

TT No.201: Mike Latham - Sat 31 March 2012: Stagecoach West Region Super League First Division: **Ardrossan Winton Rovers** 0-1 Renfrew; Att: 150(h/c); Admn: £5; Prog: 28pp, £1; Raffle: £1; FGIF Match Rating: 4*.

With time to spare and a gloriously sunny morning in prospect I decided to head north-west and see how far I got. At 1pm I was sauntering along the seafront of Ardrossan contemplating a vital game in the Super League First Division against Renfrew having sampled fine fish and chips and coffee from Palazzo on Glasgow Street, the main road into town. With stunning views out to sea, I decided that life or groundhopping doesn't get much better than this.

Ardrossan has a population of around 11,000 and has close roots with neighbouring Saltcoats and Stevenston. The town's roots date back to the 12th century and the construction of its castle; the town grew in the 18th and 19th centuries due to its coastal situation based around exports of coal and pig iron to Europe and North America. Ardrossan later became a centre for shipbuilding of fishing vessels and small cargo boats.

The town also became known for the ferry services to Brodick on the Isle of Arran which commenced in 1834 and which continue to this day; later to Belfast and the Isle of Man which started in the late 19th century and which have now ceased. These days Ardrossan is part of a regeneration area, overseen by the Irvine Bay Regeneration Company and there were plenty of positive signs to be seen as I wandered around the town before the game. The seafront area is well maintained, the beach was clean and many locals and tourists were taking the opportunity to make the most of low tide while the developed Marina area had signs of great potential.

Ardrossan Winton Rovers were formed in 1900 and nicknamed the 'Winton.' Winton Park is to be found at the end of Winton Street close to the fish and chip shop I had frequented earlier. First impressions count for a lot and the club earns top marks; the entrance is neatly maintained with a well-painted sign, welcoming visitors; club officials don brightly logoed jackets and there is an excellent programme on sale alongside by the obligatory raffle tickets at the entrance.

Also, the club do the trouble to have a whiteboard by the entrance where both teams' line-ups are displayed; a nice touch that was really appreciated by many spectators.

Winton Park originally ran in an east-west direction but was later turned around to its current north-south direction. The main grandstand, built in 1956 is largely disused these days; but there is seating at the front and also a covered terrace alongside. The club also has a tea bar and a supporters' club inside the ground. The far side has a shallow terrace and the far end behind the goal is also terraced. The nearside end is grass-banked and backs onto a junior school.

The vagaries of the weather in this part of the world have taken grounds-men by surprise. After a wet winter, the relatively mild spring has seen grounds dry out far quicker than normal with few opportunities to roll the grass. The playing surface was well grassed but bobbly and dry.

The match itself was well contested with both teams displaying an urgency and energy that meant that you could never take your eye off the action. Renfrew won the game with a goal late in the first-half after a defensive mix-up. Their win was well deserved but the home side competed well until the end. The home left-back suffered a nasty-looking leg injury in the first-half after appearing to twist badly on the turf with no opponent in proximity. He was stretchered off and an ambulance was called; I hope he makes a speedy recovery.

This was another splendid trip to the West Juniors and it goes without saying that a visit to this atmospheric ground and friendly club comes with my warmest recommendation.

07/20