



# Special Edition

30



FEETHAMS  
FLYER  
SPECIAL

## THE FOOTBALL CLUB AT FEETHAMS



A SPECIAL EDITION TO COMMEMORATE THE FOOTBALL CLUB'S TIME  
AT FEETHAMS

(A chapter in the Cricket Club History currently being written by TD.

© DSMCricket 2011.

## **Darlington Football Club Leave Feethams**

The football club had Feethams as its home from 1883 to 2003.

Feethams itself had seen football played on its turf since the 1860s but when the town's club was formed in 1883 professional football was first played here. Football was very popular at the start and huge crowds attended. So much so that stands began to be built around the turn of the century.

When the Polam Lane end terrace was built it was originally called the Cricket Pavilion. Steps were built behind the goal at the town end. Eventually the "tin shed" would be erected. This would serve as possibly the largest sight screen in English cricket on its reverse!

The twin towers at Wembley could also be found at Feethams. In 1913 the Feethams entrance still used today was built. Football fans coming to Feethams had the unusual pleasure of walking around the cricket field to get to the football match.



I remember as a cricket player and indeed a hockey player how during the swap over period between the cricket and football seasons, huge crowds would turn up before the football match and stand around the cricket boundary watching the cricket before taking their places to watch the match. Sometimes it caused hold ups with spectators moving behind the bowler's arm. If you were batting at this time and not used to these distractions it could easily cost you your wicket.

Half time used to see a rush of football fans who were also cricket fans rushing out to see how the cricket match was going. The annual match with local rivals Hartlepool FC was always a frantic affair and on occasions the Pools visit to Feethams coincided with the cricket season. On one occasion a riot ensued in the football ground and several hundred fans being chased by the local constabulary took the easy option and used the cricket field as a short cut. Problem being....the second team were playing a cricket match. Darlington were fielding and several players grabbed stumps to protect themselves. Paul Stabler did help the police by tripping up and pinning several of the Hartlepool

hooligans to the ground until they could be arrested. He was not a man to be messed with!

The cricketers today don't realise how easy they have it!

The hockey club played their home games on the outfield of the cricket ground during the 70s and 80s before the introduction of all weather astro turf pitches became a factor in their section of the club leaving Feethams. The football fans enjoyed pouring out of the Tin Shed to watch the hockey during the half time break in the football. The hockey players enjoyed having people watching them.

Towering floodlights did not come to the football club until 1960. Numerous sons of Darlington cricketers would end up being chastised by their dads during the summer for attempting to sneak into the football ground and climb the emergency ladders attached to the floodlights. Panoramic photos were taken of the cricket ground from the top of these floodlights.



In fact during the 60s security was not as high as these days and several of us under 11s would sneak onto the football pitch for a kick around and even sneak into the director's box in the stands. Imagine our delight when we found a way in to the press box and realised there was a phone line there!

The car park was tarmacked during the 60s and stumps were chalked onto the football ground toilet walls and the wall of the football stand. The greatest of test matches were played by the sons of the Darlington cricketers. Many tennis balls were lost into the river Skerne by six hits over the fence. Occasionally we would stop to applaud if a Darlington player scored a century but we were far more interested in being Colin Cowdrey or John Snow and beating the Aussies led by Bill Lawrie. How we loved those summers of the 60s when the football season had finished and we had the place to ourselves.

During the same period we would go with our dads to watch the football matches in the 60s and see John Peverall with his mighty powerful shot, Tony Moore the best goalie and also a good cricketer (he played for Scarborough)



and Lance Robson who was a dentist in the town too. I always remembered shouting each week “*watch it Lance you’re offside!*” as he led the line for the Quakers...each week he would look over and stick the thumbs up to me, he was my boyhood hero on the football field! He remained my hero even when he missed scoring the equaliser against an Everton side in the FA cup that included Alan Ball a world cup winner in 1966. Ball went down in my estimation as he blew his nose on our corner flag to enrage the Quaker fans! Lance Robson

presented me with a medal in 1969 when my junior school team, Alderman Leach beat Firth Moor Junior School 3-1 in the “Richard Luck Cup Final” at Feethams on FA Cup final morning. The pitch was soaking wet and the goalmouths were full of sharp sand laid down to soak up the water. I was Alderman Leach’s goalie and I can remember after our victory spending the afternoon watching the FA cup final on TV at home with my mum picking gravelly sand out of my knees with tweezers and “Detol” antiseptic. It hurt like hell but the joy and pride of receiving my medal for winning off Lance Robson made up for any pain!





