

22/12/05 TT No.140: Mike Latham - Darlington Railway Athletic (Northern League Division 2)

Wed 21 Dec 2005, Northern League Division Two: Darlington Railway Athletic 1-0 Guisborough Town. Attendance: 80 on headcount; Admission: £2; 32pp programme: £1. FGIF Rating: 3*.

The shortest day of the year was mercifully mild and dry and allowed a trouble-free journey up the A1 to the Northern League's newest member. Exiting off J58 and taking the road into Darlington the Brinkburn Road ground of Darlington Railway Athletic is located to the left about one mile out of the town centre. Positioned in a quiet and decent residential area, the set-up is impressive with an adjoining cricket pitch and a second football pitch behind the far goal.

A great deal of work went in by club officials, players and supporters to transform the ground fit for Northern League standards after they went up from the Wearside League in the summer of 2005. On each side of the excellent playing area four floodlight poles were erected each with two lights, a fence was put up to separate the soccer and cricket fields, a small seated stand was constructed behind the nearside goal and a small cover behind the far goal. With hard standing around a neatly painted red and white post and rail fence surrounding the playing area the whole ground looks neat and tidy and reflects the pride of the club's supporters and officials in their enviable facility. There is another small covered standing area behind the dug-outs on the far side of the ground to the cricket pitch. Neatly painted in red, this proclaims: '*Darlington Railway Athletic- members of the Northern League 1919-1925.*'

Admission was only £2 with an informative 36-page programme with its distinctive red and white cover excellent value for a further £1. This also reveals that the club briefly enjoyed Northern League membership once before, until returning to the local league. The admission allows spectators day membership of the club house inside the ground which also doubles up as the cricket pavilion. There was a wide range of drinks on sale at cheap prices and a tea bar selling excellent big cups of coffee for only 50p and pie and peas for £1 did a roaring trade. A pleasant place to sit before the game.

Early-comers were treated to the sight of the home players, smartly attired in club tracksuits gathering for their pre-match talk and club officials extended a warm welcome to the three travellers in attendance.

Guisborough have undergone a rapid decline in the last couple of seasons but despite being bottom of the league put in a spirited display in a keenly contested game played in a good spirit. After hitting the woodwork twice, the home side clinched victory with a smartly taken goal midway through the first half. The behaviour of the players was excellent with none of the bad language that often mars non-league games and the crowd of around 80 were kept on their toes to the

end as Guisborough tried valiantly to equalise. After playing their first seven games of the season away from home, including a 5-0 win at Guisborough, this game was Railway Athletic's seventh home game in succession and brought only their second home league win of the campaign. But with their excellent away record they are safely established in mid table.

The team changes were announced clearly over the 'tannoy' but the team line-ups in the programme were of little use. The home side had no less than nine changes to the starting eleven, while only the goalkeeper for the visiting team was unchanged from the Guisborough team listed. With the five subs on each side also different that made for 29 changes out of 32- surely a record? If only clubs followed the example of Ashton United and put up a team sheet by the entrance for those interested in noting down the players for their records. Despite that gripe it was a good evening's entertainment- excellent facilities, a friendly welcome, a club clearly on the up and a good, competitive game. A trip to Darlington Railway Athletic comes highly recommended.

04/20