

TT No.17: *Andy Gallon* - Sat 14th September 2013; **Penrhyncoch** v Caernarfon Town; Cymru Alliance; Res: 1-2; Att: 104; Admission: £4; Programme: £1 (56pp); FGIF Match Rating: **.

THE HOP: Penrhyncoch does not merit even a line in the 600-page Rough Guide to Wales therefore we felt obliged to spend the bulk of our day elsewhere. With a glorious late summer sun beating down, it proved to be the best outing of the holiday. Morning and early afternoon were spent seeking out the many charms of five-miles distant Aberystwyth, a classical Victorian resort of no little elegance. Post-match, we returned briefly to 'Aber', mainly to enjoy Marine Terrace and the promenade illuminated joyously by the western sun, before driving north to Aberdyfi, a delightful village on the north bank of the Dyfi Estuary. I'm not one for takeaway food but even I enjoyed fish and chips on the beach whilst watching the sun go down. We could even see Aberystwyth away to the south.

THE PLACE: Can't tell you much, to be honest. We drove to and from the ground without pausing to look round. Penrhyncoch, located between the Afon Stewi and Nant Seilo rivers, seemed a quiet place with more than its fair share of bungalows. I'd guess the average resident in a population of about 1,000 to be fairly advanced in years. The village dates only from the end of the eighteenth century and grew to its present size post-Thirties upon the break-up of the Pryse family's Gogerddan estate.

THE CLUB: Penrhyncoch might be a small place but it attracts plenty of footballers. The club run four senior teams, including one for women, and junior sides at under-eight ('tots'), under-nine, under-12, under-14 and under-16 levels. As the programme put it succinctly: the complete package, from cradle to, well, older. Penrhyncoch's crest features the Lion of Gogerddan, associated with the defunct Pryse family and its erstwhile landholding. The club was established in 1965 and began in the Aberystwyth & District League. The Roosters won four championships on the trot during the Seventies. Penrhyncoch became founder members in 1982 of the Mid Wales League Second Division. At the start of the Nineties, they opted to join the then-new Cymru Alliance. Despite the odd wobble, the Roosters have been fairly consistent members ever since.

THE PEOPLE: Friendly once again. I've always liked the Welsh - all Celts, in fact - and this holiday saw them rise even further in my estimation. We were recognised by one of the Penrhyncoch managerial team who'd noticed me taking photographs at Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant the previous Saturday. We chatted amiably and discovered it was his 50th birthday. "Three points would be the perfect present," he smiled. The junior school adjacent to the ground was staging a 150th anniversary celebration and there was plenty of mingling between partygoers and football spectators. Penrhyncoch appeared to be a happy place, content with its lot. A broad smile could well be a residency requirement.

THE WEATHER: The sort of day that makes one glad to be alive: sunny and warm with a cooling breeze. It felt like the last day of summer.

THE GROUND: Another Welsh gem. Thanks to its rural setting, mountain views, quaintly sloping pitch and oddball stands, Cae Baker cannot fail to please. Unusually, both dressing rooms and clubhouse - structures separated by the length of the pitch - are outside the ground's perimeter fence. Players have to enter the ground via the same route as spectators. The small, low main stand was erected for the club's venture into the Cymru Alliance. Close by is an even tinier structure. Opposite, there is room for a mere single line of spectators between touchline and school. There is limited hardstanding. Over the summer, a generic all-seat kit stand was constructed behind the north end goal. It seems out of place. Cae Baker has floodlights, I was surprised to discover. The system was installed during the latter part of the Nineties. The bucolic scenery adds considerably to the ground's appeal. We were told to keep an eye out for red kites and, sure enough, several pairs were spotted soaring above the action.

THE GAME: Dear, oh dear. A shapeless contest long on spills and short on thrills. Caernarfon, promoted into the Cymru Alliance over the summer, were second in the table before kick-off and boasted an unbeaten start to the season. And yet the Canaries were dreadful. This really is a very poor league indeed. I'd put it on a par with the First Division of the Northern Counties East. Yes - that bad! Well supported Caernarfon, followed to Ceredigion by remarkably few fans, were always on top and scored through Cai Jones (8min) and Luke Powell-Thomas (62min). Substitute Jon Evans, a former Accrington Stanley trainee, pulled a goal back in stoppage time but his rather fortunate close-range effort came too late to give Penrhynoch a realistic opportunity of stealing an unmerited draw.

THE PROGRAMME: Despite its chunky size, rather short on interesting content. This issue comprised an eight-page photocopied insert enclosed by a glossy 48-page shell. The number of adverts suggested the Roosters are well thought of in the community. Colourful the cover might have been but it was too cluttered and confused to contend for any design awards. Not bad for a quid, though.

THE VERDICT: A memorable day, with only the football itself forgettable.

04/20