

TT No.194: *Andy Gallon* - Fri 15th February 2008; **Llangefni Town v Airbus UK Broughton**; Welsh Premier League; Res: 0-3; Att: 368; Admission: £6; Programme: £1.50 (28pp); FGIF Match Rating: ***.

To poet Goronwy Owen, his native Anglesey was "the delight of all regions, bountiful as a second Eden or an ancient paradise". Standing on the island's rocky south-eastern shore on a stunningly sunny winter's afternoon, gazing across the silvery narrows of the Menai Straits to the silhouetted pinnacle of Snowdon and the black outline of Caernarfon Castle's majestic battlements, it's impossible to disagree. The magical stillness is punctuated only by the occasional dissenting voice of a gull and the murmur of tethered boats rocked gently in the shallows by the caress of the incoming tide. A lullaby to massage away the aches and pains of life's petty problems.

Anglesey's glories are to be found in its coastal extremities. Llangefni, the island's county town and administrative and cultural centre, is marooned within the considerably duller interior. The town, laid out in a shallow valley and hallmarked by claustrophobically narrow streets, is unremarkable, though one or two of its buildings - notably the town hall and the clock monument to former JP George Pritchard Rayner - bring to mind the granite splendour of Aberdeen. For my money, the best bet for pre-match entertainment is The Dingle - not a pub, but an easy two-mile boardwalk up the Valley of the Deluge. The route, which starts from the former railway station, parallels the Afon Cefni and the track-bed of the disused line to Amlwch. Its early stages are deep in the confines of a wooded gorge before the terrain opens out to reveal a reservoir secreted in wild and lonely countryside.

Llangefni Town's ground, Cae Bob Parry, opened for the club's debut Cymru Alliance season in 1999, is perched on the eastern lip of the valley. The approach, through a fairly unappealing housing estate, is not promising. To the left as you head up Talwrn Road is the town's major landmark - a stocky former windmill which stands sentinel-like above a limestone cliff, seemingly the master of all it surveys. The ground, opposite a construction site for the county council, doesn't look much from the outside, though the location is semi-rural. There is a large, unmetalled car park, a floodlit five-a-side pitch with a tarmac surface and an ugly perimeter fence of steel slats backing on to a dreary double decker block of portable buildings. First impressions, however, can be deceptive. Inside, Cae Bob Parry (named after a local estate agency which sponsors the club) has cover on all four sides and is neat, tidy and immaculately maintained.

There have been big changes since last season's promotion to the Welsh Premier League as Cymru Alliance champions - and more are planned. The main stand, to the left as you enter, and the cover at the far end went up over the summer. Town also had to fork out to install white panels to provide a solid barrier round the pitch. It might be an optical illusion to rival artist Rex Whistler's astonishing

trompe l'oeil at nearby Plas Newydd, but the playing surface seems exceptionally wide. The two new stands are fabricated from blue metal corrugated sheeting, with the framework painted yellow. The boxy main stand offers five rows of blue plastic tip-up seats, some of them padded. Behind there is a wide strip of grass and to either side modern Perspex dugouts. To the right of the stand is a single-storey, grey block housing the dressing rooms and refreshment hatch. Beyond that, in the near left-hand corner, the portable buildings contain the social club, which is pleasant and welcoming, and has team, action and ground photographs on the walls to lend a bit of individuality. Town hope to rent out the upper tier as office space. The far end cover, unusually, is built over grass, and the hardstanding path which surrounds the pitch runs in front - within reach of the elements. The stand's low, pitched roof is held in place by 17 columns. Some kind of record, surely?

The stand on the right side is rather smaller and older than that opposite, though again made from blue corrugated metal sheeting. Its roof, pitched at two angles, covers five rows of fairly ramshackle blue plastic seats, the view from which is obscured by the presence of a scaffolding TV gantry. Tonight, a cameraman (singular) recording footage for the Welsh language Clwb Pel Droed magazine programme occupies its heights. At the near end, to the right of the turnstile, is another low cover. It is very deep and has roof columns apparently made from telegraph poles. Much of the stand, again of blue corrugated metal sheeting, is given over to stacks of blue and amber seats bought from Shrewsbury Town when they left Gay Meadow. Llangefni hope to use these at this end in a new stand which will include executive boxes and dressing rooms. They also aim to put seats under the cover at the far end.

From the turnstile, the ground is seen to best effect. Beyond a line of trees to the west and away over to the more open north, a pastoral landscape of gentle undulations is visible. Town want to complete the perimeter fence around the right side to make the ground fully enclosed. The floodlights, first switched on in 2005 for a friendly against a Manchester United XI, are masts - four per side with six lamps on each. Of Cae Bob Parry, it's fair to say the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. But much of the work done on the infrastructure here will seem rather pointless if Llangefni's adventure in the WPL proves to be a one-season wonder. Luckily, clubs in the feeder leagues aren't exactly lining up for promotion (a matter of expense, largely), so Town are effectively locked in a two-way battle with fellow strugglers Porthmadog to see who takes the drop.

On the evidence of this ordinary performance against a moderate Airbus side, it is a fight Llangefni are not destined to win. The visitors, who arrived later than expected because of roadworks on the A55 expressway near Bangor, scored three times in the last 17 minutes to gain a rather flattering margin of victory. It equalled their best win away from home in the WPL. That said, the Wingmakers were the better team throughout and created all the clear-cut chances. Llangefni, though honest and industrious, were painfully limited and never really looked like getting a goal.

Airbus's Phil Molyneux (a man so unwilling to part with the ball, he might as well have worn blinkers) and Gareth Sudlow both failed to convert close-range headers from corners in the opening half-hour, while the hosts replied through Dylan Owen and Kevin Lloyd with efforts from outside the box. Gareth Caughter screwed a good chance wide and Airbus team-mate James McIntosh shot tamely at Farai Jackson when well placed. As the temperature value began to drop with the rapidity of a portfolio of Northern Rock shares, I began to fear a goalless draw.

Into the second half, and Llangefni's Lloyd fired straight at Chris Doran and Molyneux was then inches too high from 20 yards before the Broughton club's substitute Danny Hughes, on his WPL debut, decided the contest with two goals in as many minutes. Town cleared a corner only to the edge of the box and when Matthew Woodward nodded goal-wards, Hughes (73), improvising well, half-turned and glanced a header past Jackson from a couple of yards. When the ball bobbed about on the edge of the area again, the same player (75) cracked a daisy-cutter wide of the Llangefni keeper's outstretched left hand. There were audible groans from the home fans. Hughes charged through in the last minute and beat Jackson in a one-on-one, but saw his effort come back off the inside of a post. In stoppage time, Molyneux tried his luck from 20 yards and the ball looped up off defender Craig Hogg before dropping beyond the backpedalling Jackson. That's the kind of luck you get when you're propping up the league.

Llangefni have a come a long way, on and off the pitch, in a relatively short time and the attendance for this game, by WPL standards, was very respectable. It would be a shame if they cannot retain their hard-won status, but a season of managerial upheaval hasn't helped. One fellow traveller in the crowd suggested newcomers to the WPL should be exempt from relegation in their first season. That could well be the club's only hope.

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