veggie breakfast is beginning to wane.

From Liverpool Street I take a direct train for the over-priced journey to Wivenhoe in Essex, from where it's a short walk up to the local Co-op and then the 78 or 87 bus for the 20-minute trip into Brightlingsea. It's worth noting that you can also get off the train at Alresford and catch the same bus, with the distance between station and bus stop being somewhat smaller. Also, 78 & 87 tickets are only interchangeable for the return journey in the late evenings. However, at £1.80 single and £2.20 return, it's not going to break the bank.

I arrive in town a little too early for the pubs, so decide to do a bit of exploring, including sussing out the best route to the ground, which is only 5 minutes from the town centre. Then I go the other way down to the seafront, which I access via the perimeter of the boating lake (or large duck pond depending which part of the year it is!). Like the sea front, this is fringed with the kind of colourful huts often associated with Southwold, just up the coast. I walk round to the harbour where the tourist industry has wound down for the winter, but the coffee shop is busy, and the man selling fresh fish from the quayside is attracting some custom.

From here I walk up to the Hurst Green part of town, effectively a rural community spread around a village green, where the colourful Rosebud is my first beery port-of-call. It's a cosy inn with areas laid out for diners, but with enough space for a traditional bar area too. All three cask beers are from the local Mighty Oak Brewery, and I start off with the GBG award-winning Oscar Wilde mild, an excellent dark brew, followed by Captain Bob's, which provides a nice balance of malt and hops.

There are three pubs in the middle of town which I believe are operated by Greene King, so I detour back down towards the boating lake, and the street corner Railway Tavern, which has its own brewery. Commendably, the landlord has decreed they will only brew dark beers, and my pint of 'Big Three C's' is the best of the day. His other beers seem to be from Crouch Vale. The pub itself is decidedly unkempt but has a certain charm and loads of character. The gaffer and one of his customers are practising some guitar numbers when I arrive, although he assures me that he will be up at the ground later as one the Regent's self-proclaimed Ultras. The appropriate flags nestle in a corner of the bar.

And so up to the North Road ground, which is set at the end of, err, North Road, a quiet residential street. Primarily comprising flat standing, the stadium has the benefit of a small, seated kit-stand on either side of the pitch, there being no covered standing. The clubhouse sadly has no decent beer, although the man from the Railway Tavern did tell me earlier that he occasionally delivers some of his brews to the ground. Likewise, there's not a lot for the veggie on the food front.

Today's visitors to North Road are Great Wakering Rovers, another promoted team in Isthmian North for this season. And it's a fairly even contest for much of the first half hour, before Regent put their foot on the gas to strike three times in a ten-minute period which leaves Rovers reeling. The visiting team seem to be creeping back into the game after scoring on 57, but a further home strike ten minutes later seals the game as a contest.

And so, my day at the seaside draws to a close, and another part of the country is ticked off on my to-do list. And although it's not exactly teeming with holidaymakers at this time of year, you can bet your life they'll be back come the Summer, Butlins notwithstanding!

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

Where do we like to be?

04/20