

**TT No.219: Mike Latham** - Sat 2 April 2011: South of Scotland League, Creetown 1-0 Mid Annandale; Attendance: 20 (h/c); Admission: £2; No programme; FGIF Match Rating: 3\*

It was a glorious spring morning and memories of spending Saturday mornings hunched over a computer desperately trying to find a fixture that has escaped the ravages of the winter weather seemed distant; with a blank canvas from which to fill in I decided on a visit to Creetown.

I have been steadily ticking off the South of Scotland League and now have only to visit Newton Stewart to complete the set. As I have mentioned before it's a league of contrasts with some clubs with impressive grounds for this level of football and others with more rudimentary facilities. Those clubs who are full members of the Scottish FA tend to have the better facilities; after all they get to share in distributions from the governing body. Creetown are not in that illustrious group and so miss out not only on funding; they also are ineligible to enter the Scottish Cup unless they win the league. Their best placing was runners-up spot in 2005.

Visiting Creetown there are ample compensations for those missing out on spectator comforts, notably the stunning location and the friendly welcome afforded to the traveller in this fairly remote outpost of the game.

The League does itself few favours with lack of a website that gives essential information over fixtures, results and ground locations. Bob Geddes fills the gap with his superb Solway Press Services site that is an essential bookmark for those interested in football in this area. Regularly updated with fixtures, results, reports and league tables Bob performs an invaluable service for enthusiasts such as me.

Jamie Wire's guide to Non-League Scotland also provides background information and photographs of all the league clubs together with historical information; again, an invaluable resource lovingly maintained. Each year Stewart Davidson publishes a superb annual, Scottish Non-League Review while Ian Anderson's tour of non-league grounds of nearly 20 years ago can be found on You-Tube. Creetown have also started their club website, though it's still in the course of construction. Helpfully the league fixtures to the end of the season are posted, information that is not readily available.

So though information is hard to glean there is quite a lot available if you know where to look. As I say though it's a shame the league doesn't do more to promote itself. Though recognised as the weakest of the three senior leagues in Scotland I always enjoy watching games in the South League and the scenery usually compensates for other deficiencies.

Creetown is a small town with a population of less than one thousand situated between Gatehouse of Fleet and Newton Stewart. Though the traffic thunders by

on the A76 to and from the busy port of Stranraer, Creetown is peaceful and its main street must have been virtually unaltered for many years.

The football ground couldn't be easier to find, located in what appears to be part of a farmer's field just off the A76 and next to a holiday caravan park. A club official takes the modest entrance fee at the gate and there is a big car park. There have been plans to erect a new changing room building and small stand at the ground for many years but though the concrete base is in place nothing else has been done. The players change in two metal containers and an excellent tea bar is operated from a wooden hut. Other than bright yellow dug outs on the far side and a fence around the playing area that's about it as far as facilities.

Football in Creetown dates back to the 19th century; Barrhom Rovers and Creetown Volunteers were two previous incarnations. Football has been played at the present ground since 1933. The ground was once known as Cassencarrie Park but these days seems to be more often referred to as Castle Cary Park, also the name of the adjoining caravan park.

Creetown went into the game second bottom of the league with Lockerbie-based Mid Annandale in mid-table. Goalmouth action was limited and though both sides attempted to get the ball down and play constructive football a deceptively strong wind coming in off Creetown Bay played its part. Just 12 minutes remained when the home side forced a corner as they attacked the goal at the sea end of the ground. The Mids defence failed to clear and central defender Andrew Houston stabbed home what proved to be the winning goal. Mids attacked strongly in the closing stages but despite hitting the bar failed to get the equaliser that on the balance of play they probably deserved.

With glorious sweeping views across the bay towards Wigtown on one side and stunning inland views towards wooded slopes and towering hills Castle Cary Park is an idyllic place to watch football, especially on such a bright and sunny day as this one. The nearest rail head is Stranraer and the bus service, is infrequent and so car is the only realistic way to visit this outpost of the game.

07/20