

TT No.64: *Mike Latham* - Saturday 24 October 2009: Spar Mid Wales League: Llanrhaeadr YM 2-3 Bow Street; Attendance: 80(h/c); Admission: £2.50 (including 8pp programme).

The Spar Mid Wales League is at level three of the Welsh football pyramid and feeds into the Cymru Alliance. But in contrast to the two other level three leagues in North Wales, the Welsh Alliance and the Wrexham Area League which both have informative websites the Mid Wales League has frustratingly little web presence, a glaring omission in the internet age.

The BBC Mid Wales site provides the largest source of information on the league with results, fixtures and league tables but even then, information is often only updated several days after the event.

So, attending a fixture in this league, though often rewarding, is something of a shot in the dark as contact information for many clubs is hard to come by, though the Welsh FA official site does have a useful section on member clubs.

With the Met Office forecasting a decent afternoon in mid Wales and needing a game within two hours of home, I opted for a visit to Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant for their fixture against Bow Street.

Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant is easily reached by car, a pleasant journey through the Tanat Valley after turning off the A483 south of Oswestry. The football ground is typical of many in this region, next door to a school and with a village hall providing the main facility in terms of dressing rooms, a canteen and toilet facilities.

The village is best known as the former parish of a vicar by the name of William Morgan, who translated the Bible into Welsh and has many attractions close by, including the Pistyll Rhaeadr, Wales' highest waterfall, Lake Vyrnwy and the remote and breath-taking Berwyn Mountains.

For a village with a population of less than two thousand Llan do remarkably well to field a competitive side at this level of the pyramid. They went into the game in fourth place in the league with their visitors lying in ninth.

One bonus was a programme, a modest eight-page production that came with admission of £2.50. Llan are the most northerly team in the league, as the informative map in the programme shows, with Llansantffraid and Llanfyllin their local rivals. Bow Street are one of four teams based in and around Aberystwyth to the west with Hay on Wye the most southerly team and Presteigne the most easterly.

The village centre was remarkably unspoilt and must have looked largely unchanged for centuries and the local football team is obviously a focal point of village life. By kick-off time around 80 spectators had gathered to watch the game,

many taking a vantage point from the balcony of the village hall. There was a real family atmosphere with villagers of all ages gathering together, engaging in friendly banter.

The pitch, flat and well grassed, is surrounded by a neat post-and-rail fence and Llan have plans to erect a 50-seater stand at the ground, while there are also proposals to demolish and rebuild the village hall, which is also home to the local bowling club.

Play was fiercely fought with biting tackles the order of the day and a number of subplots developing between opposing players. The referee, though, controlled the game expertly and defused several potential flash-points. Llan took an early lead with a fine free-kick but the visitors were soon on level terms after scrambling home a left-wing cross.

At half-time most of the spectators took advantage of the canteen where an excellent cup of tea in a proper mug and a chocolate biscuit cost a mere 70 pence. I was returning the mug when I noticed the referee in the queue behind me, patiently waiting to hand back his mug before resuming the game. 'It's just started to rain,' he observed to a local. 'Well, you stay in here in the dry and we'll carry on without you,' was the reply, amidst much mirth.

The second half saw Bow Street take control with two further goals, both from free-kicks. Llan pulled back a goal with three minutes remaining but, in a tense finish, could not force an equaliser.

Handshakes all round at the finish with home club officials making the effort to thank the referee for his trouble before the players left the pitch. This was an excellent, competitive game in a lovely part of the country and a visit to the Llanrhaeadr Recreation Ground comes with my recommendation.

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