

**TT No.203: Mike Latham** - Mon 27 Mar 2006; Craven Cup 3rd Round: **Penrith** 4-1 Consett; Attendance: 120 est.; Admission: £4; Match Programme: 4pp free; FGIF Match Rating: 4\*.

With the wet weather continuing to play havoc with fixtures- all the NWCL games were postponed, as were all the other Northern League games scheduled for this evening- a friendly voice on the other end of the telephone confirming that the game at Penrith was “definitely on” at last brought some encouraging news amidst the gloom that the Monday might be blank football-wise.

The journey up the rain drenched M6 was far from easy but for once the warned-of hold-ups from the radio travel news on one stretch happily failed to materialise and soon the floodlights of Penrith’s Southend Road ground were seen shining brightly in the distance. The Craven Cup is a knock-out competition for second division Northern League clubs and this tie attracted a decent turn-out on a wet evening.

Located just a short walk from the town centre, the ground is in its last years before being developed as a retail site. One club official explained, though, that planning permission had still to be granted for their proposed new ground off the Appelby Road leading out of the town.

With the current ground located adjacent to a new leisure centre and with football pitches in close proximity it will be a shame in many ways when Penrith do move, for its current location is an excellent one. The ground, though showing inevitable signs of age, is well kept and full of character.

There is plenty of car-parking just outside and a warm welcome was dispensed at the turnstile together with profuse apologies that a full programme had not been produced for the game. A four-page folded sheet was handed out free of charge and copies of previous games’ programmes were freely given away in the tea bar behind the far goal. The club secretary, a thoroughly charming gentleman and holder of that position since 1962 could not have been more helpful and the chairman, David Noble, was equally friendly and informative.

The main stand is slightly elevated above the narrow terrace in front and bears the legend ‘Penrith Football Club’ in white lettering on a blue background on the roof. With several rows of bench seating there was an excellent view. On the far side is a small covered shallow terrace and the rest of the ground is open standing.

The old club house is no longer in the club’s hands and was not open but a well-stocked tea bar did a roaring trade and dispensed a good range of freshly prepared snacks and refreshments. There is also a pleasant seated area inside and the chance was taken to read the previous Saturday’s home programme- a well-produced 28-page production with a striking full colour cover with some interesting articles and good statistics.

The pitch had stood up well to the downpours and Penrith, with a reputation of being a good footballing side, survived some early scares to assert their authority on a free-flowing game. Consett are the runaway leaders of the second division of the Northern League and have lost just one league game all season. But on this occasion, they were decidedly second best to a vibrant Penrith side.

An outpost club in many ways, with long distances to travel to compete in the Northern League, Penrith is a really friendly place to visit. Club officials and supporters were keen to chat and clearly took a pride in their club and the football they played was a credit to manager David Heslop. The supporters also seemed very knowledgeable and were keen to applaud good play by the opposition as well as by their own team.

As an added bonus the latest edition of the wonderful Northern League magazine was on sale for the princely price of 30pence, ensuring plenty of thought-provoking reading matter at half-time and for later in the week. If you haven't had the chance to visit Southend Road, Penrith's home since their formation in 1894, then do so while you can. It is not as geographically isolated as you may think- about 70-or-80 minutes' comfortable drive from Preston and just five minutes off J40 of the M6. With the town in close proximity and a host of tourist locations nearby a Saturday visit with time to spare would be particularly rewarding. On this evidence you can be assured of a warm welcome and good football in pleasant surroundings- certainly the journey home through driving rain and low cloud was done made all the more bearable with the lasting memories of a good night out in good company.

04/20