Remembering

With Remembrance Sunday last week, Armed Services Day today and the Centenary of the Christmas Day Truce being commemorated at the Carol Service next month, there seems to be a lot of remembering going on at the moment. And that’s no bad thing.

We forget too easily and it seems to me that we are being more and more disconnected with our past here in modern Britain. I’ve enjoyed the BBC Sport features on lost football grounds – tracing the history of some of the nation’s best known and most fondly remembered grounds, and what’s happened to them now (most of them have become housing estates with little statues or commemorative plaques where the centre spot once was or someone made a great save).

I remember my last visit to Maine Road, the day after my grandfather’s funeral. My dad led us through the backstreets of Moss Side where he grew up, we munched on a pie as we walked through the sort of iconic streets reminiscent of the opening credits of Coronation Street, and then out of nowhere emerged the stadium, swarming with City fans and buzzing with the expectation of a fine win. We (yes I was CTID before I moved to Plymouth) had slipped into the old second division and were playing Reading, which at the time felt like a bit of a come down, and we watched a dismal 0-0 with hardly a successful pass completed until in the 90th minute City got a penalty and Kinkladze stepped up to take it. He never missed: the man was a football genius. At least we will return from our mission with a home win, to be dedicated to the memory of my dear grandfather.

As I watched it go wide of the post and we trudged out of the Kippax Stand and off home, I reflected on the how it was I felt tied through loyalty to support City where all my friends followed whatever team they fancied, usually whoever was top of the table when they made their decision, and always more successful than City.

I was teaching in a primary school a few years back and I spotted a Man City lunchbox and my heart leapt, until I realised what had happened in Manchester since I was last there – they had exchanged the character and history of Maine Road for millions of pounds of foreign investment and top spot in the premiership.

It’s worth saying that in that primary school there were more Argyle shirts on display than premier league clubs, and I’m proud of Argyle’s history even if I wasn’t about at the time, proud of the place PAFC has at the heart of the culture of Plymouth, and proud of Home Park. So many grounds have been lost to anonymous, off-the-shelf identikit stadiums, just as much of the character of our high streets have been lost to bland shopping centres that could be anywhere.

It’s another reason why remembering is important, along with taking the long view and understanding (in the words of Aldous Huxley); ‘That men do not learn very much from the lessons of history is the most important of all the lessons of history.’