

TT No.41: *Chris Freer* - Sat November 29th 2014; **Wisbech Town v Cogenhoe United**; United Counties Premier; Score: 3-0; Attendance: 100 or so; Entertainment value: 2/5.

As a child of the 1950s and an adolescent of the Sixties & early Seventies, I grew up in a time before 'Political Correctness' was invented. This generally meant we tended to call things as we saw them, without being demonised for doing so. If somebody was of a different race, size, gender or sexual orientation, we would and could comment accordingly, without fear of castigation. It was not malicious. We had a word for it. The word was 'banter'.

And we were all the subject of somebody's 'banter' at some time in our lives, and the theory was that you developed a thick skin, saw it for what it was (err, banter) and got on with your existence on Planet Earth. You only need to watch re-runs of black & white British movies (St Trinians, anyone?) and 1970s sit-coms to see what used to pass as acceptable behaviour.

Of course, times change and my teenage daughter, a child of the 21st Century, is the new guardian of 'Political Correctness' in our house. Woe betide me if I dare to comment on the potential pie-eating prowess of any character on a TV quiz or reality show!

I suppose football is one area that was slow to move with the times. As recently as the late 1990s I can recall standing on the Polam End at Feethams when a gang of youths began uttering monkey noises at a visiting black footballer. Outraged as we might have been, no-one confronted the bigots. And only last season at Barnet I sat within earshot of some bloke spouting forth with advice of a kitchen-based nature at the female referee. Even the stewards were laughing at him!

So, I suppose I still feel a sense of familiarity when I'm amongst football-supporting folk on match days. Overt racism may well be a thing of the past, but if we think the opposing keeper is a bit too fond of the pastry, we still feel able to comment accordingly. And I'm pretty sure the keeper would accept that for what it is - banter.

Today I will have a chance to catch up on any pre-PC gossip with my old pal, Nick. He's a few years younger than me, and the joke at his wedding was that I used to hang around outside his school gates in my battered Mark 2 Cortina, waiting for my shorts-clad young companion to emerge. Roars of laughter when recounted in 1994, doubtless the subject of Operation Something-or-other in 2014!

We're off to Wisbech Town, who ply their trade in the United Counties Premier. Wisbech is a town with which I am familiar, having attended numerous meetings and functions at the local brewery over the years. Although there is no railway station, an excellent bus service (X1) runs from Peterborough on a regular basis.

The region has seen a large influx of EU migrant workers in recent times, which is self-evident in the shop signage and overheard street conversations as you walk through the town. I'd hazard a guess that, despite the presence of the local brewery, real ale wouldn't be the pre-dominant drink in the area's pubs nowadays.

We arrive in a vicinity of the Fenland Stadium, which is a few hundred yards further out of town than the now-disused but still standing Fenland Park ground (Town's previous home), at around 2.00pm so decide to call into one of the local pubs for a pint. There are two or three pubs close to the ground, but we choose the spacious Black Bear which is more-or-less across the road. They have a couple of cask beers on tap, one of which - Adventurer - is produced locally by the Mile Tree microbrewery. It's typical of the modern style, being straw-coloured and slightly citric, and not one I'd be rushing up to the bar for another. But that's just my personal taste.

Into the ground, which has a spacious car park with stewards directing. Be warned. The rows are arbitrary and if you plan on making a swift getaway, think carefully where you position your vehicle! Inside the stadium the playing surface looks heavy but certainly playable, hence the pitch inspection earlier. There's a two-step covered terrace behind each goal, and a small seated stand straddling the halfway line. Opposite is the clubhouse bar area, where a good chunk of the crowd tends to congregate. The bar itself is reasonably large and benefits from a food hatch (just chips for the veggie) and a handpump selling Elgood's Cambridge Bitter, which sadly is not a good advertisement for the brewery, being not far short of undrinkable.

The game is between 8th-placed Wisbech and 4th-placed visitors Cogenhoe United, and is one in which the home side have the edge throughout, although a penalty on 48 is all they have to show for it going into the last few minutes of the match. But as the game becomes stretched, chances begin to appear and two late strikes put some gloss on the score-line and Town run out 3-0 winners.

During the match we position ourselves at various points around the ground, conversing with local stewards and commenting on how smart the linesmen look (or words to that effect), estimating the calorie intake of both goalkeepers, expressing disappointment at the absence of any fit lady physios, and bemoaning the lack of a good old-fashioned 22-man punch-up to enliven the proceedings. All classic old-school banter. I suspect my daughter would have been appalled!

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

Who ate all the pies?

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