

TT No.223: Mike Latham - Saturday 9 May 2009: Vodkat League Division One: Padiham 1-2 Stone Dominoes; Attendance: 117.

We all have our favourite football grounds- and one of mine is Padiham FC's Arbories ground.

It's everything that a non-league venue should be- beautifully maintained, picturesque, friendly and, most importantly with a tea bar that serves the finest pie, peas and gravy- on a plate with a proper fork- in the Northern Union.

They are civilised in Padiham for here you can reserve a pie for half-time. It comes with your name on it.

I was delighted that Padiham had managed to achieve promotion from the Vodkat League Division One this season. For several seasons they have played fine, consistent football yet just missed out. At long last they managed it. Life in the Premier Division will be tough- this must be one of the hardest leagues to get out of with just the outstanding AFC Fylde managing it this year leaving two other fine sides, New Mills and Glossop North End behind.

For several weeks as the promotion places ebbed and flowed it looked as though this particular fixture would decide who went up with Bootle. Stone had a superb run towards the end of the season but their defeat at the hands of AFC Liverpool, coupled with Padiham's win at neighbours Darwen meant that this was dead rubber.

No matter, there was still a game to enjoy and with my scheduled cricket match falling to a downpour of tropical intensity I was able to make a hasty change of plan and get to Padiham.

An attractive market town about five miles from Burnley and south of Pendle Hill, Padiham boasts some beautiful stone buildings and the football ground is to be found up a small track by the side of some stone-built terraced houses. The cricket ground is side-by-side- with Padiham CC playing in the Ribblesdale League.

The excellent Ribblesdale League website has a history of Padiham CC and reveals that: *"Moves to re-establish a cricket club in the town began in 1947, chiefly at the instigation of Bill Houston. Land was bought at the Arbories, by the local authority, from Mr. Legendre Starkie of the Huntroyde estate who gave up ideas of a private housing development to allow for a cricket and football field to be developed. A public meeting at the Town Hall in November, 1947 gave unanimous support and a successful appeal was launched to raise the £5,000 needed from the club itself. Work began in 1948 and the ground, dedicated as a memorial to the dead of the Second World War, was opened in August, 1949. With its tall trees around three sides, sometimes a hazard and requiring special boundary rules, it is one of the most picturesque of the league's grounds and one of the smallest."*

Padiham FC were active in the late 1880s and once had an attendance of 9,000 for a match against Burnley. But as with many small town or village sides competing against bigger towns and cities, the onset of professionalism proved their undoing. Padiham's old ground was on the banks of the River Calder and is now just a distant memory. But following the establishment of the Arbories sports ground after the second world war football in the town was revived and Padiham FC re-formed.

With its elevated position, Padiham is an attractive place to visit, especially with a camera in hand for the sweeping views across Lancashire are simply stunning. It struck me that though I have been to the Arbories many times, this was the first time I had ever visited Padiham in daylight, my visits previously being for midweek, floodlit games where the lure of the pies usually makes a visit preferential to other grounds in the area. I suspect that I am not the only one who regards Padiham as one of his favourite teams.

I arrived 15 minutes or so after kick-off time with the storm sweeping over the ground. The score was 0-0 and both sides were struggling to cope with the conditions- huge credit to them and the officials for continuing.

Had the game been a promotion decider then several hundred spectators would doubtless have been in attendance. This despite neighbouring Burnley's early evening play-off tie with Reading. But with Padiham's promotion assured just over one hundred braved the conditions, many sheltering in the clubhouse or in the covered terrace behind the goal as the newly constructed seated stand on the halfway line seemed to have caught the worst of the elements.

Fortunately, the storm passed and the second half was played out in bright sunshine. Credit to the visitors, who overcame their disappointment at missing out on promotion to deservedly win a competitive game 2-1, the winner coming following a goalkeeping howler on the hour-mark.

The meat & potato pie, peas and gravy, together with freshly brewed coffee in a mug were as good as ever - it was as good a way as ever to signal the end of the season and look forward to watching Padiham in the top flight of this excellent league in 2009-10.

06/20