

**TT No.75: Mike Latham** - Sat 22nd October 2011: Welsh National League (Wrexham Area) Premier Division: **Pen-y-ffordd FC 0-1 Coedpoeth United**; Admn: By donation; Programme: 36pp, £1; FGIF Match Rating: 3\*; Postcode: CH7 4HB.

Sometimes, following this great hobby of ours, you are fortunate enough to stumble across a lovely club, one that makes all the miles, the heartache of late postponements and goal-less draws, the occasionally dire football and bad language all worthwhile. So, it was for me when late last season I met some officials of Penyffordd FC at a Wrexham Area League game at nearby Saltney.

Their enthusiasm and plans for the future were infectious, we kept in touch and here we were on a lovely autumnal afternoon in North Wales, just over the border from Chester experiencing the delights of grass roots football on a red-letter day for the village club.

How many clubs issue a personal invitation to groundhoppers? Well, Penyffordd do, and Pete Olsson, one of the long-serving and dedicated committee at the club sent out the following:

"I would like to extend a cordial invite to you and your fellow non-league enthusiasts to our official ground opening day this Saturday October 22nd. Pen-y-ffordd FC enjoyed great success last year gaining promotion to the Welsh National League Premier Division as champions of division one. As a consequence of our success and due to the fact that we needed to meet Premier Division ground criteria, we were forced to move home from Abbotts Lane in Pen-y-ffordd to The Castle Ground at the Hanson Cement Works in Padeswood.

"During a very busy close season, we managed to prepare a ground "from scratch" and in July had the ground passed as fit by the Welsh National League Inspection Committee.

"We have played a number of home games already; however, will be hosting an official opening day on Saturday 22nd October, when our first team host Coedpoeth FC. Festivities will commence at 12:00 when Stewart Jones, Plant Manager of Hanson Cement officially "opens" the ground. We shall be staging a couple of exhibition games in the lead up to the 14:30hrs kick off. The exhibitions will involve our junior teams and a short 5-a-side match for PFC vets against Hanson Cement vets. Complimentary teas and coffees will be on offer along with the sale of match day programmes, club badges, food and non-alcoholic refreshments.

"We would love to see you and any of your fellow non-league enthusiasts at our event. Our ground location details are as follows; "The Castle Ground; Home of Pen-y-ffordd FC; Padeswood Works, Hanson Cement; Padeswood; Mold; Flintshire; CH7 4HB".

How could any self-respecting groundhopper resist that invitation? Several had already visited the club before this game but a good number were in attendance on a glorious afternoon.

Pen-y-ffordd FC, as the excellent 36pp programme explained, started off in the early 1970s as some of parents of the village got together to provide their children with a game of football. Many of those original founders are still involved with the club and most of the players appearing in the red jerseys of the first team had graduated through the junior ranks.

Arriving in good time for the kick-off, the ground was a hive of activity; lots of junior games taking place on the adjoining pitch, the club house looking splendid and a simply outstanding buffet provided to friends and visitors alike. Mr Jones duly conducted the opening ceremony, cutting the ribbon in front of the welcome board to the ground on which a plaque had been mounted.

The main ground itself, bordered by trees, with splendid dug-outs and surrounded by a post-and-rail fence is testimony to the hard work of the club officials over the summer; they have transformed the site in just a few months. The pitch needs work on it, but that will have to wait for next summer. Adjoining the cement works, which provide an atmospheric backdrop with rolling hills further in the distance the new ground is a mile or so from the village and has easy links to the nearby A55 at Broughton.

Groundhoppers, by their very nature, are largely fleeting with their affections; it's the officials and supporters of clubs that provide the backbone and stability. From my visit I've no doubt that Penyffordd FC will continue to prosper over the future years and provide a level of football that gives so much pleasure to players and supporters- this is grass roots football at its very best.

Penyffordd players still pay their weekly subs to play each week, and went into the game on the back of a 6-1 away victory. But in a hard-fought game of few chances they just lost out; the visitors winning the game courtesy of a goal midway through the second half.

Despite the result it was a memorable afternoon, one that I and many more thoroughly enjoyed. I'll be keeping my eye on the club's results this season and will be visiting again before the season's end and hopefully long into the future. I'd advise fellow groundhoppers to do the same; clubs like this deserve the very highest support.

For badge collectors by the way, a new Penyffordd FC club badge has been minted and is available from the Club.

07/20