

**TT No.57: *Andy Gallon*** - Sat 17th October 2009; **Charnock Richard** v Haslingden St Mary's; Richardson Cup Prelim. Rd; Res: 3-2; Att: 70 (h/c); Admission: £1.50; Programme: £1 (40pp); FGIF Match Rating: \*\*\*.

Visiting a progressive club is always a heartening experience. Charnock Richard, formed in 1955 and based in a near-comatose rural village just west of Chorley, have ambitions to follow former West Lancashire League rivals Barnoldswick Town into the North West Counties League - and are making rapid strides toward that goal. In recent seasons, the club took the decision to build a new ground on the west side of Charter Lane. Mossie Close, their previous home, is opposite and still exists, and is used by the A team, who play in the Preston & District League. But the senior and reserve sides are now based at Mossie Park, which is being developed steadily ahead of a likely application to join the NWCL for the 2011-12 season.

The recession, and consequent loss of income, has hit Charnock in the same manner it has so many smaller non-league clubs. They are looking for an influx of cash so they can finish new dressing rooms, which at the moment are merely foundations in the north-east corner of Mossie Park. The club are advertising for a commercial manager, to be paid on a commission-only basis, and will be hoping the appointee can work a miracle. More seriously, Charnock have had refused by planners an application for floodlights in the car park and on the ground. The money is not yet in place to erect them, so this issue has been put on the backburner for the time being. But it won't go away, I guess.

Mossie Close, opened in 1968, is worth a look before heading to the new ground. It's easy to see why Charnock decided to begin again. A constricted, though pleasant, site, hemmed in by Charter Lane at the west end and by houses to the north and south, it would be impossible to develop it to the standards required. A brick building, opened in 1988, forms an 'L' shape around a corner at the near end, and houses the dressing rooms and social club. The pitch is railed off, and there are dug-outs on the southern touchline, but no stands or cover.

Over the road, a large, unmade car park provides access to Mossie Park, looking particularly attractive on a mild, sunny autumn afternoon. Charnock prefer regulars and visitors to use the car park to avoid antagonising Charter Lane residents, who could, in the long run, hold the key to the floodlighting impasse, and don't take kindly to strange cars outside their homes. There'll always be an England, eh? The ground is enclosed by a metal mesh fence, about 12 feet high and painted dark green. A gate at the east end is guarded by a wooden pay hut. Entering behind the goal, the foundations for the dressing rooms are to the right. The pitch, which appears to slope downhill slightly from south to north, is surrounded by a flimsy-feeling fence of white plastic posts and panels. There is a 20-yard kit stand on the halfway line on the northern touchline. This contains four rows of plastic tip-up seats in a mixture of dark green and white. The club's name,

green letters on a white background, is picked out on the fascia. To the rear is a golf course, and beyond that the elegant tower of Christ Church, fashioned from a pleasing salmon-coloured stone, mellowed in places into darker tones.

The remainder of the ground consists of dark aggregate hardstanding. Smart, sturdy Perspex dugouts straddle the halfway line on the southern touchline. Beyond the perimeter fence is the ground of Charnock Richard's cricket club. At present, the footballers use the changing rooms in the cricket pavilion, which is over to the left as you enter Mossie Park. Flat farmland stretches away behind the goal at the west end, and on the occasion of our visit a hard-working tractor provided a pleasant background buzz. Beyond the east end, above the rooftops of Chorley, can be seen the heights of the West Lancashire Moors. The monument on Rivington Pike (1,191 feet) and the telecommunications masts dotting Winter Hill's flat summit (1,496 feet) are prominent. The ground is neat and tidy, but no more exciting or interesting than functional can ever be. The warmth of the welcome compensates, however. It seemed everyone was keen to meet and greet 'hoppers' from the other side of the Pennines. Special thanks to the chap who gave us a chance to try Uncle Joe's Mint Balls - a sugary confection which surely ranks among Wigan's finest exports.

Charnock Richard, despite being saddled with several suspensions this season, are top of the West Lancashire League, which they joined in 1993 after spells in the Chorley Alliance League, the Bolton Combination and the Preston & District League. They went into this preliminary round Richardson Cup tie on the back of a shock 3-0 Lancashire Amateur Shield defeat at Haslingden St Mary's, and a 2-2 league draw at local rivals Euxton Villa. That said, the home team looked like league leaders. They played with confidence and authority, moving well off the ball and retaining possession much better than the opposition. Mary's, by comparison, looked leaden. How they beat the same opposition by such a margin a fortnight previously was difficult to comprehend. Oh, and don't be fooled by the final score. The visitors were outplayed, and gained a measure of respectability by scoring twice in stoppage time at the end of the second half.

The opening 45 minutes were goalless, and not great. The action was disappointingly scrappy, with most of the play in the half Haslingden were defending. Mary's skipper Oliver Wilkinson cleared off the line in the fifth minute after John Sanderson, returning from a ban, had latched on to an Alex Randell pass, beaten keeper Chris Cogger to the ball and sent it angling goalward. What followed was an arm wrestle, though Sanderson volleyed wildly over on the half-hour when a little composure might have brought a more satisfactory outcome. The quick and skilful Randell, who has played at Northern Premier League level and was simply outstanding, hit a crisp 20-yarder straight at Cogger soon after, and just before the break, placed a low effort from the edge of the box a foot wide after a determined run from midfield. Damian Dashti, a tireless bundle of energy at right-back, curled a shot past a post and Mark Kerr stung Cogger's fingers from 30 yards. Haslingden, harried and hassled, contributed nothing of note in attack.

The contest was considerably brighter in the second half. Many of the crowd (including us!) were still engaged in crossing Charter Lane, having watched a bit of the A team game (including a converted penalty for the home team) and grabbed a mug of tea in the social club, when Randell (47) broke the deadlock from close range following a cross by Phil Jackson. It sparked a long period of domination from Charnock. Jackson, fed by Sanderson, shot over when through on the left, but a Randell cross from same flank was glanced in from 10 yards by Kerr (53), who jumped unmarked to score his first goal for the club. Mary's were rocking now. Skipper Andy Roberts blasted wastefully over when a Dashti pull-back left the goal at his mercy and muscular substitute Carl Grimshaw, Charnock's top scorer and just back from a hamstring injury, screwed an angled effort wide when through on Cogger. But the hosts went 3-0 up with a superb effort in the 73rd minute. A flowing move ended with Jackson pulling the ball back and Randell, steaming in unpoliced, cracked an unstoppable 10-yarder past the visiting keeper. The game was over, and Charnock eased off, allowing Haslingden to get two late consolation goals. Substitute David Snape sent Kevin Baldwin the wrong way from the spot after Dashti, spoiling an otherwise unblemished performance, upended Jeff Moulton in the penalty area. Moulton then hooked a left-footed volley from the left angle of the box across the Charnock keeper and into the side of the net. Stunning, but the visitors did not have time to push for an equaliser and Charnock now travel to Blackpool Wren Rovers in the first round on November 7.

Charnock Richard have long been noted for the quality of their match programme, and the issue for this game did not disappoint. Without a home game in a month, editor Keith Reader, also the vice-chairman, came up with a bumper 40-page edition - the maximum his stapler will tackle! The colour photographs from the lens of Ken Chapman enlivened an already impressive production containing plenty of reading material, including a decent amount of comment - always unusual. The level of organisation and professionalism at a club is often reflected in the quality of their programme, and on that basis alone, Charnock Richard are heading in the right direction. Let's hope the changing rooms reach completion, and the floodlights issue is resolved in their favour.

06/20