

TT No.63: *Mike Latham* - Sat 8th October 2011; **Montgomery Town** 1-3 Rhayader; Spar Mid Wales League Div. 1: Attendance; 100 (est.); Admission: 33; FGIF Mach Rating: 5*.

It's always good to visit a club clearly 'on the up,' the feel-good factor and enthusiasm generated by the team and its supporters can be quite uplifting, especially so when it involves a visit to one of the most beautiful parts of the country. I had been keeping an eye on Montgomery Town FC and had heard good things from groundhopping mates who'd beaten me to a visit; one was so impressed he almost relocated to the town as a retirement home from the south-east.

Montgomery is an historic county town on the Welsh Marches, just three miles or so from the English border and a few miles from the A483 at Welshpool, a road that must be travelled by virtually every football team in Wales at one part of the season or another. Due to its location on the border the town has long had a strategic significance and was established around a seemingly impregnable Norman stone castle built on a crag in the early 13th century. The parish church dates back to 1227 and a walk around the impressive town square quickly shows that here was a place of significance.

The town's name dates back even further to the days of William the Conqueror; one of his key supporters was Roger de Montgomery, who originated from Montgomery in Normandy; he was gifted land here as a token of gratitude. These days the town is peaceful and gives few hints to its turbulent past as a key strategic border post. The main stirring is when the local football team are at home as they are on a dry and reasonably warm autumnal afternoon and their top-of-the-table clash with Rhayader is clearly Match of the Day in the Mid Wales League.

Football has been played for many years in the town but the current Montgomery Town FC was only re-formed in 2007; they steamed through the local amateur league and won the Mid Wales League Division 2 last season. They began this game with seven wins from as many games and are on track to be the most successful team to represent the town in senior Welsh football.

The ground is located off Maldwyn Way at the lowest point of the town, just a short walk from the centre, past the Crown public house the shirt sponsors. As my favourite pub is also the Crown, albeit the one in Horwich I empathised with the club and with their attempts to consolidate at a high level of the game in Wales. With beautiful sweeping views across to the parish church, the ruins of the castle and wooded slopes the ground is set in a stunning location and the playing area is beautifully kept. A smart wooden fence has been constructed around the playing area, two sides of which back onto trees. The main feature of the ground is a smart stand which also includes a tea bar and bears the legend Montgomery FC.

I've seen a lot of games at this level in Wales; this was outstanding and the standard would not have disgraced the Cymru Alliance, the next step-up. Both sides were fit, well organised and skilful, attempting to play high-tempo football aided by an excellent official. The game was played in a good spirit and reflected well on the league as a whole. After surviving a few anxious moments, the visitors took the lead with a well-worked goal after ten minutes and stunned the home side with two further goals in the last five minutes before half-time, the last an own goal.

Montgomery tried hard to recover and eventually pulled back a goal with 15 minutes left but Rhayader's victory was well deserved. Around 100 supporters watched the game, their entrance fee collected in a bucket by a home official at half-time. Montgomery Town FC a well organised and friendly club in a beautiful location and a visit here comes highly recommended.

07/20