

TT No.37: Keith Aslan - Saturday 4th March 2017; Stockton Town v Billingham Town; Northern League Division 2; Kick-Off: 15.00; Result: 4-0; Admission: £5; Programme: £1; Attendance: 352 (230 home, 58 away & 64 neutral)

Congratulations go to Denaby United for announcing on their excellent website on Friday evening the postponement of Saturday's match due to rain, thus saving me, and others, a whole heap of pain and distress the next day. A quick flick through *'The Traveller'* and I'd found a bespoke plan B at Stockton's new ground whose plastic surface is joyfully impervious to the ravages of H₂O.

Darlington to Stockton is the oldest passenger railway in the world and began running in 1825. Seven days a week, no weekend rail replacement landau's back then. Also, of note is the line goes through the least used station on the rail network. Teesside Airport racked up 28 passengers (customers) last year from its two trains a week. Seeing its location makes you wonder what the 28 were doing there!

Stockton's ground is a 20-minute walk from the station and about 100 yards away from their previous abode. It's the same clubhouse, a thriving affair with full meals and lunchtime football. This looks to be the number one nightspot in Stockton, although I wouldn't imagine the competition is particularly robust.

The ground is exactly what you would expect, an *Atcost* stand and the foundations for another one adjacent which will contain seats, but no sign of any sitting down material at present. The tea-bar has pies, and to the traveller who reported there was no hot food I suggest you get there a bit earlier mate. The whole ensemble was surrounded of course by a green mesh fence, apparently compulsory if you've got a synthetic pitch. The large crowd was bolstered by a substantial away following from one station up the line, plus refugees from many of the local postponements. Incidentally, my headcount was 352 while the official attendance was 355. Maybe 3 people were in the toilet when I did mine! Before their elevation, Stockton won the Wearside League, and almost everything else, for the past 4 years, but until now the lack of a decent ground has halted progress. Undaunted by the step up to the Northern League today's win saw them go top, above Team Northumbria on goal difference.

That's the Northern League wrapped up again for me, at least for the next few months, but something I've noticed on my visits is that the games all kick off at the advertised times and I don't recall any late starts. It can't be coincidence and I assume the league insist on punctuality. Perhaps other leagues could follow suit?