

TT No.65: Andy Gallon - Fri 10th October 2008; **Mold Alexandra v Mynydd Isa**; Cymru Alliance; Res: 4-2; Att: 90 (h/c); Admission: £3; Programme: 70p (64pp); FGIF Match Rating: ****.

Alyn Park, frankly, is a bit of a disappointment. But, in the same cause and effect manner which ensures one's shin throbs when someone kicks it with venom, there is good reason for the threadbare nature of its facilities. The ground is owned by the neighbouring Synthite chemical works and Mold have, for years and at any moment, expected to be turfed-off their patch to make way for housing development. With that particular Damoclean sword hovering, investment was deemed pointless and so the Alex's dilapidated home has been left to moulder. Patching up and titivating aside, little has changed since the club's halcyon days in the then-League of Wales. But the global credit crisis, and the allied collapse of the property market and house building industry, has led, as it were, to the goalposts being moved. The landlord's plan was to sell up to a company called Morris and have 100 homes on each of two plots of land - one on the south edge of Alyn Park and another on the ground itself. A halt to work has been called on the former, with the development only partially completed. Mold simply do not know when, or if, the latter will ever begin. Morris clearly can't shift the new-builds because they are offering a "Pay 75% Own 100%" deal. And so the club must carry on with what they have; all the time wishing they'd done a bit more on the home improvement front in more successful times past.

Mold, an ordinary town with a modest number of low-key attractions, is situated alongside the River Alyn in a shallow vale ringed by low hills. Daniel Owen, a tailor who became the so-called Father of the Welsh Novel by writing in his spare time, lived an entire life here. You can see the famous Golden Cape - in replica form only - in the library. The original of this Bronze Age treasure, unearthed in 1883 at Bryn yr Ellyllon, was carted off to the British Museum in London. The cape is remembered in the name of a Wetherspoon's pub on the High Street. Which doesn't sit quite right with me, somehow.

The football ground, as its name suggests, is close to the banks of the Alyn and, from a distance, looks pleasant enough. Inside, it is a different story. A narrow, potholed track barrels down to the entrance gate from the Denbigh Road. A pay hut and various portable buildings which house the dressing rooms, toilets and snack bar are painted a dark grey. It feels appropriate. Behind the near - south - goal, a broad area of aggregate provides car parking space. The half-finished housing estate, cement mixers frozen in time, lies beyond a line of scraggly shrubs. On the left - west - side, past the L shape formed by the portable buildings, there is a strip of hardstanding covered for part of its width by a simple 30-yard shelter of propped corrugated metal sheeting.

The 15-yard main stand, painted mostly in the club's blue colours, straddles the halfway line. This is a rickety beast. It gives the impression a decent gust would

blow it down. Not much in the way of huffing and puffing required. A deck of four wooden benches, supplemented by grubby, smashed plastic seats, shelters beneath a flimsy, propped canopy, again of corrugated metal sheeting. As you ascend the stairs to one side, the stand creaks and groans like an old man with sciatica. In a recess beneath, the home dugout is tucked away next to a muddy puddle. The area beneath the stand is an echoing void. To the rear, a wide area of grass runs up to trees fringing the ground perimeter. There is a children's play area behind, a boxing club in a wooden hut and drab semis next to the Denbigh Road. Whatever the stand's faults, its height means the view of the action it provides is excellent. The rising ground opposite is dominated by two bafflingly ghastly examples of modern architecture. It's hard to believe years of training goes into producing the perpetrators of such monstrosities. To the right, and straight from a Lego set, is the main administrative office of Flintshire County Council. The other building, more nuclear reactor in appearance than renowned regional centre for the performing arts, is the Theatr Clwyd. Why this sort of thing, the bland leading the bland, is allowed to happen amid pretty fields of grazing livestock I cannot explain.

The east side and north end comprise grassy swards. Not a drop of the hard stuff to be seen. The away dugout, a breeze block structure, is on the halfway line of the former. Beyond the plentiful spare turf and a line of trees is the track-bed of the former London & North Western Railway's secondary line between Chester and Denbigh. Mold hasn't seen a train since 1964 but, on the site of the station, it now has a Tesco, an Aldi and a McDonald's. So that's all right, then. The Alyn is also masked by the vegetation. Looking back across the main stand, two tree-covered mounds dominate the scene. The attractive 15th Century parish church of St Mary tops the one to the left and the ruinous Mold Castle, built around 1140, perches on that to the right, Bailey Hill. Mold, from the Welsh, translates as The Mound. I assume it derives from this feature. A second pitch is marked out behind the north end goal, with the Synthite plant, fulcrum of Mold's destiny, beyond an area of scrub. The ground does not have a social club, with everyone repairing to the nearby Drovers Arms for the post-match analysis. A metal post and rail fence, painted white, encloses the pitch. The lights are masts, with four on each side.

Mynydd Isa, across the Alyn, is so close to Mold the visiting players could have walked to this fixture. It was a decent derby and, in the second half, acquired such a feisty edge the referee felt obliged to brandish his yellow card on seven occasions. Mold, new to the Cymru Alliance and for whom this was a first home victory of the season, were 3-0 up in 36 minutes - and not flattered by the margin. League player of the month Stuart Hayes (10) curled a beauty into the top corner having been found unmarked by Sam Roberts, Dave Pitson (19) capitalised on a kind deflection to walk the second past Ben Jones and Hayes (36), set up by Pitson, then banged a cross-cum-shot over the back-peddling Isa keeper from the right side of the pitch. The ref handed the visitors a get-out-of-jail-free card in the 41st minute when he awarded a soft penalty, which Anthony Williams tucked away very neatly, low to James Collins's right.

The next goal would be crucial, and Isa got it. Substitute Sam Pugh (57) had already struck a post before Williams (65) scored from the spot following another dubious penalty verdict. But what the ref gave with one hand (in the sense of maintaining interest in the contest for the neutral) he took with the other by way of his booking frenzy. As if that disruption to the flow were not bad enough, he stopped the game numerous times to query blood seeping steadily from the top of Pitson's head. An Easter bonnet-type mummifying solution was deemed unacceptable, so the striker, who got through three shirts, was forced to see out the evening with a glob of Vaseline the size of a cricket ball stuck to his nut. It did not, however, cramp his style and he removed the element of doubt by firing in low from the edge of the box with 19 minutes left. An upright denied Pitson a hat-trick a minute later before Isa substitute Daniel Farrell (77) side-footed wide of an unguarded net to round off an entertaining game.

So, for the stadium enthusiast, the credit crunch has offered Alyn Park a stay of execution. Trouble is, Mold's ground is still on death row. And that makes life very difficult as the club attempt to climb back from whence they fell.

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