

**TT No.31: *Chris Freer*** - Sat September 12th 2009; (A) **Motherwell** v Rangers; Scottish Premier League; Result: 0-0; Crowd: 9,355; Ent. Value: 3/5 and (B) **Celtic** v Dundee United; Scottish Premier League; Result: 1-1; Crowd: Not given; Ent. Value: 2/5.

Wow - two new grounds for the price of one!

Well, one rail ticket anyway. In fact, when I book the Virgin Voyager some weeks previously, I have no idea that TV companies are going to give me two bites of the cherry on the same day, but some time spent poring over rail timetables shows me that all things are achievable. It's a shame my train from Crewe doesn't stop at Motherwell on the way up (it thunders through) but I quickly change at Glasgow Central and am soon on my way to Airbles.

Airbles? I hear you say. It's the halt prior to Motherwell Central, but only a ten-minute brisk walk to Fir Park. In fact, this line from Glasgow Central to Motherwell and back is quite handy for other grounds, including Hamilton, and Celtic Park, which is where I am heading later, after visiting Fir Park for this 12.15pm ko against Rangers.

Some of the customers on the train out to Airbles have a certain earthy quality about them. I bury my head in my book - *The Damn United*, a car boot snip at £1 - whilst a group of youth's, serenade everybody in the carriage with a string of cider-fuelled profanities. The ticket collector slings a deaf ear whilst I - mindful of my south of the border accent - decide not to be a hero. These guys aren't going to the game, they're just rat-arsed locals probably doing what they usually do at midday on a Saturday.

Fir Park is a mixture of the old and new. I'm sitting in the East Stand where cunningly-placed stanchions impede part of the view. The newest - and tallest - stand contains the bulk of the Rangers supporters whilst the main stand holds some of the rest. Behind the other goal is a smaller seated stand. The game is nowhere near a sell-out, despite the limited capacity of Fir Park. I partake of a macaroni pie (one of the delights of Scotland) and settle down for the action.

Being a neutral at these kinds of game is enlightening. Every incident on the pitch brings hoots and howls of derision and outrage from my companions in the East Stand - Motherwell to a man, woman and child - whilst I struggle to see what all the fuss is about. I suppose that's what happens when you switch from the ardent week-in, week-out supporter I once was, to the nomadic stadium collector I am now. I've become sanitised!

Rangers look the most likely to score for most of the game, although Motherwell have some lively direct-running players who give the 'Gers defence a few problems. It's looking goalless until the referee intervenes and - surprisingly - awards the home team a late penalty. Now I've seen the script of these games

involving 'Auld Firm' teams and shouldn't it be Rangers getting the late winner? It sorts itself out when Motherwell remember their lines and 0-0 it stays.

Now it's time to shoot off to match 2, and I'm back on the train heading for Glasgow, until alighting at Dalmarnock. I'm not alone, as a phalanx of green & white clad troops (all chanting Celtic at each other, for what it's worth) take the ten-minute march to the stadium which looms above the houses on the near skyline. Celtic Park is a tad bigger than Fir Park and I spend some time walking around the exterior before finding my turnstile (one of more than 100, that's about 97 more than most of the grounds I go to). I suspect my seat might be sun-soaked and consider buying a cap before deciding not to queue for three hours trying to pay for it. When I find my seat, I wish I had, because I can for-see 90 minutes of squinting ahead of me!

The food stands are doing a roaring trade. Fortunately, I had my fill of macaroni pie earlier so I have no need to take my turn for the pizza and chips on offer. There's fish and chips, too, if you want to rid yourself of a Scottish fiver.

Surprising, Celtic Park is not full either, although there's a few thousand more than were at Motherwell. Probably about 50,000 more in fact. A little cluster of vocal fans in one enclave at my end do not stop singing from start to finish. Judging by the flags they wave, they're from overseas, and not Ireland, as you might imagine. Over on the far side, the modest gaggle of away fans - having left their taxis - are stunned by their heroes going a goal up in the early stages and can sing and dance for a while before an equaliser restores the status quo. Some pizza depository a few rows in front of me is shouting something indecipherable at the ref - or maybe it's the players - and spraying everybody within ten feet of him with the residue of his lunch. Truly, I chose my seat wisely (apart from the sun).

Despite showing promise in the first period, the game degenerates after the break and only really livens up when the script calls for a late Celtic winner. The home fans - those clad in the green and yellow dayglo away shirts looking like angry wasps dotted around the ground - do their best to raise the temp but despite the ref doing his bit by brandishing a red for a Dundee offence, the Hoops aren't good enough to score and it remains 1-1 to the end.

Just time, on the walk back into Glasgow, to avail myself of a pint at the West Brewery, a place I visited last year only to fall foul of archaic Scottish licensing laws which dictate pubs can't open until 12.30pm on a Sunday. Then it's one in the Pot Still before settling down for a snooze back to Crewe on my Virgin Voyager. Mission accomplished.

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

Footy from a veggie, real ale viewpoint.

06/20