

TT No.152: Mike Latham - Sat 21 January 2012: **Pollok** 1-1 Lochee United; Emirates Scottish Junior Cup Round Four: Attendance: 536; Admission £5, Programme £1; Raffle ticket: £1; FGIF Match Rating: 3*.

Temperatures were close to zero with gale-force winds on the journey north; on arrival intermittent spells of bright sunshine followed by driving icy-cold rain and sleet made this a typical afternoon watching the Emirates Scottish Junior Cup, my favourite football competition. It was good to be back in Scotland, especially as the chance was taken to breakfast in style at the Café Ariete in Moffat for the first time this year- superb as ever.

In the event we were lucky to get a game, as several ties were postponed due to the weather but Pollok are one of the best organised of junior clubs and their pitch looked in splendid condition, though it was wet in the corners. Pollok quickly got the message across on their website and on their Twitter account that the game was taking place, so great credit to them for that. Arriving at Newlandsfield Park, located just off the A77 Kilmarnock Road in the south-side of Glasgow it was interesting to see a sign pinned to the fence next to the main road advising passers-by that the game was on with a 1-45pm kick-off, a simple but effective method of communication.

Played in Glasgow, charting the heritage of a city at play, Ged O'Brien's wonderful history (Malavan Media 2010), was essential reading prior to the game. Pollok are one of the best supported and organised of junior sides and are located in Pollokshaws, an area rich in sporting history. Close-by is Hampden Park, Third Lanark's old Cathkin Park ground and the Titwood cricket ground.

Pollok have played at Newlandsfield Park since 1928, having moved from their old ground at nearby Haggs Park. The ground is tucked away off the main road close to a busy shopping and residential area and Pollokshaws East station and backs on to White Cart Water, a fast-running river that separates the ground from a number of huge apartment blocks beyond the far goal. The near-side is dominated by a modern apartment block wherein the residents must have a wonderful view of play. The near-side entrance, by the social club has a narrow piece of terrace behind the goal, with the far side dominated by a magnificent covered terrace that runs the length of the field.

Pollok, or 'Lok as they are known, were formed in 1908, O'Brien explains in his wonderful book, and are the community team of the south side of Glasgow, especially since Third Lanark's sad demise in the 1960s. The club was founded by members of the Pollokshaws Working Lads Club and they benefited from the patronage of Sir John Stirling Maxwell, adopting black and white colours from the Pollok heraldic shield.

The ground was only laid with turf in 1968; prior to that, games were played on a black ash pitch. The playing area is quite narrow and there are superb viewing

options from all sides. Due to the weather, most of the spectators gathered under the covered terrace where a well-appointed tea bar did brisk business.

Lochee United, from Dundee, brought with them a cheerful and sizeable support, many having decamped upon arrival to the Pollok social club. The visitors had the best of the elements in the first-half and went into the interval one goal to the good. But Pollok equalised soon after the resumption and a draw was a fair outcome from a tight game that always held the interest.

The pitch held up well in the circumstances and the game was superbly refereed by an official I had seen before. Both sides did their best to play football but the over-riding memory of the day was the magnificent ground, a simply terrific venue to watch football with the pitch being so close to the terraces.

Pollok are streets ahead of most junior clubs in their organisation; the ground is well maintained, they have that excellent website, they produce a neat and informative programme and have a small army of helpers who sell raffle tickets or help out around the ground; they even have a tannoy-system, albeit one that sounds like it was borrowed from the adjoining railway station. I'll await the result of the replay with interest- I'd make Lochee slight favourites and meantime will get back to reading O'Brien's masterly tome.

If you only visit one Junior ground in Scotland make it's this one- simply superb.

07/20