

PRE-WORK

First impressions

My earliest recollection of the railway was when I was just about five years old. I remember going in a red, open top sports car belonging to a friend of my father's to Basford Bridge located by the Co-op dairy on the main Newcastle to Nantwich road. This was located about 2 miles south of Crewe station on the west coast main line. Dad lifted me up to get a better view of an express on the down fast. I can recall the engine going underneath the bridge directly below me. It seemed so close I could almost touch it. Just a wisp of steam was escaping from the safety valves. I must have been almost five, as I say, because mother used to tell me she was only a few weeks off giving birth to my sister, who was born on 5 October 1947. Since I was born 28 August 1942 that makes it probably just after my fifth birthday. My mother was worried that the jolting she got in the car might have started her into early labour, but it didn't.

First train spotting, Chatterley

Did you ever say as a child: "Mum, I'm really bored. What can I do?"? Well, I did once, when I was about eleven. "Why don't you go and watch the trains at Chatterley. You know where it is. Catch Brown's "White Fleet" bus for Tunstall, like we do when we go Tunstall Park, and get off at Chatterley, where the railway tunnel is." I knew it well from travelling on the bus, because I would always look towards Harecastle tunnel as the bus crossed the bridge spanning the cutting just before the tunnel. I caught the bus and arrived at Chatterley, located about 4 miles north of Stoke-on-Trent. There was another lad there, and he told me that at one o'clock there would be a "namer" coming through.

"What's a namer?" I asked. "An engine with a name, of course," he replied. Sure enough, almost exactly on the dot at one o'clock, (later I was to learn that the booked passing time at Kids Grove, 1½ miles north of Chatterley, was 1.03 pm), the "double peg" came off for the Stoke direction, and after a couple of minutes the 12 noon Manchester London Road to London Euston came out of the tunnel mouth, headed by N° 45701, a "Jubilee" class locomotive. There on the side, and I can still see it now, was the name "Conqueror".

Crewe

It wasn't long before I found out where one could see dozens of 'namers' in a single day. That was Crewe, of course. Soon after starting at Wolstanton Grammar School in 1953 I found out that a lad in the same class, Malcolm Sutton, was also interested in 'train spotting'. We used to spend most of a Saturday on the footbridge at the north end of Crewe Station. There was always something different to see there. A "string" (three or four engines coupled together, one in steam pulling the other "dead" ones) would either come under the road bridge from Crewe South shed heading for Crewe Works, or going in the opposite direction. Those going into the works would appear rusty and dirty, those coming out clean and shiny. The air coming out of the open steam cocks would make a strange sound. There was some excitement when the cry "String" was heard, because often a string would contain engines we had not seen before, possibly from some faraway shed. What I remember most, I think, was standing on the footbridge looking down into the chimney of a "Duchess" or a "Scot" standing in N° 2 platform. Who cared if you got a black face, the smell was worth it.

Whitmore

Justin Ray, Malcolm Sutton and myself had been going to Whitmore for a year or so. One particular Easter Monday morning I went alone, and as the trains were few and far between I decided to go down by the box, even though the view of the trains was not as good as on the other side of the road bridge. The box door was open and I could hear the bell codes very clearly. I asked the signalman what they meant, and he said why didn't I come up and he would explain, so in I went. The signalman's name was Jack Woodcock, full name John Baden Woodcock, and he explained the

function of the block instruments and simple bell codes. I remember what caused confusion for a while was how you could signal both up and down trains on one instrument. I don't think I was allowed to send any bell codes or 'pull off' on my first visit, but I was certainly hooked on the sounds and smells of a signal box. Jack invited back some other time, which I think was on the following Saturday afternoon. After a few visits I was confidently pulling the signals off and sending bell codes. Jack would say: "This is the Royal Scot so I'd better pull off for this one", but soon he could trust me to do it all myself. Jack's locker was in the corner of the box, and he always had the locker lid raised so I would know he was on duty. We had to keep an eye on the Station Master, Mr. Barnett, as his house was only 300 yards away, and he could see straight through the box from his kitchen window. We made sure that only one of us was visible at any one time. I later wore black trousers and a black waistcoat, which a signalman at Bradwell Sidings, near Stoke, gave me, to look the part.

To put a little extra cash in his pocket, Jack would cut the platelayers' hair, in fact anybody's hair that was getting too long. He used to cut mine as well, but since I could usually only visit the box every third Saturday when he was on "noons", it was a choice between having it cut after three weeks when it didn't want cutting, or after six weeks when it was too long! I do remember though visiting Jack several times during school holidays, on a weekday morning. Once or twice I was in the box when the 'pickups' was shunting in the yard. Jack said though that he had better work the box while it was there. The engine was usually a Black 5 or a Stanier 8F (super-power for the 'pick-ups'!!). When the 'pickups' had left, Jack cut a platelayers hair while I worked the box.

One of my favourite trains to signal through was the 5/50pm Stafford – Crewe, 6/12pm passing Whitmore. This was a train of 3 coaches which came through on the down fast. A regular engine was 4-4-0 No. 40660 of Crewe North shed. Jack told me this train took mostly railway workers back to Crewe after working at Stafford. A curiosity of this train was that sometimes it would be signalled as 3-1 (local passenger), and sometimes as 4 beats (express passenger). It should really have been signalled as an express passenger, but perhaps someone at Stafford liked to go back to the old days when the train was a local passenger train stopping at all stations to Crewe.

Jack trusted me so much that on a couple of occasions he left me in the box on my own. Once was on a Saturday night when Jack said that just felt like a Guinness. "There's nothing about, Spen", he said. "I'm just nipping up to 'The Sheet Anchor' for a bottle of Guinness". The Sheet Anchor pub is on the A53 Newcastle—Market Drayton road, just off the railway bridge, close to Jack's Up Fast Starting signal. He was only gone ten minutes, but I felt very important on my own. I actually did give "line clear" for a down London before he came back.

The other occasion was on a Saturday afternoon when the local village (incidentally Whitmore box was about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile from the village of Whitmore, right on the border with the next village - Baldwin's Gate) put on a show in the field behind the box. "I just fancy a go at that clay pigeon shoot. Just look after the box a few minutes. Mr Barnett (the Station Master) has gone on his usual Saturday afternoon trip to Newcastle, so you'll be OK". I remember leaning on the balcony at the top of the box steps, in lovely sunshine, watching the goings-on at the village show. Jack was almost out of sight over the far corner of the field. He could have stayed there all after-noon as far as I was concerned.

Jack had a real scare one damp and foggy night. He said it was the closest he had been to having a pile-up on his hands. What happened was this:

Very often, when the weather was damp, the electrical circuit which released the lock on the Whitmore Up Fast starting signal refused to work. The other starters worked O.K. Also, it only seemed to happen when the next box to the south, Stableford, was switched out. Maybe it was a bad connection inside the switch in Stableford box which carried the signals through to Standon Bridge, the next box after Stableford. The lock on the lever in the box was released by the signalman in the box in advance when he turned a needle indicator on his block instrument to "Line Clear", if the line was clear up to his clearance point. This was usually 440 yards inside his first stop signal (the 'home' signal).

