

TT No.47: *Mike Latham* - Sat 16 January 2016: West Lancashire Football League Division 1: **Turton 2-0** Hawcoat Park; Venue: Darwen Aldridge Community Academy, Sudell Road, Darwen; Attendance: 30 (h/c); No programme or admission.

For the second Saturday in a row I ended up watching West Lancashire League football on a 3G pitch after the excellent league website advertised this venue change after overnight frost decimated the league programme.

It just goes to show the power of the internet as an effective means of communication for leagues willing to embrace IT. Even ten years ago such a venue switch would more likely than not have gone unrecorded until it was too late for a groundhopper to do anything about it.

Just two games in the league's three divisions finished with the other game being at Furness Rovers. The Premier Division game at Lostock St Gerards was abandoned and it was a relief when this game got through to its conclusion after sleet turned the pitch into a winter wonderland in the second half. Fortunately, home officials kept the lines clear by use of brushes and we just about got away with it, though only because the game started at 2pm. A later kick-off and there would have been no chance.

With both sides lagging behind on their fixtures, Turton's enterprise in finding an alternative venue had much to commend it. Darwen Aldridge Community Academy is a secondary school and sixth form with academy status situated off the A666 on the Bolton side of Darwen.

The Academy specialises in entrepreneurship and is sponsored by the Aldridge Foundation, an educational charity chaired by Sir Rod Aldridge and moved to a new purpose-built site in September 2010. The new site features a five-storey main building, a sports hall, dance studio, cafe and office spaces and cost an estimated £49 million. It was officially opened by Prince William and Kate Middleton in April 2011, as part of their final public engagement before their wedding.

Part of the impressive complex is a 3g pitch to which spectators were allowed to watch from pitch side. Two sides of the pitch are bordered by a traditional cage, two by walls and boarding which give the pitch a nice enclosed feel.

There are some spectacular views across to rows of steeply banked terraced houses and the site of the old Barley Bank ground where Darwen played in the Football League in Victorian days. There are two notable landmarks, the India Mill chimney which towers above Darwen and the iconic Darwen Tower on Darwen Hill.

Neither side had played much football lately due to the weather and they both looked rusty at times. Turton gradually got on top and won a tight and competitive game with two second half goals. As the weather closed in during the second half

the small army of club officials that kept sweeping the lines saved the game from being abandoned with their industry.

It was a really cold and wintry scene by the end with the moors in the background virtually obscured and Turton could be well pleased with their victory that confirmed their promotion credentials. The visitors faced a long trip back to Barrow on icy roads but at least had the consolation of avoiding a lengthy midweek trip in late season.

The West Lancashire League is an excellently run league and the standards of play are good. This was another good advert for a league that I know is highly regarded by groundhoppers.

04/20