

THE LNER FOOTBALLERS

(Photo : Richard Riley, courtesy Rodney Lissenden)



To the casual observer, the LNER's policy of naming some of their B17 Class express locomotives after famous football teams might seem a little haphazard. 25 locomotives were selected to carry these names, in theory to honour top level Association Football clubs in the LNER's area of operation. However, there were some glaring omissions, some names were swapped between different locomotives and a few names were only carried for a matter of weeks !

The first four 'Footballers' appeared from Darlington Works in 1936 and they were each named after that year's FA Cup Semi Finalists. No. 2848 was named after the eventual winners, Arsenal and the others were Sheffield United (the runners up), Derby County and Grimsby Town. The next locomotive, No. 2852 was due to be named Sheffield Wednesday but rumour has it that the LNER Works Manager had nameplates cast in favour of the local team – in order to commemorate the Works themselves ! The plates were never changed and No. 2852 seen leaving Cambridge in the photo above, ran as 'Darlington' for its entire career !

Loco No. 2858 had the dubious honour of carrying Footballer nameplates for the shortest period of time as 'Newcastle United' was renamed 'The Essex Regiment' less than four weeks after it entered service in May 1936. Unlike some of the other re-namings, the Magpies nameplates were never used again. The Norwich City and Tottenham Hotspur locomotives were both re-named when the engines themselves were streamlined in a style similar to the A4's for the East Anglian express train service from London to Norwich. However, both set of plates were re-used on similar B17 Class engines numbers 2839 & 2830 respectively.

It is often said that the biggest omission from the list was Ipswich Town. The club were smack bang in the middle of LNER operating territory and the old company had a locomotive depot there – with several other Footballer Class locomotives on the allocation. Ipswich Town fans working on the LNER were furious !

Although re-numbered twice from LNER 2862 to 1662 and then finally to BR No. 61662, our own favoured locomotive, '**Manchester United**', never carried any other name during its 23 year service career from Jan 1937 to Dec 1959. We are planning to continue the story of the LNER Footballers in future Newsletters.