The result of this was that trains on the Up Fast, towards Stafford, had to pass the starting

signal at danger. Of course, the driver had to be verbally instructed to do so, and told the reason why. Two factors made this procedure awkward that night. The Up Fast was the furthest line from the box, therefore three running lines had to be crossed to reach the driver. Also, it became very foggy, so crossing the running lines could be extremely hazardous. Each box had a 'fogging point'. This was a convenient location some distance away from the box, chosen so that if it was not visible during fog or falling snow, someone would have to assist the signalman to observe train tail-lamps. This was necessary to ensure that the train was complete and had not become parted whilst in the preceding section. Jack had to drag the 'ganger' out of his bed. A phone was provided for the purpose, and he only lived in the railway cottages close to the box, so he wasn't long in arriving. The "ganger" could do two jobs for Jack, look for tail lamps and also authorise drivers to pass the Up Fast starter at danger.

All went well until about 3 a.m. As Jack said, "About 3 o'clock there comes a string of sleepers out of Crewe." ('Sleepers' meaning sleeping-car trains, not what the track is laid on). Because Stableford box was closed, the length of the block section was now twice the distance, through to Standon Bridge, 4.2 miles away. This meant that in the time it was taking for trains to clear the section to there, a following train would reach Whitmore and stand there waiting for a line clear. The first train had left Whitmore, and as soon as Jack cleared the section back to Madeley, he was offered another train, which he accepted. They sat talking in the box, Jack just getting up to 'get the road' for a freight train on the Down Slow Line from Standon Bridge. He pulled off the signals for it, and sat down again. Just then Jack heard the clunk of the track indicator in the box, which meant that the train from Madeley had reached the Up Fast home signal track circuit. The train had to stand at the home signal at danger a couple of minutes or so until the previous train cleared the section to Standon Bridge. (Usually, when a train was waiting to enter the section ahead, the home signal would be pulled off. This would allow it to creep up to the starting signal, hoping by the time it reached there the signal would have cleared to green. On this occasion, of course, the signal could not be changed to green, so Jack held the train at the home signal.) When Jack "got the road", he pulled off the home signal, and said to Harry the ganger: "He's coming up now, Harry. Can you go across and tell him I've got a line clear and he can pass my starter at danger because of the fault. Watch out for the Down Slow goods. It must be getting close now." Harry went to the foot of the stairs and waited for the goods to pass. Jack thought, "Go on Harry, or else you'll have to walk all the way up to the starter to tell the driver." The Up Fast train started to pass by the box, on the far side of the four running lines, a "Duchess" at the head, blowing off impatiently. In desperation Harry turned his small battery torch to green, held it up towards the driver, and held his other hand in the air to signify 'right-away, Driver'. Just then the Down Slow goods came by. Harry noted that tail lamps were present on both trains, and came back up the steps into the box. He told Jack everything was in order. Jack cleared the line back to Madeley and was immediately offered another 'sleeper' on the Up Fast, for which he gave line clear. This train was now clear to proceed up to his home signal, about 200 yards on the approach side of the box. They sat down to await its arrival. The box door had been left open. All of a sudden Jack rose to his feet and said: "Hush, Harry. I can hear an engine blowing off. That Up Fast hasn't gone yet." They went to the door, and through the fog they could just discern the last coach of the 'sleeper' about 100 yards away. Jack realised that there was about 250 yards from his home signal to the back of the express standing there. (440 yards was the required distance, even in clear weather). In the fog the driver of the train coming from Madeley could have overrun the signal by that much. Jack said to Harry: "Go as fast as you can and tell the driver he has a clear road to Standon Bridge. I'll go and try and make sure the one behind stops in time." Jack grabbed his hand lamp and three detonators and ran towards the home signal. He placed the detonators on the rail, on the approach side of the signal, spaced out as required. He could hear the diesel pounding up the bank from Madeley. "He must have passed my distant at caution by now. Why doesn't he shut off power? Perhaps the driver hasn't been over this road for quite a while and isn't quite sure where the home signal is." Jack told me that all these thoughts flashed through his mind. At last Jack heard the sound of the diesel subside as the driver shut off power. As it approached, Jack picked up the detonators one by one, until the driver came to a perfect stand at his

home signal. "Got a problem with releasing my starter, driver," Jack truthfully told him. What he didn't tell him that there was another train standing only 250 yards ahead in the fog. "If you can draw up to the box when the home comes off, the ganger will give you clearance to Standon Bridge." With that Jack made his way back to the box, but when he went inside there was a very irate Cockney driver pacing up and down. "What the ****'s going on here?" he asked, "some fellow is standing there at the foot of the box steps giving me the 'right-away', and when I get to your starter it's at danger. I've only got a 17-year old fireman tonight so I thought I'd better come back myself and find out was going on." (It was normal practice to send the fireman to the box to advise the signalman of the presence of a train). "I've sent the ganger up to tell you to pass my starter at danger," Jack replied, "I've got trouble with the block instrument needle and can't pull the starter off. Haven't you seen him?" "I've seen nobody", the driver retorted. Apparently he had gone down one side of the train, the ganger up the opposite side. Jack didn't tell him there was another train 250 yards behind him. "Get going, mate", Jack advised. "You've got a clear road to Standon Bridge." He hoped the driver didn't hear the throb of the diesel engine on the other train as he walked back to the waiting fireman on the "Duchess". He also hoped the driver wouldn't report the incident. Jack would have to fix the entries in the train register after consultation with the signalmen either side of Whitmore. The time the expresses lost as a result of the extra delay could probably be covered by the problems with the signal release circuit anyway. Harry showing a green light, even if the driver had seen it, and raising his right hand, was no authority to pass the starter at danger. Jack told Harry that he couldn't use a small battery torch instead of a proper hand-lamp if he was working with him in future. The driver would possibly have seen the brighter light of a hand-lamp on the other side of the train when walking back to the box.

One Saturday afternoon in November 1958, as I entered the box, Jack said, "You've just arrived in time, Spen. You've passed your O-level in English, so come and help me fill this report in." "What report's that, Jack," I asked. "I had some excitement last night," he told me. "You know how it goes quiet about six and I have my tea then. Well, as I sat there enjoying my boiled egg, I heard the signal wires rattling under the box. I jumped to my feet and looked through the window towards Madeley and there in the moonlight I saw five cows running towards the box. That was what rattled the signal wires as they tripped over them. An Up Fast had just gone by and frightened them all over towards the Down Slow. The trouble was I'd pulled off for the Broad Street – Carlisle fast freight on the Down Slow, and they were all running straight into it. That's as far as I've got with my report." "What happened next then, Jack?" I asked. "Well, I knew the freight was a fast runner and had probably passed my distant at green, so I put all my signals to danger, grabbed my hand-lamp and some detonators and after sending six bells ("Obstruction Danger") to Madeley and Standon Bridge, I chased after the cows, hoping to get in front of them." "OK, write 'Knowing the Broad Street – Carlisle to be a fast runner'", I suggested. "That sounds good", said Jack, "carry on." Jack was too late, of course. Three of the cows ploughed under the steam locomotive hauling the train. The other two ran as far as Stableford, almost 2¼ miles away. They had run almost 5 miles. The train came to a stand in the derelict Whitmore station platform. Jack had to send for the platelayers to come and scrape the cows from under the steam engine. The smell of burning cows was too much for some of them and it made them sick. Apparently a farmer at Madeley had bought the cows that day, and they had suffered a long road journey before being let out into a field alongside the railway. After the first train went past, they had charged the fence and were through onto the line.

