

TT No. 16: *Andy Gallon* - Wed 11th September 2013; **Rhayader Town** v Llanidloes Town; Cymru Alliance; Res: 2-0; Att: 147; Admission: £5; Programme: None; FGIF Match Rating: **.

THE HOP: The holiday plan here was to spend the day exploring the beautiful Elan Valley before heading east to nearby Rhayader to enjoy a football evening. We'd hoped to view the dale's nine-mile chain of reservoirs, built between 1892-1903 to supply Birmingham and a bitterly opposed imposition on the local people and their landscape. However, owing to forecast wet weather, which duly arrived in torrents soon after lunch, we opted instead to hunker down in our Dolgellau cottage. Only by mid-afternoon did I drive solo the tortuous 55 miles via Cemmaes, Caersws and Llangurig south to Rhayader (pronounced - more or less - 'Radar' and meaning 'Waterfall on the Wye').

THE PLACE: Most towns these days feel the need for a slogan describing their key attribute. I still smile when I think of dreary Doncaster settling for 'Discover the Spirit'. Rhayader, a Radnorshire backwater, boasts two. Take your pick from 'Gateway to the Elan Valley Lakes' or 'The Wildlife Centre of Wales'. My approach, through a thickly wooded gorge, was spectacular. The town, essentially a meeting of four roads - North, South, East and West streets - by an ornate war memorial clock tower, is unremarkable. But its superb scenic setting more than compensates. The Wye ('Afon Gwy'), flowing quickly over a rocky bed, separates Rhayader from the neighbouring hamlet of Llansantffraed Cwmeuddwr. Over the years, the waterfall has vanished. The hills in which both communities are cupped rise to 1,500ft. Rhayader, sheltered by the Cambrian Mountains, is 700ft above sea level. This would make an excellent base for exploring Mid Wales and the area towards the Brecon Beacons National Park. One's view of a place is invariably coloured by the weather and, in pouring rain, I found Rhayader to be rather forlorn; a bit sad. Even the postcards on sale in the newsagent's were faded and curled with age. I didn't purchase.

THE CLUB: The present club was formed as recently as 2007 following the collapse the previous summer of the original Rhayader Town. Lack of interest in filling official roles led to it resigning from the Mid Wales League. There was a team playing in Rhayader as long ago as 1884 but the club that folded dated from the late 1940s. Its high point was a five-season spell up to 2002 in the League of Wales (now the Welsh Premier League). The 'new' Rhayader Town has experienced already two promotions and a relegation, and is looking to consolidate its status as a Cymru Alliance club.

THE PEOPLE: An odd bunch. Not surprising, really. A lifetime spent in a place as remote and uneventful as Rhayader is bound to have some adverse effect. As I was strolling aimlessly along West Street, a pretty young girl - maybe about 14 - stepped across my path and asked me something I didn't quite catch. I needed her to repeat it twice before I realised, she wanted me to go to the shop over the road

to buy fags for her. Now, I don't smoke - it's a disgusting, unhealthy habit - therefore denied her request. Given what we know now about the deadly nature of cigarettes, I simply don't understand why youngsters feel inclined to smoke. At least their grandparents had an excuse: no-one then realised how deadly fags were. Down at the ground, the locals, who seemed resigned to the dullness of their existence, were reasonably friendly, though I got more conversational change out of the visiting supporters.

THE WEATHER: Thankfully, the stair rod rain had abated by kick-off to leave perfect conditions: dry, still and relatively mild, with a nice 'zip' to the pitch.

THE GROUND: Sheer delight. Y Weirglodd is located in an L-shaped bend in the Wye and is accessed off West Street via a lane that passes the underdeveloped home of the town's rugby union club. The Upper Wye Valley is fairly constricted at this point and steep slopes overlook the ground. Tall evergreens - they must be 30ft high - on three sides give Y Weirglodd a wonderfully enclosed feeling. Most of the spectator facilities are on the east side, where there is plentiful parking. The low clubhouse has a fine array of memorabilia and the adjacent stand is a real curiosity. Boxy, with full end screens, the structure's red and blue seats offer a restricted view. The dressing rooms are behind the stand, in what appears to be a chronologically later lean-to. There is a wonderfully rickety cover, slightly concave, over shallow terracing at the north end. The remainder of the ground is open hardstanding. Third Division professionals Cardiff City visited for the inauguration of the floodlights in 1985 - and won 9-0. The system must have been upgraded since (probably for the League of Wales venture, when many improvements were made) because they were of a very good standard. The groundsman told me the pitch, flat and of impressive dimensions, drains easily - given the Welsh climate, just as well!

THE GAME: Yet another stinker. Perhaps it's time I started doing something more beneficial with my free time. There was scandalously little to excite a bumper derby crowd. Llanidloes were terrible - indeed, their long-serving manager, Antony Griffiths, resigned after this defeat - and Rhayader not much better. The hosts were never in danger of losing and secured three points with first-half strikes from Tom Sparey (own goal) and Tom Rowlands. Can't say much else: I was bored witless long before the final whistle.

THE PROGRAMME: A sore point. I'd received assurances from Rhayader that a programme would be issued for this game and was therefore surprised to find none at the turnstiles. Apparently, they were produced but a cock-up on the printer's part meant they weren't delivered. The Rhayader secretary offered to send me a couple. I'm still waiting... He told me of his frustration because the attendance was well above Rhayader's average (a rare three-figure gate, according to the groundsman), meaning the club missed out on extra sales and vital revenue. Surplus copies of the programme for the August 17th league game with Cefn Druids were on the bar. This was a 20-pager with a cheery - if simple - cover. It sold for £1. Nothing special but much better than nothing at all!

THE VERDICT: Everything, lack of programme notwithstanding, was fine until the players ran onto the pitch.

04/20