

TT No.71: Mike Latham - Sat 15 December 2012; **Pentraeth** v Llandegfan Antelope; Kon-X Anglesey Football League; Result: 5-1; Attendance: 40 (h/c); Admission: by donation; No programmes; FGIF Match Rating: ****.

Over the years I've found it difficult to get much information on the Anglesey Football League but the situation has improved markedly just recently. Dave McCann now runs an informative *Pitchero* website which is regularly updated with fixtures, news and results. It's still a work-in-progress as some of the competing teams have to add their location and contact details but it's a good effort by Dave and his colleagues and long may it continue. Leagues simply can't function properly these days without a decent web presence.

After a week of freezing temperatures, the thaw arrived on Friday, and with it, heavy rain. I again decided on a visit to Anglesey as there were several fixtures within short distances of one another and the weather there is generally less extreme than other parts of the country. The biggest threat to games was water-logging and even though the weather was fine and bright I was relieved to arrive at Pentraeth half-an-hour before the 2pm kick-off to see players from both sides warming up with some earnest.

Pentraeth is a small village on the eastern side of the island of Anglesey located near the simply awe-inspiring beauty of Red Wharf Bay. A watery sun peeked between grey clouds on a dry but nippy afternoon as the locals gathered for the game. Pentraeth FC's ground is situated close to the cross-roads in the centre of the village, behind the Panton Arms. By taking the Beaumaris road the entrance can be found opposite a distinctive large white building which I found out to be a Care home. It's a typical set-up for these parts, Bryniau Field where the football team play adjoins a community hall where the players change and from where an excellent tea bar is in operation. The views are interesting and varied- a large petrol garage dominates the scenery behind the far goal, there's an ancient church dating back to the 1200s, rolling countryside in the distance with the green fields dotted with sheep and a moor rising above the field behind the nearside corner.

The playing field is in good condition, with plenty of grass and well rolled. But it must take a while to adjust to playing here as the pitch has a prominent slope from end to end and also side to side. Locals told me that Pentraeth often play better playing uphill towards the changing rooms. The pitch is railed off on three sides with a sturdy stone wall marking the boundary behind the Beaumaris road.

Way back in time, in 1170 to be exact, Pentraeth was the scene of a bloody battle. Hywel ab Owain Gwynedd arrived with an army of men from Ireland with the intention of claiming a share of the kingdom of Gwynedd following the death of his father Owain Gwynedd. But he was defeated and killed here by the forces of his half-brothers Dafydd ab Owain Gwynedd and Rhodri.

There were no signs of bloody battles as Christmas 2012 approached. The village centre was quiet, the air was clear and fresh and the locals friendly and in good humour. The opposing team were from just down the road and the players from each side exchanged a few pleasantries before kick-off. The veteran match referee, Dewi Morris was obviously well known in these parts- he chatted to several spectators before getting proceedings under way. He looked like a man in complete control.

Pentraeth, the league website informed me, were top of the table with eleven wins from as many games. The visitors, who take their suffix, I was told from a well-known pub on the Bangor side of the Menai Bridge were in fourth position with 21 points from 13 games. A good, competitive game looked in prospect.

Kicking uphill Pentraeth quickly got into gear and took an early lead with a scrambled goal. But the visitors more than held their own and were unlucky to go in at half-time two goals in arrears after Pentraeth grabbed a second shortly before the break. The tea bar was at full stretch at half-time with a big demand on the hot food and drinks to ward off the winter chill on close to what was the shortest day of the year. The two ladies coped admirably and cheerfully and the referee paused for more banter with locals before making his way out for the second half.

Pentraeth made sure of the points with a third goal soon after the resumption and though Antelope responded with a well-deserved goal in reply the issue was never really in doubt. The pace and intensity of the game slackened in the closing stages and Pentraeth ended the stronger side as they ran out convincing winners of an enjoyable and well contested game.

In 1859, Charles Dickens stayed in Pentraeth; at the time he was a journalist for The Times and he was there to visit the wreck of the Royal Charter in Moelfre. It's a shame he didn't return to watch the village football team; if he had I'm sure he would have enjoyed it as much as I did. It's grass roots football in an interesting setting, taken seriously but not to the detriment of enjoyment. The referee was excellent, supervising proceedings with an expert and light touch. He got through a fiercely fought local derby match without hardly being noticed or issuing a single caution. As the sun dipped and the chill increased the game came to an end. Handshakes all round and all over before darkness descended. For me it was another hugely enjoyable afternoon out in Wales. Simply fantastic.

04/20