

TT No.238: Dean McClean - May Bank Holiday Travels to the North East: Annfield Plain and New Marske Sports Club (both Wearside League).

Monday May 1st 2006. Wearside League: **Annfield Plain** 3-2 Jarrow. Att: 20; Admission: £2; 24pp programme; 50p; FGIF Match Rating: 3*.

The Bank Holiday programme produced an unusually sparse choice of “double headers”. The only logical place to head appeared to be the North East. First on the list was a morning game at Derwent Park, home of Annfield Plain.

Upon the club's inception in 1890 they were known as Annfield Celtic and competed in the Northern Alliance from 1902 until they joined the North Eastern League in 1925. In 1965 they joined the Wearside League where they have remained ever since, being crowned Champions twice. The club's period in the North Eastern League is best described as a “Golden Era”, with crowds of 5-6,000 a regular feature for the visits of Middlesbrough, Newcastle and Sunderland's Reserve teams. Friendly club secretary and former player Marshall Lawson was only too keen to reminisce with two travellers about days gone by at Derwent Park. Mr Lawson can surely lay claim to being the oldest winger in town after turning out for the home team in 2000 at the age of 66. Another more than helpful official was Norman Wilkinson, who played for York City from 1954-1965, scoring 127 goals in 354 appearances. These two gentlemen are a credit to their local club and community, it is volunteers like them who keep small clubs up and down the country going.

Derwent Park is a venue crippled by continual vandalism. A small covered terrace provides more than enough cover for the tiny crowds on match days. Adjoining the stand is a small open terrace which has had the back wall partially smashed down by vandals. Behind the far goal and on the opposite side there is large open grass banking. The perimeter fence is a mix of green and rust colour. In the past the grass banking used to be large wooden terracing. Terracing also ran the length of the touchline where the covered stand is now housed. This atmospheric, yet eerie venue gives a feeling of being haunted by past greats who were regularly cheered on by four figure crowds.

This game was an open, end-to-end affair played in a good spirit from start to finish. Good skill levels were accompanied by high levels of effort and commitment. A refreshing attitude rarely seen at this stage of the season.

Monday May 1st 2006. Wearside League: **New Marske Sports Club** 1-1 Windscale. Att: 15; Admission: By donation; No programme. FGIF Match Rating: 2*.

New Marske Sports Club was easily reached in just over an hour from Annfield Plain via the A174. This is a basic yet smart venue and is fully railed off (as one would expect). It is situated in an elevated, pleasant location with views of the North Sea

to the East and rolling hills to the North. There was no covered accommodation available.

The club boasts a large, smart clubhouse which would be the envy of clubs higher up the pyramid. The changing facilities are housed in the adjoining building. Behind the bar a good range of sandwiches and pies were available. Just what my fellow traveller and I required after a long day without sustenance.

Such a ground in an elevated position close to the sea is bound to be affected by strong winds and today was no exception. Both teams struggled to play any sort of constructive football. A lack of quality and skill was more than matched by both teams' work rate and commitment. New Marske taking the lead mid-way through the first half with Windscale scoring at a similar time in the second following a well worked free-kick routine, with the ball headed in at the far post.

New Marske SC is a pleasant venue to visit. A dry, sunny day would probably be the best time to do so.

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