

TT No.62: Mike Latham - Saturday 14 February 2015: Vale of Clwyd & Conwy Football League premier Division: **Machno United** 1-6 Prestatyn Sports; attendance: 20 (h/c); No admission or programme, donation made.

When you've been groundhopping a while it takes something really special to take your breath away.

But for an aficionado the Tyn Ddol ground of Machno United does just that.

Penmachno is a small, isolated village in the upland valley of Cwm Penmachno, four miles south of Betws-y-Coed, about two miles from the major A5 road that leads to the port at Holyhead. It's the home village of the team known as Machno United, who compete in the Vale of Clwyd & Conwy Football League, levels five and six of the game in North Wales.

The two parts of the village are linked by a five-arched, stone bridge that dates from the 18th century which has a beautiful clear water stream running underneath. There are some striking stone buildings around the village which has been referred to as 'Pennant Machno', 'Llandudclyd' and 'Llan dutchyd' in historical sources.

Penmachno is renowned as the birthplace of the 16th century scholar Bishop William Morgan, who was the first to translate the Bible in its entirety into Welsh. His home, Tŷ Mawr is now a National Trust property open to the public and contains a Bible museum.

Other prominent locals include Owen Gethin Jones, a 19th century building contractor, poet and local historian and Richard Edgar Thomas, a 20th century tenor who lived in Pechmachno all his life and worked at the local woollen mill.

These days Pechmachno is best known for its world-class mountain bike trail which has been built on the nearby forested slopes.

Machno United are celebrating the establishment of their own ground, the recent £35,000 purchase of the field from a local farmer cementing the club's future. This will open up the club to grant funded applications and they intend to set up junior teams in the village and have local qualified coaches teaching the local school children about the game.

The teams change behind a nearby chapel and make their way to the enclosed field via a pathway. It's a stunning location in a valley with some spectacular views. Over the summer, now the ground purchase has been secured the club intends to undertake the levelling off the ground and its surroundings. And locals will be encouraged to set up allotments on the slope on the far side, cementing the local policy of growing one's own produce and being self-sufficient.

The visitors, Prestatyn Sports are a decent footballing team once they concentrate their energies solely on this target. Their goalkeeper is a voice of reason,

constantly imploring his fellow players and off-field staff to concentrate on the game rather than involve themselves in other issues.

They won this lively and competitive game at a canter in the end despite having a player sent-off just after half-time for verbal abuse of the referee. Prestatyn Sports have ambitions to play in the Welsh Alliance next season, ground-sharing at Prestatyn FC, and clearly have some talented players and a style of play that would serve them well at a higher level. But they need to ensure they have the necessary infrastructure off the field to support them.

Made up of predominantly local players, Machno United are a classic village club and clearly have a small groundswell of support in a remote and beautiful part of the world.

I'd recommend a visit here unreservedly.

04/20