

TT No.074: 10/04/05 Ground/Club Focus: *Mike Latham* - Darwen (NWCL2)

Wed 6 Apr, NWCL Div. Two, Darwen 0-4 Nelson (att. - 70)

This East Lancashire derby on a bitterly cold evening of squally showers brought together two former Football League clubs. Darwen were elected to the Football League in 1891 and left it in 1899 when they moved from Barley Bank to their present Anchor Ground.

Nelson were founder members of the Third Division (North) in 1921 and failed to gain re-election after the 1930/31 season. Their present ground at Victoria Park in a stone's throw away from their old Seedhill ground, part of which was buried under the M65 motorway.

Darwen are rightly proud of their history and their programme, an excellent 28-page publication selling for £1 and full of up-to-date statistics and interesting articles, has many glimpses of the town's glorious soccer heritage. You can discover, for example, that Darwen supplied four England internationals between 1881-91 and that they were FA Cup semi-finalists in 1881.

The club house has several old photographs adorning its walls, including a report of when Darwen played at Arsenal in the FA Cup in 1931. Though they lost, 11-1, Arsenal were so impressed with their sportsmanship they presented the Lancashire visitors with a set of their own red strip, the colours of which Darwen have worn more or less ever since.

The programme compiler was apparently horrified to find he had included league tables a week old in the programme by mistake- League clubs take note. So, he issued an insert with up-to-date statistics including the games played the day before. Fantastic service.

The ground is to found on the Anchor Estate, behind the Anchor Garage on the A666 on the Blackburn side of Darwen, just before J4 of the M65 motorway. Admission was £3 and the spectators, roughly three score and ten, gathered on the main stand side to the left of the club house at the entrance side. The other three sides were open standing but only a brave few tested themselves against the elements.

The covered side had a considerable number of seats and terraced standing and the spectators were roughly split 50-50 in terms of allegiances.

On a rain sodden pitch honours were even until Nelson took the lead just before half-time and then sealed their victory with three late second half goals. The programme revealed that Darwen had used 48 players this season but their highest scorer had four goals to his name. Statistics rarely lie and they created precious few opportunities with Nelson the more creative side once they got their noses in front.

With a tea bar adjoining the club house selling an excellent range of hot food and drinks and the club officials welcoming travellers, the Anchor Ground is a most pleasant and historic place to visit and highly recommended.

03/20