

**TT No. 120: *Mike Latham*** - Wed 27 February 2013: Northern League Division One: **Bedlington Terriers 0-0 Newton Aycliffe**; Attendance: 80 (est.); Admission: £6; Programme: £1; FGIF Match Rating: 3\*.

The night is clear and the air is cold and a white sheen is already forming on the pitch as I arrive at Dr Pit Welfare Park, home of Bedlington Terriers FC. It's as relatively modest venue for this level but obviously lovingly maintained, as everything inside the ground is immaculate and the playing pitch looks in fine condition.

Bedlington is an old mining town in Northumberland, close to Ashington, Blyth and Cramlington. The Bedlington terrier is a famous breed of dog, dating back to the early 1800s. The football team has a more recent history, dating back to just after the Second World War. They joined the Northern League in 1982 and have had their ups and downs since then.

The Terriers hit the headlines in November 2010, when it was announced that American billionaire Robert Rich, owner of the Buffalo Bisons and Jamestown Jammers baseball teams, had become the new shirt sponsor of the Terriers with his Rich Products brand.

Reportedly the 488th richest man in the world at the time, Mr Rich opted to become involved with the club after he had traced his family tree back to Bedlington. His wife purchased for him the title of Lord Bedlington as a gift. Mr Rich subsequently announced the shipment of a £30,000 electronic scoreboard to the club's Welfare Park ground while also funding a club tour, in June 2011 of Buffalo, New York and Niagara Falls which was subject of a BBC documentary.

The huge electronic scoreboard in the corner of the ground looks somewhat incongruous amidst the otherwise understated and functional surroundings, its bright lights standing out on a dark and clear evening.

I love Northern League football because the entertainment is usually of a decent standard and the teams play the game with such commitment even though, on the face of it, nothing is at stake. Bedlington are on the edge of the top six but have no chance of contesting the title race while the visitors are nineteenth but look in little danger of relegation. But the action is fast, furious and committed, aided by an excellent referee who keeps the game flowing and manages to get through the evening without having to administer a single yellow card.

It's a game of few chances, Bedlington gradually beginning to dominate but the visitors defending well and their young goalkeeper remaining impressively calm under pressure. When you watch a lot of football you can generally sense a 0-0 early on and I voiced my concerns to a local supporter midway through the first-half. Sadly, my worst fears were realized but despite the lack of goals I still enjoyed my first visit to Welfare Park.

Most of the spectators gathered along one side where the shallow main stand was a mixture of seats and terracing. I watched most of the game from the other side behind the dug-outs. There is a smart club house and a sponsors' lounge and a canteen and club shop. The programme was an excellent effort and the club website had a detailed match report posted shortly after the final whistle. Well-painted signs around the entrance build on the Terriers theme and it was interesting to note that the area to the dressing rooms was sign-posted 'To the Kennels'.

While at the game, I became aware that the Terriers had been served with a winding-up notice to be heard two days after the game. The Club Chairman made a brief statement in the programme, assuring supporters that the matter was being dealt with by the club's legal representatives and expressing the hope that the matter would be resolved to the satisfaction of all parties. The hearing was later adjourned to a future date. I sincerely hope that it is because I really enjoyed my evening at this proud and friendly club.

Looking through the FGIF archive I found to my surprise that there was no TT of Bedlington Terriers, so here's the first. I hope it encourages many groundhoppers to pay a visit.

04/20