

**TT No.208: Mike Latham** - Weds 3 April 2012: Mid Wales South League. **Penybont** 2-0 St Harmon; Attendance: 56 (h/c); Admission: by donation; no programme; FGIF Match Rating: 4\*.

Early evening midweek football has many attractions, not least the chance to visit places you've longed to explore. Such was the case on a chilly Tuesday evening; though snow was forecast for later I decided to risk it and journeyed south into the heart of rural mid Wales past the familiar landmarks of Wrexham, Oswestry, Welshpool and Newtown.

Several groundhoppers had extolled the delights of Penybont and I wasn't disappointed- on my arrival I discovered a lovely, friendly and welcoming club in a scenic location. Penybont play on an enclosed ground in the middle of the trotting track behind the Severn Arms pub in the village which is two miles along the A44 from the A483 between Newtown and Llandrindod Wells. There is a splendid old stand on the hillside that relates to the trotting track and a covered enclosure on the nearside with a tea bar facility and lots of chairs for those spectators that wish to watch the game in comforts. The players change in the dressing rooms behind the pub then cross a sturdy wooden bridge over the river to the ground.

Penybont have a big cup final coming up, they play in Emrys Morgan Cup Final at Aberystwyth Town FC on Good Friday (6pm) against St Dogmaels. They had several players out for this game but won a keenly contested game played in an excellent spirit and superbly refereed with two first-half goals. The first came from a route one when the goalkeeper's long kick eluded the defence for the Penybont striker to chip the opposing goalkeeper. The second was a well-worked effort.

St Harmon have fared much better this season having been the division's whipping boys in the past. I'd seen the corresponding game at St Harmon last season (see TT1011216) and they were certainly much improved from that occasion. They came more into the contest but couldn't break through a well marshalled home rear-guard. The referee, from neighbouring Llandrindod Wells has apparently only recently taken up the whistle; how he must wish he'd started sooner as he revealed a fine aptitude for the job and made his decisions clearly and calmly.

When you've watched a lot of midweek football in recent days you compare notes as to the relative standards. This game certainly compared favourably to some of the stuff I've seen lately- both teams were smartly attired in sponsored kits and their standard of discipline was way ahead of many games I've seen at a similar level in England.

Many of the villagers turned out to watch the game and the tea bar did a roaring trade on an increasingly chilly evening. The local interest was increased by the appearance of several Penybont residents in the visitors' ranks. Apparently, they decided to move to the club to play first-team football feeling their opportunities at Penybont limited. They all fared well, particularly the young goalkeeper.

I found a good article on the internet that describes the excitement of Penybont Races. It can be accessed here: <http://www.welsh-trotting.co.uk/article-full.php?id=9>.

Penybont Races are held annually on the first Wednesday in August. This is one of the oldest trotting races in Wales. Llandrindod Trotting Races has also moved to the racecourse and this is held over August Bank Holiday. Penybont FC, meanwhile have ambitions to move up to the Mid Wales League and certainly seem to have the infrastructure to support such a move. The committee and locals were all really welcoming and I was invited back to the Severn Arms for post-match food and drink. Sadly, with the threat of bad weather I had to decline and set off home up darkened and deserted roads having experienced grass roots football at its very best. It goes without saying that a visit to Penybont FC comes with my warmest recommendation.

07/20