

TT No.5: *Chris Freer* - Sat August 22nd 2015; **Brechin City** v Airdrieonians; Scottish League Division One; Score: 1-2; Attendance: 464; Entertainment value: 3/5.

There was a time when the three-month close season for football was the bane of this supporter's life. What to do in May, June and July before balls were effectively being kicked in anger once again. Although I like cricket, I couldn't see myself spending a whole day - or many days even - diligently filling in the score card whilst all around me were getting sozzled, or falling asleep, depending on their priorities. No, I like my live sporting action condensed into 2 or maybe 3 hours at best.

So, this year I thought that maybe I'd take a broader view of things. The footy trip to Ireland is always a help, but to fill in the rest of the Summer - and bearing in mind I don't 'do' football friendlies or so-called 'Summer Leagues' - I needed to find other competitive sports that ticked the right boxes. T20 cricket is more like it, but Rugby League is not for me. So, what else?

As teenage adolescents my brother and I spent many a Tuesday evening at Blackbird Road in Leicester. This was the home of the Lions, one of the country's top speedway teams. Though that track is now long gone, the Lions have a new stadium, and I thought it about time to make a visit and see if the passion was still there. I quickly discovered it certainly is.

So my blog now sports a new section, as the train-spotter instinct kicks in, and in addition to being a 'groundhopper' I am now officially a 'track-hopper' too! Not that I am alone in this obsession, as my new good buddy Aussie Jack is similarly minded and with us both being veggie-eating, real-ale-swilling, steam train enthusiasts, we might well be twins (although not the identical kind...)!

Which is why we are both up in Scotland today, having witnessed a one-sided speedway match between Edinburgh and Somerset the previous evening, followed by a few dark bevies in the strangely empty Wetherspoons in Grangemouth. Tomorrow we finish our weekend with a trip to the Caledonian Railway before driving to Glasgow to see the local team ride against Somerset (who are on tour). Sandwiched in between is the main event, my long-awaited visit to Glebe Park, home of Brechin City, and my last of the 41 stadiums currently used in the 4 divisions of the SFL. Given that I also have the English '92' tucked under my belt, does that make me a '133-ist'?

Back in the 1980s I ran a micro pub (yes, before they were 'invented') in Leicester. One room, no music, no lager, 5 real ales and a quirky bunch of customers, including the Midlands branch of the Brechin City Supporters Club. I vowed one day to make that trip to Glebe Park, and so I have purposefully saved it until last.

Having checked into our guest house at midday (pre-arranged with the Landlady who also wants to get to the match) we seek out the local architecture, as Brechin is indeed a cathedral city. That done, we head to the first of our targeted pubs, the Brown Horse, which is close to the ground. Most of the interior is laid out for dining, but there is a small unspoilt traditional bar which is already crammed with vertical locals watching the Celtic v Dundee United game on TV. Having obtained our pints of Atlas Nimbus - the only beer on hand pump - we retire to a smaller room nearby to find a space and watch the action.

Earlier we had taken the long walk down to the local railway station, home of the preserved branch line Caledonian Railway, and peered through the windows of the nearby Caledonian Hotel. Not open until three, we did venture in after the match and found two well-kept Scottish beers on tap, the names of which escape me (as in 'they weren't dark').

But back to pre-match, and the only other real ale pub in town, the Brechin Arms. This is essentially a one-room bar (there is a separate seating area) typically Scottish in style, with just the one hand pump, today serving Orkney Dark Island, a god-send after the highly citrusy Nimbus I had to endure earlier. Even though the Dark Island is not really on form, I'd rather drink that than yet another golden horror! One of the locals recognises us as being from south of the border, and on discovering I am about to complete the set of Scottish grounds, recommends I tell that to the gentleman on the gate up at Glebe Park, as it's something newsworthy for the club.

Sure enough, said gentleman - magnificently blazered as befits a proper football club official - listens to my story and promptly invites the pair of us into the Hospitality Area where it's first drink on the house and sandwiches at half time, plus the run of the ground. That suits Aussie Jack down to a 'T' as his penchant for taking pictures of anything that moves sits very well with a license to roam. So, at this point let us say a big Thank You to Martin and Anton at the club. To point out a lack of cask or local bottled ale in the bar or an absence of macaroni pies in the snack bar would therefore be churlish so I won't mention it...

Glebe Park is a treasure, with its hedges down both sides, a traditional covered terrace behind one goal, large cantilever stand behind the other, and the quaint Main Stand which looks much older than its 34 years. There's a noticeable end-to-end slope on the pitch but the playing surface looks immaculate. Too bad it's today's opponents Airdrieonians who make the most of that, taking advantage of first half defensive frailty to go two up at the break. Both sides have gone into the match without a point this season, and it's destined to be three defeats on the trot for City, despite notching a consolation goal after a penalty save, against opponents at this stage down to 10 men.

We say farewell to Glebe Park and with my prospects of any further trips to Scotland looking increasingly likely to be long-distance lower league forays, I may well not be back for a while. That is, unless, any new Speedway sides spring up in

this part of the world or, and one can only wish, the Highland League switches to the Summer! Now there's a thought...

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

Much more entertaining than tossing the caber....

04/20