

TT No.36: *Mike Latham* - Sat 6 October 2012- McBookie.com East Juniors Premier League; **Armadale Thistle** 1-2 Oakley United; Att: 180 (h/c); Admission: £5; Raffle ticket: £1; No prog; FGIF Match Rating: 3*.

It was a gloriously sunny afternoon and the autumnal colours were spectacular as I headed north and then east, passing through or by several towns or villages that host teams in the Scottish Juniors, Lanark, Forth, Fauldhouse, Shotts, Bathgate and Whitburn among them. My destination was Armadale, a small former mining town in West Lothian, not far from Livingston in Scotland's Central Belt.

Armadale's Volunteer Park ground has hosted football for well over a century and is that increasing rarity, a ground close to the town centre. Volunteer Park is easy to find, there's even a sign-post at the cross-roads in the middle of Armadale and it's located just behind a Citroen car dealership on North Street with plenty of street parking.

The original Armadale club was based at Volunteer Park, a former drill field for army reservists and played there from 1889. The club's original name was Armadale Volunteers. Paul and Shirley Smith's invaluable reference book *The Ultimate Directory of English & Scottish Football League Grounds* informs that the ground was developed just prior to the outbreak of World War One with embankments for spectators, dressing rooms, a 200-seater grandstand and a pavilion constructed. An even larger grandstand was built just after the outbreak of hostilities.

Armadale FC was elected into the Scottish Football League in 1921 and stayed there until November 1933 when they were expelled due to financial problems. The highest gate was thought to be 12,000 for the visit of Albion Rovers in a Scottish FA Cup-tie in February 1921. A total of 218 league games were played at Volunteer Park.

The present Armadale Juniors side were formed in 1936 and play in the East Section of the Juniors, though several of their neighbours are in the West. Entering the ground from the top side nearest the town centre there is a glorious panorama. The old grandstand is no more but the dressing rooms remain and a cover has been constructed over the main terrace. Under here is located an excellent tea bar where delicious 'stovies', homemade vegetable soup, pies and hot and cold drinks are cheerfully dispensed at reasonable prices.

The terrace to the east side is also an impressive one and at the far end spectators were able to ring in their cars and watch the action from the comfort of their vehicle, ideal for elderly supporters especially in the depths of winter. With scenic views to the distant Ochil Hills northwards the ground has many endearing features and the playing pitch, though tight to the surrounding walls was in good condition.

Armadale clearly have a loyal and a committed following, and around 180 spectators had assembled by the 2-30pm kick-off, spread around the terraces and eagerly awaiting the game. The home side dominated and failed to take their chances, their no9 hitting the post with a penalty with the woodwork struck twice more. Inevitably, perhaps, the visitors took the lead in one of their first serious attempts on goal only for Armadale to equalise with a scrambled goal from a corner. But this was not to be Armadale's day as Oakley scored what proved to be the winner with fifteen minutes remaining after a breakaway.

It goes without saying that I thoroughly enjoyed my time at this historic ground and a would highly recommend a visit here.

04/20