

**TT No.84: Mike Latham** - Sat 29 March 2014: Ayrshire District League: **Craigmark Burtonians** 2-10 Kello Rovers; Admission: £4; Attendance: 32 (h/c); No programme; FGIF Match rating: 4\*.

By any standards Dalmellington, a former mining town in central Ayrshire is a remote place and somehow a Junior football club survives in this outpost of the game.

I journeyed north from Dumfries, then cut left through a beautiful national park on isolated roads amidst some stunning scenery. It seemed strange to find a game of football at the end of what was a memorable journey. I'm indebted to the Sage of Junior football, Andy McGregor for much of what follows in this report as he kindly provided me with a potted history of the Club and district, as there is very little information on the internet.

Burtonians were having a dreadful season and were bottom of the Ayrshire League having gained one point all season. They had suffered some large defeats but had earned admiration for the way they battled through to the end. Visitors Kello were third from bottom, so I wasn't expecting a football classic. But on a beautifully sunny and warm afternoon I got a perfect example of why the Juniors is a unique and much valued competition.

The name of the football club comes from the former mining settlements of Craigmark and Burnton, just outside the village of Dalmellington. The club was founded in 1929 but football thrived in the area long before then. At one time the Doon Valley had its own league with teams such as Patna Doon Athletic, Burnfoothill Primrose, Benquhat Heatherball and Rankinston Mountaineers. Today some of these settlements, let alone their football teams, have been consigned to the history books.

In 1947 Burntonians applied successfully to join the Juniors and they moved to their present ground Station Park in Dalmellington where the ground was more suited for Junior football. It had previously been used by Juvenile and Amateur clubs such as Dalmellington United and Camlarg Rangers.

The ground is well maintained and has a neat covered enclosure, a pie hut, a small social club by the entrance and some terracing on the far side. The playing pitch is far wider than many in the Juniors and the whole ground area is substantial. Behind the far goal is another pitch with running track and a game in the Ayrshire Amateur League was taking place watched by about 20 spectators.

Craigmark's first game at Station Park, so Andy tells me was against a team of German POWs from the nearby Glebe Camp on July 19th 1947. The first competitive match was against Muirkirk three weeks later.

On such a beautiful day it seemed strange to recall a match that Andy told me about in November 1964. The match against Maybole was abandoned with just 15

players left on the park. Nobody had been sent off - seven had succumbed to hypothermia and were unable to continue. Sam Goodwin, later to play for Airdrieonians and Crystal Palace, left the field to get a mug of hot Bovril from the tea hut and returned to play with the mug in his hand.

The record attendance at Station Park is not recorded. In recent times the 1,800 who watched a Charity Match against Rangers in May 1990 is the largest gathering at the ground. Back in 1949 a crowd of 2,600 watched a Scottish Cup tie against Kilwinning Rangers.

Just 32 spectators by my head-count lined the terraces for this game, two-thirds of them having accompanied the visitors, who were 3-0 up after only ten minutes and 5-0 ahead at half-time. The home side pulled back a goal but then went on to suffer another heavy defeat, though they had the consolation of scoring the last goal of the game and never dropped their heads.

I wish them well, but in such a remote outpost of the Juniors and in such a scarcely populated area it must be a continual battle for the small and dedicated committee to keep the football flag flying.

04/20