

TT No.215: Mike Latham - Sat 22 March 2008: Welsh Alliance: **Bethesda Athletic** 6-0 Holywell Town. Attendance: 50 (h/c); Admission: £2.50; No programme; FGIF Match Rating: 3*.

Easter Saturday it may be but the roads are eerily quiet, the weather is bitterly cold and the mountains of Snowdonia are capped in snow. With a severe wind chill factor, it's no wonder many people have decided to spend their Easter indoors.

But the lure of a trip to Bethesda, an old slate and stone quarrying village on the edge of Snowdonia proved too tempting for me, especially with the home team in such a golden run of form. Many travellers have yet to visit Meurig Park on account of the fact that the Bethesda Athletic club is notorious as non-issuers of programmes and so, for once, I had a little background on which to base my journey.

Bethesda is easy to reach, being just three miles or so down the A5 from J11 of the A55 near Bangor. The A5 forms a natural barrier throughout Bethesda, being the boundary of the land owned by Lord Penrhyn and the freehold land. As a result, all the pubs are on one side of the road. At its height of prosperity Bethesda had a population of over 10,000 and its slate and stone products were exported all over the world. Nowadays the population is a little over 4,000 with many inhabitants commuting out of the area for work.

Meurig Park is on the far edge of the village, if journeying from Bangor, behind a superbly constructed slate wall. There is a large car park and a newly constructed club house at the entrance. The playing area is flat and lush, being in excellent condition for this time of year. Surrounded by a white railed fence and with a floodlit training area behind the far goal, the ground is basic though with great character. The only cover is provided by a small wooden structure at the nearside corner boasting the legend 'CP Bethesda Athletic FC' with the red dragon flag flying in the stiff breeze. With just a small wooden bench the stand can maybe seat twenty spectators at most but with a move upwards to the Cymru Alliance in the offing a new structure will soon take shape alongside to meet ground grading regulations.

The views from the ground are spectacular with the snow-capped peaks of the Carneddau mountain range dominating the landscape and alongside the far touchline there is a wooded valley while a horse grazes contentedly and occasionally peers at the action over a gate near the halfway line.

Not for nothing are Bethesda top of the Welsh Alliance, or level three of the Welsh pyramid. They are also top of the fair play league and it's not difficult to see why. They play some outstanding football, using the width of the field and playing on the ground with one or two touches when required. Holywell Town, once a WPL club, are third bottom of the Welsh Alliance and though they compete well enough for the opening 25 minutes end up being swept aside.

Bethesda lead 2-0 at the interval and eventually end up 6-0 victors though the margin could easily have been greater. Their no.9, who bags a hat-trick, is simply outstanding with his touch and awareness. Promotion to the Cymru Alliance seems a formality and with it the requirement to issue programmes. Then more travellers will have the pleasure of visiting what I found to be a friendly club set in quite stunning scenery.

The tea bar at the club sold a vast array of hot drinks and confectionary, essential on a cold day, and everyone I spoke to was friendly and welcoming. A visit to Bethesda comes highly recommended.

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