I visited Jack one Saturday morning, and he told me that his usual relief that afternoon, Lawton Davies, had hurt his leg and would appreciate someone pulling off for him. (No time off sick with pay then.) Could I stay for the afternoon as well? Could I!!! Of course, after a few minutes Lawton could see that not only could I pull off, but also I could operate the block instruments expertly as well.

So I had another friend whom I could visit at any convenient time.

Mostly Whitmore was just a block post, passing trains on down (or up) the line, and nothing much out of the ordinary happened from day to day. There were several things that I remember though that were unusual. For example:

The new Deltic prototype diesel, a very powerful locomotive¹, was regularly hauling the “Red Rose”, non-stop London to Liverpool. It was running so fast that it was catching the train up in front. When that happened, Jack would be standing at the block instrument waiting for Les Harrison at Madeley to clear the previous Down Fast train, and I would be there with my hands on the signal levers waiting for the line clear. On receiving the ‘train out of section’ signal, Jack would rattle out the code for a down London express, 4-2-4, and on ‘Line Clear’ being given, I would pull off as fast as I could, hoping that at the driver would catch the distant at green. One particular time with the Deltic, he didn’t. The curvature of the line at Whitmore was such that a driver of a down train could not see the home signal until he was almost on top of it. So drivers of steam trains, if they had missed an ‘all clear’ distant, would open up the regulator and try to get a run at Whitmore troughs to pick up water. The troughs were only about ¼ mile away. Maybe the Deltic driver wanted a full train heating boiler, or maybe just hoping to regain lost time, but as the last carriage went past the box he must have opened up a notch or two. The carriage literally jerked as the locomotive snatched at the train. I thought the carriage was going to come off the rails. No steam engine could do that. I remember a ‘Jubilee’ being opened up for the same reason one dark night. The fireworks that came from the chimney had to be seen to be believed!

On another occasion I remember pulling the signals off for the down “Midday Scot”, and it approached the box hauled by the unique BR Standard 8P, 71000, “Duke of Gloucester”. As it went by the box, however, I noticed that underneath the footplate was glowing red-hot. I pointed this out to Jack, who got onto Control at Crewe. “Everybody’s ringing us to tell us about it, Jack. We’ve arranged for a couple of fitters to meet the train when it rolls into Crewe”, was their response. I wondered what a couple of fitters could do in Crewe station. – Turn the bag on the water column on it?!!

Stableford

Jack could see how interested I was in railways and especially signalling. He used to test me on the Rule Books, and he reckoned I would pass for a signalman easily. He arranged for me to visit other boxes, like Stableford, the next box to the south of Whitmore. There was only one regular signalman there, a kind and quiet gentleman named Percy Hall. Percy lived in a caravan on the nearby caravan site. His usual shift was 8am to 4pm, but in summer when traffic was heavy he might work 12 hours. If a reliefman was available he would fill in time there too, perhaps keeping the box open all 24 hours, but this was rare. Stableford, as previously mentioned, was only a block post, that is, there were no points, crossovers, or sidings, only two signals for each of the four lines. It was therefore a very simple box to operate. Perhaps it was too simple. Let me explain. One morning I had been at Whitmore with Jack. Before he finished work, though, he fixed up for me to visit Stableford that same afternoon, but not with Percy, but with a reliefman named Harry Thorndyke. “He’s really hot on the rules, Spen” Jack told me, “he’ll be glad to help you.” Off I went round the country lanes on my bike to Stableford. Harry introduced himself and I went into the box. I had worked the box many times before, as Harry could see. All went well until I had expresses approaching the box from directions, one on the Up Fast, and the other on the Down Fast. The Up Fast went past first. I gave train entering section to Standon Bridge, put the distant signal and stop signal back (no starting signal), saw the tail-lamp, and gave train-out-of-section to Lawton Davies at Whitmore. The next thing I heard was the screeching of brakes. There was a very limited view of

¹ Reviewing the then new “Deltic”, “Trains Illustrated” magazine of July 1958 commented: “This arrangement [of the two 18-cylinder engines] results in a compactness which has made it possible to....concentrate...a power plant develop[ing] no less than 3,300 h.p. on a single Co-Co chassis and, moreover, to develop no less than 32 b.h.p. for every ton of the 106 tons weight of the “Deltic”. Such an output relative to weight is a world’s record; the most powerful U.S. diesels develop no more than 2,400 h.p., and weigh something between 130 and 140 tons.”

northbound trains from the box due to a footbridge close by. Just then a “Duchess” with the “Red Rose” headboard came under the bridge, speed dropping rapidly. What had gone wrong? Harry looked at the frame and could see that I had put the signals back for the Down Fast instead of the Up Fast. He grabbed a green flag and held it out towards the driver, who must have had a shock when the signal went back in his face. He seemed to guess what had happened. He could see the Up Fast signals still off for the train that was now half a mile past the box. The reason for my mistake was that Whitmore, where I had been that morning, was on the down (west) side of the line, Stableford was on the up (east). In Whitmore Up Fast levers were on my left, Down Fast levers on my right. At Stableford they were the other way round! Oh dear. Needless to say I didn’t feel like visiting Harry again, even if he would let me. Jack told me quietly later that Harry had to go to Crewe over the incident. That was all he said. We all make mistakes, I suppose.

Interestingly, in his excellent book “Signalman’s Morning”, the Railway Historian & Brunel biographer Adrian Vaughan had a similar experience. When still at school he was a guest (like I was in Stableford) in a signal box called Challow between Swindon and Didcot. The signalman there suggested he went to the next ’box along the line at Wantage Road, which he did do virtually straight away. Soon after his arrival there the signalman said to him: (Quote).

““Answer that ‘Approach’, get the road from Lockinge and pull off up the Main.’ as the indicator swung to ‘Line Clear’, I walked to the end of the ’box to pull off (levers) 2, 3, 5, 6 and 1.

“What are you doing?” asked Wally.

“Pulling off up the Main.”

“Aha. You’re not at Challow now. Up the Main is 62, 61, 60, 54 and 63,” Wally beamed triumphantly.

I pulled the levers over feeling decidedly awkward – these were the Down Main levers at Challow!

“You see,” said Wal, “the box here faces south, opposite to Challow, so when the levers are numbered from left to right, 1 to 63, 1 is at the opposite end of the box to Challow’s No. 1.”