Carl Sturgeon *pictured left as a youthful teenager* (father of 2<sup>nd</sup> team wicket keeper, Andrew “Tubes” Sturgeon) and John Gegg who both played cricket at Feethams as young men were the envy of many as they were the two ball boys at each Darlington FC home game at Feethams in the late 60s and early 70s. Carl is now helping the club with his work with DSM Cricket and his ideas and links with local businesses. DSM have been sponsoring the club since 2010

The football ground built a new stand in 1997 but its cost crippled the club financially and local business man George Reynolds bailed the club out

He decided to build the club a new 25,000 seater stadium on the outskirts of town.

In 2003 the club left Feethams and moved into the Reynolds Arena. The cricket club no longer had an income from the football club for ground rent and negotiations began with the cricket field trust and the clubs solicitors to decide the best course of action.



Many ideas were touted for the use of the ground or the sale of it. The economic climate had made it a tough time for many sports clubs and the cricket club were no exception. In the end it was decided to sell the land for housing. At the time of writing the sale is almost completed. The period between 2003 and 2011 were not kind to the football ground however and only the

“Tin Shed” shell remains. The rest of the land is overgrown and could be likened to a David Attenborough wildlife programme. The cricket club groundsman, Dave Bentley had numerous problems with rabbits and foxes coming from the “jungle” onto the cricket field. It certainly was a long way from those summers of the 1960s when as a young boy John Lister, Clyde Camburn, Carl Sturgeon, John Gegg, myself and others were winning the Ashes in the football club car park.

The football club reached Wembley in the 2000 season and Carl Sturgeon, Derek Coates and Martin Gray (ex player for Sunderland and Darlington football teams) had the idea in 2011 of a fund raising cricket match to help the cricket clubs finances between the footballers who went to Wembley in 2000 and the cricketers of 2011. *(Peter Howells guesting for the cricketers bats against the footballers.)*



They organised a huge fun day for the club with bouncy castles, side shows, stalls and games and a coloured clothing cricket match. The event was attended by over 400 people and was a great success.







### ***The footballer cricket side***

The cricketers ran out winners and the footballers demanded a rematch but at football.

This took place at the end of the cricket season and again was a great success. The shirts were autographed and auctioned off to help raise more money.



### ***The cricketers cricket side***



6 goals for Quaker's legend Marco Gabbiadini ensured victory for the footballers in this return challenge between the footballers and the cricketers of Darlington.

After the successful cricket match in the summer the footballers were keen to have a return encounter but this time with the larger ball!

Many of the stars from the football clubs team of 2000 turned out for the match including ex Liverpool legend and Darlington manager, David Hodgson. Unfortunately a back injury stopped Martin Gray from playing but his efforts in organizing the event must be mentioned. *(John Lister pictured in red)*

Although some players were carrying a few extra pounds the old silky skills were still there for all to see. Gabbiadini was still tantalizing on the ball and



deadly in front of goal, Glen Naylor hit a hat trick, Gary Bennett was superb and also scored and Hodgy showed signs of his Liverpool days when he worked alongside Kenny Dalglish.

The cricketers played their best stuff in their two hour warm up. This did hamper their performance during the game as some of them were exhausted by the time the game got under way.



*(Andy Peacock pictured above in red shows skill for the cricketers.)*





Shaughn Russell was a power house for the cricketers and was rewarded with two well taken goals. Doug Mulholland put a penalty away after Liam Coates had conned the ref into awarding a penalty. Andy Peacock was an influential star for the cricketers and he also scored a good goal. The best was saved for last however as substitute, David Piper came off the bench to convert a last minute penalty with aplomb!

The game ended 10-5 to the professionals (footballers) but really the winner was sport itself!

No doubt many of the footballers who played that day and indeed any footballer supporters will be devastated to see how the Feethams football pitch looks now.

The recent rainy summer has helped the undergrowth take over before the area could be developed.



We await to see how the next chapter unfolds. The move to the new stadium failed and the club went into administration several times eventually in 2012 being relegated from the Conference league and punished for going into administration by being demoted to the Northern League. They were forced out of the new stadium and for the 2012/13 season will ground share with Bishop Auckland FC. A sad end to a proud football club.... Can they rise from the ashes and become a footballing Phoenix, only time will tell. We will all have our own memories of the football clubs time at Feethams. TD

