

TT No.246: *Mike Latham* - Wednesday 16 May 2012: Dumfries & District League British Legion Cup Semi-Final; **Lochmaben** 0-1 Upper Annandale; Attendance: 42 (h/c); No admission or programme; FGIF Match Rating: 3*.

The Dumfries & District Football League now has eight active members and cup competitions can be completed inside a week. The British Legion Cup is one of at least half-a-dozen competed for between member clubs and after the first-round ties on Monday we were at the semi-final stage by Wednesday. It was a chilly but dry and sunny afternoon and I decided to head north of the border to Lochmaben, a scenic small town four miles west of Lockerbie in Dumfries & Galloway.

The football ground is at Whitehills Park, to the north-east of the town behind a housing estate with open views to three sides. The approach to the ground is via an unmarked track just off Whitehills Avenue and there is plenty of parking. The visitors arrived in a fleet of cars, their players ready stripped in distinctive black and white striped jerseys. Surrounded by a perimeter fence, the ground was extensively renovated in 1999 as a facility for the town and now boasts grass banking around the pitch which was flat and in good condition.

Once the scene for bitter border skirmishes between rival armies, Lochmaben these days is a peaceful place; it boasts a distinctive wide main street and some beautiful stone buildings set amidst beautiful rolling countryside. Due to its strategic position there was once an important castle here and it is claimed that King Robert I of Scotland (Bruce) was born in Lochmaben; his memory is kept alive by a statue in the main square. Bruce engaged in numerous battles with the English around the area during the Wars of Scottish Independence.

There are a number of small lochs around the town, one now the home of the local sailing club. Lochmaben became a Royal Burgh in 1447 and earned its Royal Charter in 1579. From 1863 until 1952 Lochmaben had a station on the Dumfries to Lockerbie railway line.

Angus Douglas was the town's most famous footballer; born here in 1889 he went on to play for Chelsea, Newcastle United and Scotland but after serving in the forces during World War One tragically succumbed to a 'flu pandemic in 1918 just before his 30th birthday.

The current Lochmaben FC joined the Dumfries League in 1970 and in recent seasons have challenged regularly for honours, being particularly successful in cup competitions. But on this occasion, they were second best in a tight and well contested game; the Moffat based visitors edged through thanks to the only goal scored midway through the first half.

A home player was red carded just after the hour for violent conduct and, missing several regulars Lochmaben rarely threatened the visitors' goal after that. Upper Annandale now meet YMCA, surprise winners over Lochar Thistle in the other semi-

final this coming Saturday (19 May). This game will be played at Moffat High School with a 2pm kick-off. I enjoyed my visit here; the game was enjoyable and the locals were friendly. The ground was basic but well-kept and the views spectacular. The Dumfries & District League has not been visited by too many groundhoppers over the years but deserves patronage; it has a good website, regularly updated and visits here, particularly at this time of year can be rewarding.

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