I saw the point and felt sheepish about it but it was still awkward to be pulling down line levers for an up line train!” (End of quote)

Madeley

Jack knew how interested I was in railway signalling so one day he told me he had had a word with a signalman at Madeley, the next box towards Crewe, and I could visit him if I wanted. Edgar Bedson was his name, and he was over the 65 retirement age. He enjoyed work so much he was staying on over his time. This was a help to the Staff Office who had a difficult job filling all the posts at times. Since Edgar was getting on a bit, Jack thought that someone “pulling off” for him would be a good idea.

Jack said that Edgar had suggested I approached the box in a roundabout way from the main road so that I wouldn’t pass the railway cottages where one of the bosses from Stoke station lived in the Station Master’s house. The lane I went along came to an old railway line that came from Leycett colliery down to Madeley. This line ended in four sidings the other side the box. Coal wagons were usually stabled there, waiting for the ‘pick-ups’ to take them to Crewe. Just before the box and sidings, between the Leycett line and the main line, was a single road engine shed where the Leycett colliery engine could be serviced between trips. I had a look around, but there was just a few tools, an inspection pit, lots of ashes, and not much else.

Although I visited Edgar many times, there wasn’t much happening out of the ordinary. The box had a different lever frame from the other boxes I had visited. Madeley had a cross-over from Up Slow to Up Fast. The only train booked to use this was the Sunday Fleetwood - London fish. I just had to be there one day to set the points from Up Slow to Up Fast. It was booked to follow an Up Fast express. From what I can remember everything went well. The train was hauled by a black five.

Edgar could see the interest I had in signalling. What with Jack at Whitmore and Edgar

teaching me the Rule Book, I was sure I would be sufficiently competent to take charge of a box if ever I had to. Edgar introduced me to a signalman, Jack Leigh, at Wrinehill, the next box down the bank towards Crewe. Jack Leigh had a break from railway work for a time, working for the Co-op Insurance. In that job he called on some neighbours of ours, and my mother knew him. She knew he was a decent sort of fellow. According to my grandma's 1957 diary I visited Wrinehill and Madeley on Saturday 23rd March 1957. She has made a note that it was Johnnie (as she called him) Leigh there, and that he was 'set on again', presumably set on again by British Railways. Wrinehill was only a Class 4 box, bottom of the ladder, which fits in with him being re-employed by BR.

Wrinehill

Wrinehill was interesting, even though, like Stableford, the next box to the south of Whitmore, it didn't have any points. Also, there were no semaphore signals. Even though the stop signals were right outside the box, one for each line, they were colour lights. It was just a block post to break the section up between Madeley and Betley Road. It was set on a high embankment, and if Jack hadn't told me how to get there, I don't think I would have found my way. One bell code used there which I hadn't come across before was 1-2-1, 'train approach'. Trains coming down Madeley bank towards Crewe could be gathering speed as they approached Wrinehill, so as soon as 'line clear' was given to Madeley, the road was asked to Betley Road and providing 'line clear' was received, the signals were pulled off. When the train was passing Madeley and Wrinehill received 'train entering section' for it, Wrinehill would give 1-2-1 to Betley Road. Betley Road would then ask Basford Hall Junction for a 'line clear', and if he got it, we would see the yellow of Wrinehill's signal change to green. Trains coming out of Crewe were signalled on as soon as Wrinehill gave Line Clear to Betley Road, (no 1-2-1).

One Saturday afternoon at Wrinehill the pick-ups went down to Betley Road. The train would have to stand on the Down Slow at Betley Road because there was nowhere else to put it while the shunting was carried out. So, a few minutes later, the "Palethorpes" sausage van arrived outside the box, behind a "Jubilee". I found out about this "Jubilee" about 35 years later. At GEC, Kidsgrove, where I worked, there was an ex-fireman from Crewe North, Sid Barnett. He told me that on a weekday this van was attached to a train at Wolverhampton and came to Crewe, worked by Crewe men. However, on a Saturday this train didn't run, so a Camden engine and Camden crew off a London – Wolverhampton train took it to Crewe. The engine stood on the Down Slow right outside the box, blowing off impatiently. The driver motioned with his hand for me to come the door. "What's holding us up, then," he asked. "The pick-ups at Betley Road," I told him. I daren't repeat his response, but it wasn't very complementary towards the pick-ups, suffice it to say that it was in a broad Cockney accent. Jack said, "You know what's up with him, don't you?" "No, what?" "He wants to get to Crewe and go and watch Crewe Alexandra play at Gresty Road."

Betley Road.

What got me access to Betley Road box was the fact that the father of relief signalman Freddie Brookshaw, Charlie, was signalman there. Freddie was another reliefman that Jack Woodcock introduced me to. Charlie was a very nice chap, and made me very welcome. Locomotives of the trains on the Up Fast would be working very hard up the 1 in 177 of Madeley bank. They passed right outside the box, and the noise as they went by was deafening. It was satisfying to now be on the receiving end of the Train Approach signal, 1-2-1, from Wrinehill, and then ask the road for the train from the important Basford Hall Junction box. Down expresses to Crewe would really be shifting as they passed the box. Drivers of certain trains were required to whistle as they passed Betley Road. Trains not stopping at Crewe, or trains booked to travel over the Goods Avoiding lines around Crewe, would whistle the appropriate code. The signalman would then advise Basford Hall Junction of the train's route.

Basford Hall Junction

Edgar Bedson at Madeley was one who encouraged me to learn more about railways, especially signalling. Madeley box had a telephone that was connected to Crewe Control and Colwich, south of Stafford. I used to like listening to the box lad at Colwich reading out the train passing times to Crewe Control. Edgar said he would see if he could get Crewe Staff Office to fix me up with a holiday job as a box lad somewhere. Unfortunately I wasn't old enough at 15. What Edgar did for me, though, was to fix up with a mate of his for me to visit Basford Hall Junction, the first box south of Crewe towards Stafford, where the lines from Basford Hall Marshalling Yard and the Crewe Avoiding Lines join the West Coast Main Line. Edgar's friend made me welcome. It was a busy box. I stood back, watching and listening. Two things stand out in my memory. One was that I was asked if I would like to "get the road" for a down London from Crewe South Junction box. Would I!?! It was great knowing that I had caused the block bell in such an important box to ring, especially the 4-2-4 bell code. I can't remember pulling off, so maybe he didn't trust me *that* much. The other incident I remember was that I was astonished when an express coming out of Crewe, headed by a "Royal Scot" locomotive, came right under the box windows, going flat out. I had been watching for some time, and I knew that the previous train on the Up Fast hadn't cleared the section to Betley Road box. "Why is he going like the clappers when you haven't had a line clear from Betley Road?" I asked. "We've got IBS's at Chorley, between here and Betley Road on the Up lines," he replied. "Intermediate Block Signals act like another section between the two boxes," he explained. "He's coming up to a yellow now, then the IBS at Chorley at red, until I get the road from Betley, then when I pull off the IBS and the yellow will go to green. He has plenty of time to stop on the rising gradient if for some reason the 'line clear' is refused." Just then Betley Road rang out 2-1, 'Train Out Of Section'. "Go on then", the signalman said to me, "Offer him 4 beats for the express". I did so, and it was acknowledged by the Betley Road signalman repeating 4 beats on the bell, and turning his indicator to 'Line Clear'. The signalman pulled the short lever to change the Chorley IBS colour light to green. That was my one and only acquaintance with IBS's.

