

TT No.34: Keith Aslan - Sat 12th December 2015; **Alton Town** v Stoneham; Wessex League Division1; Kick-Off: 15.00; Result: 4-0; Admission: Free (in an attempt to get people to arrive early it was free before 2 o'clock); Programme: £1; Attendance: 218 (202 home, 4 away & 12 neutral).

With my proposed trip to the west country an early casualty of the weather I had a quality 'Alton-ative'. A ground opening, although more of a re-opening really, and a plastic pitch meaning a stress-free Saturday without having to study the rainfall tables. Alton today returned to their old ground, 100 yards up the road from their Bass headquarters where they have been strutting their stuff for the past 30 years or so. Given that for the last ten of those years, hardly a season went by without stories of them being about to be locked out, and having to ground share, the transition went spectacularly smoothly. They played their final game at their old ground last Saturday, and seven days later, here they are, playing the first one at their new abode. Who more fitting to open proceedings than ex Ipswich and Scotland international, George Burley? Rather disappointingly, didn't hang around to watch the football match itself.

The ground is contained within the ubiquitous "cage". Is there some FA rule that all artificial pitch's must be surrounded by a 12ft high wire mesh fence? Contained within is a dressing room block, a fairly roomy *Atcost* stand, tea bar and clubhouse where you could have watched the lunchtime football on Sky Sports if someone had bothered to switch on the TV. But it is the far side of the ground that will please the aesthete. The original terracing is still in situ, a fine sight indeed. Also still there is the skeleton of the old stand, but not alas the bit that keeps you dry. Looking very spruce it has recently been painted which was presumably cheaper than demolishing it. The food bar was operated by three teenagers who were apparently suffering from early onset dementia as they had great difficulty in remembering to give people their change unless they asked for it. Clearly this trio are in for a prosperous new year! Also, if you order burger and chips it's a nice touch to get them together, the chips arrived straight away, the burger eight minutes later.

The high-profile avuncular chairman was handing out giant festive bags of Tortilla chips before kick-off, and, while it was for the kids, I managed to grab one and very nice they were too. There was a good vibe all round from this game, helped by some top of the range ground hoppers in attendance. As for the match itself, even stevens for the first 20 minutes then Stoneham conceded a penalty, the referee adjudged the miscreant to have denied a clear goal scoring opportunity, sent him off, and the away side never recovered. Although this was not to be Stoneham's afternoon, I wish them well for the future. Any team that plays in all purple surely deserves success.

