

TT No.225: *Chris Freer* - Saturday April 2nd 2011; **Maine Road** v Colne; North West Counties Premier; Score: 4-1; Attendance: 68; Entertainment value: 4/5.

I don't know if they still do it or not, but on the first day of the FA Cup each season, BBC's Football Focus would always check on how Wembley FC were doing, for no other reason than the club bore the same name as the stadium destined to host the final. Actually, there can't be too many teams that share a name with a football ground - even their own - but one in the North West Counties league has always caught my eye.

Maine Road FC was set up in the 1950's by supporters of Manchester City, and the links to the Premier League big boys are still evident with a very similar club badge and, of course, the light blue shirts. With the disappearance of Maine Road - the football Stadium - and the decamping of City to east Manchester, Maine Road - the Football Club - now describe themselves as the biggest team in south Manchester. A shame then that City fans apparently no longer seem to view them as little brothers to be encouraged, as their gates compare very poorly to those of FC United of Manchester, the 'satellite' club of their cross-town neighbours.

My rail journey today would have been £5 cheaper had I decided to travel via Stoke. But with the Potters being at home, and a race day at Uttoxeter, I can't face being crammed into that single carriage that East Midlands Trains always allocate to this line, so I travel via Sheffield and arrive in Manchester at about 11.00am. I've done my research and know that the 86 bus from Piccadilly Gardens to Chorlton goes very close to the ground. Failing that the 85 gets there via a slightly different route. The driver on the 86 is not very helpful and says I should get the 85, so I do, alighting at Morrisons with the help of my I-phone satnav. From here it's just a short walk to my first target for the day, the Sedge Lynn, a Wetherspoons hostelry at the bottom end of Manchester Road East.

Not quite so big as the average Wetherspoons, the pub is not that busy. I order up my usual large veggie brekkie whilst surveying the Beer Festival ales on tap. I was at Birmingham airport in the week waiting to collect the Old Dear from a delayed flight. I killed time in the Wetherspoons bar where three strong, dark ales smiled out at this driver from the bar. I was restricted to fruit juice. Today I am faced with several golden hoppy ales...yippee my favourite (not). To make things worse my CAMRA vouchers expired two days ago. So, I enjoy my breakfast and swiftly move onto my next port-of-call, the OTHER Marble Brewery pub, just up the road.

En-route I pass a semi-outdoor Deli bar where people are literally queueing up on the street waiting to be served. That must be where all the punters in Chorlton go, because there aren't that many in the Marble Beerhouse, the exact opposite of its parent pub in North Manchester where I can never get a seat. At least today I can settle into a corner undisturbed and savour a pint of Marble Ginger quickly followed by a similar quantity of Marble Chocolate. I have to admit they do brew

characterful beers. 25 yards or so from here is another converted shop called P1 which is in the Good Beer Guide. They produce a beer list, like a continental cafe, and although much of it is predictable, there are a few interesting items in there. Two of the three hand-pumped beers are from the Knutsford-based Tatton Brewery - there appears to be a relationship - and I select the White Queen, their new and very palatable wheat beer.

From here there's a good ten-minute walk down Brantingham Road to reach the home of Maine Road FC, which is not signed. The interesting but decidedly tatty turnstile block is 'womanned' by a chatty blond and I take my turn to enter the ground after the two teams, who had been warming up outside, bulldoze their way in - unusual to say the least. The stadium has seen better days. There are two stepped areas covered by what looks like corrugated iron roofing, with some planks to sit on. Behind one goal is some raised terracing.

A snack bar set slightly away from the pitch can offer me just vegetable soup - fortunately I'm still stuffed from my brekkie and the subsequent ale - and when I venture back out of the ground and into the clubhouse, where the only toilets are kept, the bar is closed. It remains so for the rest of the afternoon. A lady visitor enquires about the afore-mentioned toilet facilities and a helpful wag directs her to 'the nearest bush...but if it's a burning bush, don't squat!' He's either used that line before, or he has the ready wit of a Paul Merton.

Maine Road's opponents today are Colne FC. The descendants of the all-conquering Colne Dynamos of a few years hence, 2011's side sits at the top end of the division but with no chance of promotion. The home team can be best described as 'mid-table', but are ahead almost instantly from a powerful 25-yarder. A professional-looking photographer joins me behind the goal and I cheerfully point out he's just missed the opening strike. 'Just my luck it'll be the only goal of the game...' he wistfully notes. He doesn't need to worry because we've got an open and entertaining match on our hands and despite being pegged back during the middle of the half, Maine Road click into the goal-scoring gear halfway through the second and, ably led by a Number 9 with a hairstyle he'll laugh at in ten years' time, score three goals in quick succession, the last from the spot also resulting in a red card for a Colne defender.

So, my day at Maine Road is done. I did actually get to go to the old Maine Road once, back in the late 1980's, so this is something of a double. Wouldn't it be nice to see some of the other sadly departed classic stadiums celebrated in similar fashion? What price a Roker Park FC, or a Filbert Street FC? Mind you, you'd have to be comfortable with your sexuality by setting up a Gay Meadow FC. And as for Love Street FC, we might be looking at a different participation sport entirely...

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

Good ale - and some footy too!

07/20