Standon Bridge

When Stableford box was closed, the next box to the south of Whitmore was Standon Bridge. What was a 2½-mile section became a 5-mile section. As a result, if trains were following close behind each other, the one in front would not clear the section from Standon Bridge to Whitmore in time to give the following train clear signals. It wasn't as bad in the other direction, though, because once over the top at Whitmore they could speed through the long section almost as fast as a following train through the shorter, previous section. I only went in Standon Bridge box once. That was when a reliefman I knew was on duty there. It was a tall box to give a clear view of up trains approaching the other side of the bridge in Standon Bridge. The signalman on Jack Woodcock's shift was named Ernie. He was the worst "tapper" I ever heard. I always knew he was on duty as soon as I heard him tap out a down London, 4-2-4. It sounded like a fairy dancing on the key. It was something like 1-2-2-1-1. Even 4 beats would come out like 1-2. Only when Stableford was closed would Ernie at Standon Bridge be through to Jack at Whitmore.

Badnall Wharf

The next box south from Standon Bridge was Badnall Wharf. Jack Woodcock, signalman at Whitmore, arranged for me to visit Whitmore box one Saturday afternoon when he was on holiday. The reliefman was named Peter Adams. Peter also invited me to go to Badnall Wharf when he would be there. After he was made redundant about 1957, Peter ran a successful market garden business, Sleepy Hollow Nurseries, from his bungalow, ¼ mile from where Badnall Wharf box used to be. (Sadly, Peter died in the first week of May 2014.) The box had a 100-lever frame, quite large to me. The frame, and the instruments above it, was facing away from the traffic. In other words, as you stood at the block instruments, or "pulled off", you would have your back to the trains. Badnall Wharf

box was enlarged, probably early 1940s, because R.O.F. Swynnerton came up to the railway at this point, and some extra sidings were installed. At the time of my visits though, half the 100 levers were spare, because traffic was no longer what it used to be. The box was unusual also in that it had a flat roof. I didn't visit Badnall Wharf very often, partly because the bike ride was getting a bit too far, and partly because the bus service was almost non-existent.

Great Bridgeford

I visited Great Bridgeford box, between Norton Bridge and Stafford N° 5 just once. The only thing I remember was that it was very low down on the ground. I used to think that Peter Adams was the one who invited me to go there, but speaking to him in 2002, he says he never worked that box. It must have been Jim Allen, who I mention further on.

That really covered all the boxes between Crewe and Stafford, except Norton Bridge. It was a great stretch of railway between Crewe and Stafford. There were four running lines, lots of expresses with Stanier Duchesses, Princess Royals Scots, etc, in charge. However, the closest point to my home was about 8 miles away. But, from my bedroom window I could actually see, about 1½ miles away, just a couple of hundred yards of the line between Stoke and Kidsgrove Central. To get there I had to cycle through Bradwell Woods, something I wouldn't recommend a fifteen-year-old boy on his own to do today. But things were different then. The rough track through the woods brought me to a bridge over the railway. To the left, or north, about 300 yards away, was Chatterley Junction signal-box. To the right, or south, about 200 yards away, was Bradwell Sidings box. Chatterley was the junction for the Chesterton branch. This was a steep climb through the woods, past Parkhouse Colliery, under the A34 main road, over a bridge in Chesterton and into the coal wharf by the Audley road, less than a mile from home. I can see the "Jinty" 0-6-0T engine 47633 of Alsager shed now, crossing the bridge as I walk under on my way up Crackley Bank and home. I also remember, in 1949 or '50, going on a picnic in Bradwell wood with my mother and some friends. We sat in a field alongside the Chesterton branch. The 0-6-0T "Jinty" came down the bank towards Chatterley Junction with the empties from Chesterton and the loaded ones from Parkhouse Colliery. The driver gave us (or should I say the ladies) a toot on the engine whistle. Years later, when I worked in Kidsgrove Booking Office, I would see the Chatterley Jinty shunter, just before 8am, coupled to two other engines, on its way from Alsager shed to Chatterley. One day I managed to attract the attention of the signaller in Chatterley Junction. His name was Stan Pedley. He invited me inside since it began to rain. I told him how I had visited Whitmore and the other boxes on the West Coast Main Line. After a while he trusted me to offer and accept "Line Clear" codes on the block instruments. I preferred the old London & Northwestern Railway instruments such as at Whitmore. You tapped the key down to send the bell codes, whereas on the North Staffordshire Railway like at Chatterley, it was a plunger that you pressed in. The plunger protruded out from the block instrument, and in my view was rather cumbersome to work. They also required a different method to work them. I also preferred the LNWR lever frame as at Whitmore as it was easier to get into a swing when pulling off. The levers in the frames used by the NSR were more vertical in their normal position in the frame. In fact, the Up distant was particularly difficult for me, as it was about ½ a mile from the box. Now, this was not a long way, especially for a distant, but there was a banner repeater at the far end of Harecastle tunnel. This would not clear unless the distant was right off. Across from Chatterley Junction box, over the up and down main lines, was Chatterley Yard. Freight trains were shunted here ready for their forward journey. Most freight trains went north. They joined the down main just before Chatterley's down starting signal. The points at the exit were motor worked. Stan give me the word to change the points. They would either take the left fork at Kidsgrove Central for the Crewe direction, or straight on for the Macclesfield line. There was at least one trip though which made its way south for Stoke Yard, leaving from Derby Sidings at the north end of Chatterley Yard, and out onto the Up

Main. I asked Stan Pedley why the group of sidings was called Derby Sidings. He said that many years ago trains used to run through from Chatterley to Derby. One evening when I was in Chatterley Junction, I asked Stan if I could get on the footplate of one of the engines. The freights came down the Goods Line (“down the straight”), leaving the main at Longport Junction, past Bradwell Sidings to Chatterley. The first engine I went on was a Midland 4F. There were lots of these around Stoke. In fact, they were the biggest engine at Stoke shed, except they used to have a Black 5 occasionally. I remember a couple of years later, when I worked at Stoke Yard Master’s Office, seeing a Black 5 on the Cockshute (Stoke) — Barlaston Power Station coal trains. I think the Black 5 was at Stoke mainly for the summer SO 7.45am Stoke - Euston passenger train. Anyway, the fireman on the 4F told me to throw a few shovelfuls into the firebox. It was hard enough with the engine standing still, never mind moving, to get the shovel through the firehole door without hitting the side. The driver said: “This is the brake. When I tell you, move the lever over the other way to put the brake on.” I did so when prompted, but I should have moved the lever gradually instead of in one sudden movement. “That was a sudden stop,” the driver said. “You could break the wagon couplings if you’re not careful.” He was just joking. After a few minutes they were ready to go. “Lift the regulator here,” said the driver. “Not too far, now.” I did so, it was quite easy. The engine started to move forward, then suddenly the footplate began to bounce up and down, and a column of smoke from the chimney shot into the air. “What’s happening”, I asked. “She’s just lost her feet for a moment,” the driver answered. “Leave the regulator alone, she’ll soon find them again.” And she did. “You can come with us through Harecastle Tunnel if you want,” the driver said. “Well, I would like to,” I said, “but my bike’s here and I have no way of getting back.” That was an excuse really. I didn’t care to go through the smoke filled, mile-long tunnel. On another occasion I went on the footplate of a 2-6-4T. I remember how more enclosed the cab was compared to the 4F. The next box north from Chatterley was Kidsgrove Central, the station where I would start my time working for British Railways. The next box south was Bradwell Sidings.

