



The enigmatic **Tom Callaghan** was the first man to manage the side that became the current Chesterfield FC.

Claiming to have managed Oldham during the Great War, he was one of 67 applicants to the post of Secretary/Manager to the Chesterfield Municipal FC in April 1919.

Callaghan was appointed by the Town Council's Sports Committee at a salary of

£260 per annum and was given a fortnight or so to assemble a side for two matches at the end of the 1918-19 season. He roped in old chums from the Manchester area, and returning soldiers from the Great War, putting together a side loaded with internationals and First Division players like Andy Wilson (Sheffield Wednesday and Scotland), Billy Halligan, Paddy O'Connell and Arthur Donnelly (Ireland) and Jack Carr (Middlesbrough and England).

Wartime "guest" player regulations made this possible, and by the time "real" Midland League football resumed in August 1919 these players were back with top clubs. Callaghan struggled to find his best eleven, using eighteen players in his first five games. He looked to have solved the problem centre-forward position with the signing of Frank McPherson from Barrow Shipbuilders, and the player enjoyed a successful debut, scoring twice against South Normanton Colliery in the FA Cup. After being beaten five-nil, though, the Colliers announced that they were going to protest to the FA that McPherson was cup-tied.

Callaghan issued a straight denial of any knowledge that McPherson had already played in the cup that season. When an FA inquiry ascertained that McPherson had played for his previous club in an earlier round they suspended the player for a month and slung Chesterfield out of the Cup.

Callaghan could see the only consequence of this and absented himself from a routine meeting of the Sports Committee shortly afterwards. The committee launched an inquiry of their own to get to the truth.

McPherson maintained throughout that he had told Callaghan that he was cup-tied. If he was told, Callaghan chose to ignore it, on the not unreasonable grounds that South Normanton would be an unlikely place to find a statto who knew the line-up of the Barrow Shipbuilders' side in the preliminary round. Looking back on it, one is forced to entertain the possibility that someone at the club had it in for Callaghan and tipped off the Colliers to drop him in it.

Callaghan's greatest error came after the protest was registered. He ordered Peter Irvine, the Municipal side's skipper, to verify his claim that McPherson had said

nothing about being cup-tied, and he offered McPherson five pounds to deny that he had ever surrendered such information. These were not the actions of an innocent man. Callaghan was sacked in his absence and was never heard of again, in football circles.

No trace of any subsequent football-based career for Tom Callaghan can be found. He is not to be confused with the former Glossop and Manchester City player, and enquiries among Oldham historians have drawn a blank. Enigmatic, then? “Slippery” might be a better word. A year before Callaghan ran away from Chesterfield, a child was born in Oldham, the product of an adulterous relationship in which Callaghan was named as the father. An appeal for information regarding Callaghan's whereabouts appeared in the local press a year after he left, from detectives anxious to trace him, as he had been named as co-respondent in a divorce case. In the event, the case went through the courts uncontested. It appears that the child lived her life knowing nothing about her real father and his evident lack of redeeming qualities.

Stuart Basson, 2025.