

**TT No.126: Mike Latham** - Tues 27 December 2011; **CPD Gwalchmai** 1-2 Holyhead Hotspur; Welsh Alliance Division 1; Attendance: 200 (h/c); Admission: £2; 20pp programme: £1; FGIF Match Rating: 4\*.

I had fully intended to make one final visit to Farrar Road on the Tuesday after Christmas, with Bangor City taking on Prestatyn Town in an all-ticket game. I bought my ticket ages ago and mentioned my plans to some of the regulars in the Crown. I must have been over enthusiastic about the game; either way three of the regulars elected to accompany me and I had a car-full as we set off on a windy, mild and bright morning.

With tickets at a premium and a big crowd building up I made an executive decision and decided to 'dump' my friends by the ground and venture to a ground on Anglesey I had never previously visited. After all, the prospect of a local derby between Gwalchmai and Holyhead Hotspur was not to be sniffed at and I always try to visit new grounds whenever I can, especially after a round journey of 200 miles or so.

Gwalchmai is a small village in the heart of Anglesey, located less than a mile from the A55 and the Anglesey Show Ground and in close proximity to RAF Mona.

The village, I discovered, is thought to be named after the 12th-century court poet Gwalchmai ap Meilyr, whose own name may have been derived from that of the Welsh hero known as Gwalchmei ap Gwyar, who became the Gawain of later Arthurian legend. More recently, it's sobering to look at the village clock on which are inscribed the names of the 29 people from the village who died in World War One and the nine who died in World War Two, a tremendous sacrifice and ones which must have ripped out the heart of such a small, close-knit community.

The football ground is located behind a housing estate with plenty of parking and good facilities. CPD Gwalchmai, formed in 1946 became one of the most successful clubs on Anglesey with a series of league and cup triumphs. The club won the 2009-2010 Gwynedd League championship and were promoted to the Welsh Alliance League. They have an excellent web site which includes a library of quite stunning photographs and produce a neat and informative 20-page programme. Admission is only £2 and a well-stocked tea bar, manned by friendly club officials dispenses a good range of food and drinks. I warmed to the place straightaway and enjoyed my visit here.

The ground has an open feel, bordered as it on three sides by fields and though the weather was unseasonably mild a strong wind encouraged the spectators to gather mostly under the three separate covered standing areas.

I'd seen Holyhead several times previously in the past few years; I've always found them to be a friendly club especially welcoming of groundhoppers. I met up with a few old acquaintances and enjoyed a really entertaining local derby played in good

spirits. Holyhead, pressing for the title scored twice in quick succession midway through the first half and also hit the woodwork three times. But the home side pulled back a goal with 16 minutes remaining to set up a grandstand finish. Holyhead's 2-1 win was just about deserved but the 200 or so spectators that gathered around the neat village ground thoroughly enjoyed their afternoon with the issue in doubt until the final whistle.

The game over, I ventured back to the mainland and picked up my three friends from the game at Bangor. On the way home they enthused about the quality of the football, the great atmosphere and the friendliness and atmosphere; a crowd of over 2,500 had seen Bangor City mark the historic occasion in style with a thrilling 5-3 victory. One was a season ticket holder at Old Trafford, another at Anfield and the third, returning home to visit family was now based in East Anglia and had a season ticket at Norwich City. They were still talking about it as I left them back in the Crown. Maybe I had recruited three new fans of Welsh football; I hope so because days like this make you appreciate the joys of groundhopping in Wales.

Returning home, I noted with some alarm that the excellent league website had recorded the score as 1-3. Had I missed a goal, sacrilege in many groundhopper's eyes, while I chattered my way through the afternoon? With some relief I greeted Dan Sinclair's match report on the club website a day or so later - it confirmed the score was 1-2!

I wished I'd met Dan during the afternoon, I could have asked him what kind of camera he uses as his photos, on a murky afternoon, were far sharper than mine. Lovely club Gwalchmai; a visit here comes highly recommended.

07/20