Stan Pedley, the Chatterley Junction signalman I knew, introduced me to the signalman on his turn at Bradwell Sidings. His name was Jack, but I don’t remember his surname. Bradwell was interesting because there was an up goods loop between there and Longport Junction, so sometimes a freight train had to ‘go inside’ to wait for a path through the two track stretch between Longport Junction and Grange Junction. Jack gave me a signalman’s waistcoat. Wearing that and a black pair of trousers made me look just the part. From then on that’s what I always wore when visiting signalboxes.

I only visited Longport Station box once. A relief signalman I knew, Jim Allen, was on duty there while I was working at Longport booking office. There were crossing gates to operate there.

Another signalbox I visited with Jim was Cliffe Vale, between Stoke and Etruria. It was quite a busy place. I went there a couple of times. The signalman at Newcastle Junction, the next box towards Stoke, would send a certain bell code on the down goods line. A bell code on an instrument always meant that a train was coming. But this time that was not so. It was a train going into Cockshute Carriage Sidings, which had to enter the section between Newcastle Junction and Cliffe Vale. When it had got clear of the down goods line, the signalman would clear the line again.

And still another box I visited with Jim was Alsager East Junction. This box controlled the up and down lines between Alsager Station box and Lawton Junction. Also, it was the junction for the single line Audley branch. On unusual thing, to me at least, was the fact that the down branch line joined the up line. It seemed strange to read on one of the plates fixed behind a points lever: “Down Branch to Up Main”. This box also had an up loop, where goods trains could wait for a passenger train to overtake.

A friend of the family, Ken Edmunds, was a signalman at Tunstall Junction on the Loop Line. I also managed to add that box to my list. At the junction, the line going straight on continued towards Stoke, and the right-hand turn took the single line to Pinnox Junction then Longport Junction on the Stoke – Kidsgrove Central main line. The signalling of the single line section, and the handing over of the single line token was interesting to observe.

And one final signalbox I visited with Jim Allen was Minshull Vernon, about 4 miles north of Crewe. I still find it hard to believe what a large area Jim covered – from the Stoke to Derby line somewhere around Meir, to Minshull Vernon, and Crewe to Great Bridgeford. He didn't work all the boxes between these points of course. He didn't work Stoke Junction, Glebe Street, Stoke North or Newcastle Junction. Similarly around Crewe, he didn't work the big boxes, only the easy-to-work ones, and he didn't work between Whitmore and Norton Bridge. At Minshull Vernon an express signalled 4-2-4 was routed over the West Coast main line through Warrington towards Preston, and 4 beats on the bell was an express turning off at Weaver Junction for Liverpool. Between Crewe and Stafford a 4-2-4 was for an express train originating from the Trent Valley Line (usually from London), and 4 beats was an express off the Birmingham line at Stafford. This was so Crewe South Junction could sort out which train was which as it approached Crewe. So it was a bit of a novelty at Minshull Vernon to signal 4-2-4 and it might not have been a London train.

WORKING FOR BRITISH RAILWAYS AT STOKE

The careers master, Mr Kershaw, at Wolstanton Grammar School which I attended, had arranged for me to take up a job with British Railways at Stoke for a junior clerk's position at Kidsgrove Central station. I started to work there on Monday, 8th September 1958, eleven days after my 16th birthday. I cycled from my home about 3 miles away. Arriving 20 minutes early, I waited under the railway bridge on the canal towpath until it was almost 8 o'clock. I reported to the Station Master, Mr Donald A. Walker. Mr Walker was also responsible for Liverpool Road station on the Potteries Loop Line, which ran from Kidsgrove Liverpool Road Junction, ¼ mile north of Kidsgrove Central, to Etruria Junction, 1 mile north of Stoke station.

He introduced me to the Booking Clerk on duty, Jack Poole. Jack was on the early turn that day, which was 6.15am - 1/15pm. Jack showed me how to issue tickets, and date stamp them with a cumbersome machine. If you weren't careful you would hit your thumb joint as you pushed the ticket hard inside the machine. Perhaps a couple of times per shift you would do a quick balance of the books on the booking office window ticket sales. The tickets were in racks, and they were taken out one at a time from the bottom of the pile. Just above the bottom of the pile was a slate on which you would write in chalk the number of the first ticket you issued out of that pile. When you did a balance you could see how many of a particular ticket you had issued by comparing the chalked number with the next ticket number. There was a small amount of outgoing parcels traffic, but the amount of incoming parcels traffic was quite heavy. These were the days when mail order catalogues had really taken off. After the arrival of a parcels train, the porters would bring the parcels inside the booking office, and it was my job to write down on a delivery sheet all the addresses for the parcels. Every morning the lorry driver, George Wiggins, would load them onto his truck and deliver them to the surrounding area. The clerk on the opposite shift to Jack was Malcolm Haines. For some reason Jack and Malcolm had got a bit behind with the monthly returns, and balancing the books at the month's end. So we had to concentrate on bringing everything up-to-date.

Of course, being more interested in signalling than booking office work, it was not long before I managed to work my way into Kidsgrove Central signal box.

The best signalman there was Harry Thomason. There was a box-lad named Bob Watts on Harry's shift who kept the train register and looked after the phones. Kidsgrove Central is the junction where the Crewe branch leaves the Stoke – Manchester main line. The Crewe line branches off to the left coming north from Stoke, and descends on a gradient of 1 in 100 towards the Cheshire plain. Because of this fairly stiff gradient coming from the Crewe direction, the box could accept trains coming up from the Crewe direction even though the actual junction was less than the usual required ¼ mile clearance past the outer home signal. This meant you didn't have to think about whether the junction was set correctly before accepting a train from Lawton Junction, the next 'box towards Crewe. Most of the freight traffic went up and down the Crewe branch. The usual practice every

