

TT No.115: *Chris Freer* - Sat December 10th 2011; **Pickering Town** v Maltby Main; Northern Counties East Premier; Score: 0-1; Attendance: 115; Entertainment value: 1/5.

I suspect I'm not the only family man who likes to take the missus away for a weekend - without the kids - at least once a year. Indeed, we have our own little 'bolt hole' pub in north Yorkshire which boasts a few well-appointed letting bedrooms, a cracking restaurant, and - all importantly - its own brewery at the back. We usually do a bit of shopping en route, spend the evening sampling the local produce, and then make our way back home on a leisurely basis the following day.

Now and again I also manage to fit in a game of football. Looking back at my diaries I see that on the day of our first visit - back in 1997 - I let the wife loose in Darlington with my credit card while I slipped over to Feethams to watch Darlo play Mansfield. On another occasion I left her to sleep off a heavy lunch in the car as I felt obliged to attend the Whitby Town v Matlock Town fixture taking place quite coincidentally (yeah, right!) 100 yards from where we were parked up.

Circumstances this year have dictated that our 'bolt hole' weekend will be just before Christmas, and - weather permitting - should give the wife a chance of a bit of pre-Christmas shopping in the charming market town of Pickering where - by sheer chance - the local footy team are also playing at home.

I've often passed this stadium on the many occasions of our visits to the area but as yet never managed to fit a game in. As the extreme northern outpost for the Northern Counties East League, it would be handy to 'tick' this ground off without having to make a special visit, so I'm praying that the coldish snap that has signalled the end of a mild Autumn doesn't scupper the game. The league website states, that the game is definitely 'On' after a pitch inspection so we park up in Pickering Town centre, say Au Revoir as we set out on our differing missions, and I take the ten minute walk to the Mill Hill Recreation Ground which necessitates me having to trek all the way round the pavilion and enter the ground via the car park.

As a bit of a footballing oasis in this part of the world, crowds are pretty reasonable at Pickering by NCEL standards, and there's 115 hardy souls braving the just-above-zero temperatures which leave the linesman and substitutes crunching up and down the frosty touchline, with one of the latter claiming to be doing a passable Torvill & Dean impression.

Pickering's ground is quite well appointed with not one but two seated stands, one straddling the halfway line and the other behind one goal, whilst there's some covered shallow terracing by the side of the other goal. The clubhouse is one of the largest I've seen for a club at this level, and features two rooms, one with a bar serving two real ales - John Smith's Cask and Thwaites Wainwrights - whilst the other sports a food hatch, with pie and peas being the order of the day. Sadly,

they're all meaty pies so it looks like I'll be building up an appetite for my Scampi and Chips dinner later.

Today's game is against rock-bottom Maltby Main - birthplace of Freddie Truman according to chalked promotional signs at the entrance to the ground and with Pickering too close to the drop zone for comfort, the home loyalists are expecting no less than three points from this fixture. The visitors, having not won since the opening game of the current campaign and with a mid-season goal difference of -42, would appear to be lambs to the slaughter for a Pickering side that netted 5 in a midweek League Cup game. As so often happens on occasions such as this, the form book goes out of the window.

Despite a bright start when the home team can't quite capitalise on the Maltby goalie's inability to kick a ball, the first half degenerates into a midfield mess where neither side can add a third pass to the first two, they just about manage. The more Town huff and puff in their attempts to put a decent attacking move together, the more Maltby believe that their occasional counter-attacks will bear some fruit, and so it does early in the second half, when a sustained spell of pressure leads to the visitors taking a not-undeserved lead. With the natives getting restless Pickering try to up the ante but it's to no avail and the visitors have their second win of the season.

As I rendezvous with the wife and we head off to our adopted home for the night, I muse to myself how one man's meat can be another's poison. Being in this part of the world is my idea of a good weekend, and I'm surely joined in that thought today by the management and players of Maltby Main FC. On the other hand, the Pickering Town lads would probably be anywhere else but here right now....

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

A place to escape to...

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