

TT No. 151: Mike Latham - Sat 17 Feb 2007: Scottish Junior Cup 5th Round.
Arthurlie 1-1 Petershill F&A Club. Attendance: 750 (headcount); Admission: £5;
32pp programme: £1. FGIF Match Rating: 4*/

On a gloriously mild and sunny winter's day the opportunity to take in action in the Scottish Junior Cup was just too good to miss especially as the visit entailed a former Scottish League ground into the bargain.

Arthurlie FC are one of the oldest clubs in Scotland, formed in 1874 and one of only five remaining who took part in the inaugural Scottish FA Cup competition. They moved from Dovecothall to Dunterlie Park in 1921 but resigned their league membership, which they had held since 1901, in 1929 before reverting to the junior ranks.

Their name derives from the Gaelic 'Arthur's Meadow' being one of the villages that formed the township of Barrhead, now with a population of over 20,000. Located south-west of Glasgow close to East Kilbride and Paisley, it is one of the easiest grounds to visit by rail, Dunterlie Park being just 200 yards from Barrhead station.

The highest recorded gate for a league match was 6,000 against Third Lanark in 1925 though, a far higher gate, 10,500 attended a Scottish Junior Cup-tie against Cambuslang in 1939.

Arthurlie, nicknamed 'The 'Lie' are one of the best supported junior clubs in Scotland and have an especially close rivalry with neighbours Pollok. They have an excellent club website and the 32-page programme, with a full colour cover, was good value for £1. Originally produced for the tie the previous Saturday, which was postponed due to bad weather, it informed that the 'Lie were third favourites for the competition, which was first competed for in 1886/87 season. Arthurlie's last success in the Cup was in 1998, Petershill's back in 1956.

After a traumatic 2005/06 season which included the docking of 12 league points and one of their players being banned for five years for an alleged assault charge, a management change and a completely new playing squad taking part in the current campaign, they have re-built well and currently lie fifth in the Stagecoach Super League Premier Division, two places above their visitors and so a closely fought game was forecast. So, it proved.

The ground is a magnificently atmospheric arena, entered by turnstiles at the railway station end. There are two sides of good, deep terracing, the far side having the advantage of a substantial cover, its roof neatly painted in the club's distinctive blue and white stripes and bearing the legend 'Arthurlie Football Club.'

The near-side, bordering Carlibar Road has only shallow terracing up to the dug-out on the halfway line and then a small amount of standing further down. Behind

the far goal the dressing rooms are located with a limited amount of flat standing behind a post-and-rail fence.

The ground is well maintained and, bordered by a mixture of light industry, works and residential housing, with a striking stone-built tenement behind the near-side goal, has an enviably enclosed feel. The playing area, sloping downwards from the station end, was in excellent condition though there was not much room between the edge of the penalty area and the touchlines. It reminded me somewhat of the lamented Grundy Hill ground at Horwich and had an atmosphere of its own, so much better than the sanitised feel of a modern new stadium.

There was an excellent refreshment hut by the entrance that did a roaring trade with its selection of pies, sausage rolls and hot drinks while a range of club souvenirs were available on a stall by the entrance. The demand for sustenance was such that a new batch of steak pies was baked just before the half-time break. Club officials were friendly and welcoming and there was a real feel of anticipation in the air as the teams warmed up with a place in the last eight of the prestigious competition at stake. Don't rely on catching the team line-ups on the tannoy, though. They are given out once, but at breakneck speed in an unintelligibly (for these ears) thick Glasgow accent. And, according to the programme's squad lists, with ten of the players on view having surnames beginning with 'Mc' it was a lottery to record the details. Thank goodness for the club website giving a report of the game later.

The first twenty minutes were as fast and frenetic as I have witnessed all season, the action unrelenting as the two teams threw themselves into the action at 100mph. Against the run of play the home side scored first, an excellently placed free-kick by John Johnston breaking the deadlock. Though the pace of the game slackened somewhat thereafter it remained highly watchable and the standard certainly seemed to be higher than recent games in Scottish League Divisions Two and Three that I had recently witnessed. Indeed, the attendance of around 750 (on a headcount and confirmed later by the club's website) was higher than seven of the ten gates in the bottom two senior divisions that afternoon.

It was no great surprise that the visitors got back on level terms when just after the hour-mark, Kevin Murray headed a left-wing corner firmly past the home' keeper. My new-found friends on the Dunterlie Park terraces assured me that was one of the 'Lie's worst performances of the season and the visitors, resplendent in their maroon kit and backed by a large travelling support, were fully deserving of their draw.

With the game kicking-off at 2-15pm the journey south was mostly negotiated in the light- a tremendous bonus- the journey back to J5 of the M74 via East Kilbride taking less than half-an-hour. I had deliberated long and hard about my choice of game, one fellow traveller opting for another cup-tie, at Tranent. When I got home, I looked up the result, as we have a friendly rivalry over goals scored, only to find the game had been called off 15 minutes before kick-off due to water-

logging of part of the pitch. He had to swiftly follow Plan B and resort to a game at Berwick down the coast.

The crowd were friendly, intense and passionate in their support of the teams though this never boiled over into nastiness and the game, fast and furious and played at a high tempo, was keenly fought but played in excellent spirit and well refereed. In fact, this was an afternoon to savour and a visit to the historic Dunterlie Park comes highly recommended.

06/20