hour was that after the Crewe – Derby Diesel Multiple Unit (DMU) had departed at 34 minutes past the hour, a freight would be accepted from Lawton Junction. When this reached the outer home signal track circuit, I would pull the signal off to bring the freight up to the inner home, which was situated right on the junction at the platform end. This would then be about 45 minutes past the hour. The up Manchester – Stoke DMU would leave at 53 minutes past the hour, and the freight would follow it towards Stoke. I was usually up the 'box while Don Walker, the Station Master, was on his lunch break, providing Harry was in the 'box. The Crewe – Derby parcels followed the 12/20pm Crewe – Derby DMU, which left Kidsgrove at 12.34. The parcels would arrive about 45 minutes past, pulled by a Stanier 2-6-4T. Its booked path was to follow the up Manchester – Euston which passed at 1/03pm. One day when I was in the box, there weren't many parcels to deal with, so the driver whistled for the road just turned ten-to the hour. The Manchester – Stoke DMU was just leaving No. 1 platform on time at 12.53. The up London was wired "2 down" (2 minutes late) when passing Macclesfield Moss box, the boundary between Manchester and Stoke Control areas, booked time 1/03pm passing Kidsgrove. I then pressed the button on both Control phones, hoping someone in Stoke Control would pick one of them up quickly. "Can we have the Derby parcels before the up London?" I asked. The parcels was right away Stoke from Kidsgrove, so if it could keep up express speed to there, it could run into Stoke No. 1 up platform and then quickly propel its train into the cattle dock out of the way. A quick check by Control to see there was nothing on the Up line to Stoke, then it was "Let her go". I pulled off the platform starter signal, then, when the passenger cleared Chatterley Junction, I got the road from Chatterley, pull off the advanced starter, and away she'd go as fast as a 2-6-4T could, the driver giving us a wave as he went by.

On the morning of November 11th 1958, I was sitting in Kidsgrove booking office when I heard a Stanier whistle, which was a bit unusual. I looked through the window and saw Duchess 46224 "Princess Alexandra" with the "Royal Scot" headboard on. I was really surprised, so I rang the signalbox and asked Harry Thomason why the "Royal Scot" (London-Glasgow) had come through Kidsgrove (it always went the direct West Coast Main Line between Stafford and Crewe via Whitmore), and how was it that a Duchess had been allowed through Harecastle tunnel, just south of Kidsgrove, as they were banned from going through. There had been a serious accident the night before, just south of Crewe, and trains were being diverted around the blockage. I sent a note to Trains Illustrated magazine about this rare occurrence of a Duchess going through Harecastle tunnel, and the precautions taken, as Harry told me, and this is what appeared in print in the January 1959 edition: "Next morning the down "Royal Scot" was diverted through Stoke-on-Trent. It was hauled by its usual Pacific, No. 46224, a type which normally is prohibited from this route; as a result the adjoining line had to be kept clear of traffic when the train passed through Harecastle tunnel, where a speed limit of 15 m.p.h. was imposed on the Pacific". It was good to see my name in the acknowledgement section.

About this time, one Friday when the staff called for their wages, the Yard Foreman from Kidsgrove Liverpool Road Yard told me about one of the new Type 4 diesels (later Type 40) which was coming into the yard every weekday on crew training runs from Longsight near Manchester. He asked if I would like to go and see it. Of course I said yes, so the following Monday I walked to the yard and the Foreman had a word with the driver, and I climbed up. It was very impressive. I was surprised to see a cooker installed. The engines were just ticking over, of course, but even so, I remember thinking how noisy they would be when pulling a heavy train. While at Liverpool Road yard, I took the opportunity of asking if I could visit the box for a few minutes. It was literally a few minutes too, but it was another box I had visited.

In the summer of 1959, I was sent to Mow Cop and Scholar Green, the next station towards Manchester. The Station Master was on holiday for a week, so I had to do the booking office work, and help the porter. I enjoyed sitting in the Station Master's Office, pretending I was in charge. The

only trouble was, I couldn't find the hat with "Station Master" in gold letters on the front. I took the opportunity of going in the signalbox, of course. This was only small, but did control level crossing gates.

Later I went to Alsager, the next station towards Crewe, to help out. While I was at Alsager, a relief signalman I knew, Jim Allen, worked Alsager Station box. He knew I was at the station, so when things were quiet he said I could pop up the box for a look around. Even though I was only there for probably a few minutes, it was another box to add to my list of boxes visited. There wasn't much to do in Alsager booking office, except on Fridays when everyone came for their wages. The locomotive shed staff picked up their wages from the booking office too, so we were kept busy. The Station Master took me to the small station of Radway Green & Barthomley, further towards Crewe. There was a 3-year backlog of amendments to be inserted into the Station Handbook. The summer of 1959 was glorious. I sat on the platform with a small bowl of water to wet the glue, and stuck the amendments in. There was not much to do there. Passengers were few and far between. So I asked the porter if he could ask the signalman whether I could visit the box. The signalman gave me permission. I was only there for a few minutes. I remember that he was rather abrupt and obviously didn't like visitors, but it was another box to my visited list. My father was delivering bread, cakes etc at the time, and he came within about a mile of the station, so a couple of times a week he would bring me a cake or two. If you saw "Radder" station at 5pm you would think it was such a busy place. That was when the Royal Ordnance Factory workers streamed out onto the Crewe bound platform to await their train home. There was a separate station called Millway where special trains came from and departed for the Stoke direction, so I couldn't see the crowds there. One of these, the 6.17am Hanley – Radway Green, had a late start from Hanley one morning, see below.

One morning, the 9.20am Crewe – Derby passenger train stopped in the station, and an elderly lady got off. She walked over the crossing and onto the Crewe platform. The porter followed behind, carrying her suitcase. She had caught a Crewe train at Meir, the other side of Stoke, on her way to convalesce at Llandudno. She said that nobody told her to change at Crewe. She sat in the train in the bay platform at Crewe, and when the train started off again in the direction from which it came, she realised that she was going back towards Stoke. So she thought she had better get off at the first station the train stopped at. Unfortunately, the next down Crewe didn't stop at Radway, so it looked like she would miss her Llandudno connection at Crewe, and the person waiting for her at Llandudno would wonder where she was. I telephoned Stoke Control and told them what had happened. They issued the driver of the Crewe train with a special Stop Notice, to stop at Radway and pick her up. She was very grateful.

One day I was asked to go and help out at Sandbach, on the Crewe-Manchester line. I was only there a few days, but I did manage, with the Station Master's permission, to visit the old signalbox (Sandbach No. 1?) for a few minutes. Later that evening, as I had about half an hour to wait for my train home, the SM asked me if I'd like to visit the new signalbox at Sandbach, which was then being commissioned. I went to have a look, but I'm afraid it was all foreign to me!

After Sandbach, I helped out at Longport, Stoke Parcels (that was a busy place – I got writer's cramp from filling out the addresses on the parcel delivery sheets), Hanley Parcels, and then Hanley Booking Office. That was a quiet job, except on Monday mornings. I had to be there for 5.45am for the 6.17am Hanley – Radway Green. On my first Monday morning, I had very little 'float' in the safe. The passengers came to book their weekly tickets, and I had no change. The passengers were very helpful, and between us everybody got the right change. The Station Foreman had to hold the train for a couple of minutes while we sorted it out though. A few days later the Station Master got a 'skin' from Head Office asking for an explanation for a 2 minutes late start. I told him why and that was the end of the matter.

Stoke Staff Office knew I was interested in a move from the Commercial Department to the Traffic Department. In mid-November 1959 they rang to say there was a vacancy for a Junior Clerk in Stoke Yard Master's Office, located on No. 1 platform at Stoke. I took the job, and started work there on 23rd November 1959. The Clerk there had moved to Basford Hall, Crewe, and the Junior

Clerk had been promoted to his job. There was also the Chief Clerk, Alan Hutchinson, in the office. The Yard Master was Mr White, originally from Darley Dale in the Peak District. Most of my work was typing and filing. After a few weeks the clerk left to join the army. One of the Yard Inspectors, George Tittle, had suffered a heart attack not long before, so he moved into the Clerk's job as a less demanding job. Unfortunately, as I used to say, he'd never had a pencil in his hand, always a shunting pole. We had to work out the pay for the shunter and goods guards at Stoke, overtime, rest day working, Sunday rate etc. George just couldn't do it, so I had to help out. There were other things I had to do for George as well.

One day Alan was off sick. The Control phone rang on his desk. I picked it up. Harry Snape, the Loco/Guards Controller, said: "We need a guard tomorrow for a special ballast train from Caudon Low to Warrington. Can you see what you can do? It's got to run for weekend work. Crewe South are sending an 8F especially for it" (Stoke had nothing bigger than 4F) I looked at the roster book. It was difficult. Not many guards had signed the road for Caudon Low and Warrington, but there was one guard, Bill Bath, on the morning Burton, who had. Fortunately there was a spare guard who knew Burton, so I put Bill on the ballast, and the spare guard on the Burton. The timekeeper who signed the men on and off, both loco and guards, said: "Bill won't like that." When Bill signed off duty, he was told to book on for the ballast train the following day. He came straight in the office, and said to me "What's this job for tomorrow?" I could tell he was annoyed. "If it's cancelled, and I'm spare, then there'll be trouble!" "It won't be cancelled, Bill", I said, "it's got to run. A loco is coming up from Crewe South especially for it." The train ran, and give Bill his due, when he booked off he came in the office and said to me: "That was a good little job. I wouldn't mind that every day".

While I was working at Stoke, I was still visiting Whitmore box. Jack Woodcock told me one day that the signalman at Stableford, the next box south, was moving to Hartshill box as Stableford would soon close. Percy Hall was the signalman, and I visited him at Stableford a few times. Hartshill was the first box on the Newcastle/Silverdale/Market Drayton line from Stoke. This branch line left the Stoke – Macclesfield main line at Newcastle Junction, which was the next box after Stoke North. I passed by Hartshill box on my motorcycle as I went to and from home to work at Stoke Yard Masters Office, so it was convenient to call in and have a few minutes with Percy, which I did on a couple of occasions. Hartshill controlled the single line section of the branch, which passed through the narrow tunnel under Hartshill. It was quite a climb for freight trains, and it was very unpleasant for the loco crew if the train come to a halt in the tunnel. Immediately at the other end of the tunnel was Newcastle station.

There came a vacancy for Assistant Loco/Guard's Controller in Stoke Control Office upstairs, but they said I was of more use in the YMO. I was getting a bit fed up, so I thought I'd show them I wanted to get out, and applied for the first job I saw on the vacancy list. That was for a Goods Guard's Clerk at Brent. I had no idea where it was, but I applied. A few weeks later the relief Yard Master called me into his office, and asked me what I'd been up to! I said: "Nothing Jim". He said: "Well, you've got an interview for that job you applied for." "Where is the interview?", I asked. "London St. Pancras", he replied. I went for my interview, travelling via Derby to get to St. Pancras in time. The train from Derby was double-headed by two black 5s. We were delayed at Harpenden and went slow road for a while. The station announcer at St. Pancras apologised for the delay when we arrived, saying a broken rail was the cause. That made me late for the interview. It went well, I thought. There were three men on the interview panel. One asked me whether it was the bright lights of London that were attracting me. I told him no. I got the job, and started to make arrangements. I left Stoke in mid-November 1961.

WORKING FOR BRITISH RAILWAYS AT BRENT

Starting to work at Brent, Nov. 1961.

Before I left Stoke, I received a message from the Yard Master's Office (YMO) at Brent asking if I had managed to arrange lodgings in the area. My answer was no. One of the other Goods Guards Clerks, Pat Guthrie (an Irishman, well he would be with a name like that, wouldn't he?) lodged with an elderly lady, Violet Rice, at 102, Brent Terrace. She had room for another lodger, so I took up the offer. Pat had been at Brent for about six months. His wife, Jean, was still living in Nottingham until Pat found somewhere for them both near to Brent. After a few weeks Pat was offered a railway cottage at Elstree, right by the station.

We used to do the rosters for the following week when on nights. It was a good system, because it helped us to keep awake. We had to take into account guards on holiday, off sick, or on special duties, etc. Those special duties might include helping to make a film (see below), covering a Station Foreman's position at Luton and/or St. Albans, or the guard who trained new recruits. We also had to provide guards for special passenger trains. These might be empty coaching stock (ECS) from Cricklewood Carriage Sidings to St. Pancras then a special boat train to Tilbury, turn on the triangle, and ECS back home. There could be trouble if you rostered the wrong man to one of those jobs. The man who thought it should be his would soon be complaining. You had to choose the man nearest to the booking on time for the special who had signed his route card for Tilbury. These were the older hands, as this was a prestige job. Then, of course, his job had to be covered. If you hadn't a spare guard with the required route knowledge, then you would have to pick the next nearest man and try again.

Coming on duty with Pat one night during the second week there, as we approached the YMO, we could see bright lights around a 2-10-0 9F locomotive. As we got closer we could see that the engine was 'off the road'. Someone had apparently opened the engine's regulator on Cricklewood shed and the points were not set for it. I heard that a few weeks earlier Brent No. 2 signalbox, which controlled engine movements on and off Cricklewood engine shed, had received a 'phone message "Light engine Wellingborough". An 8F had gone down the Goods Line, through Hendon station, but the engine stopped on the incline that takes the Goods Lines up and over the Local and Fast Lines. The Hendon signalman sent a man up to the engine but there was no one on the footplate.

I had had two weeks' training, one on days (6am to 2pm) and one on nights (10pm to 6am). On the Thursday of the third week when I arrived at the YMO at 2pm, I found that Pat had phoned in sick. I was asked if I could manage on my own. Well, 2pm to 10pm was the quietest shift, so why not? All went well until about 7 o'clock when a guard came to sign on, and when I saw him, I knew he was the guard who had worked the 7/35pm Hendon – Derby freight train the previous three days. This was an important train as it connected with St. Pancras – Liverpool and Manchester fitted freights at Kettering. It also picked up traffic at St. Albans, Harpenden, Luton and Bedford on its way to Kettering. It was essential that this train ran to time if delays to many other important trains were to be avoided. Unfortunately I had not noticed that the time for him to book on for the Hendon train had already passed. I asked him what job he had come for and he replied that it was empty coaches from Cricklewood carriage sidings to 'Pancras for a relief to the night Scotsman as far as Leicester. I looked at the roster and there it was on the page where we entered special workings. Unfortunately Jim had not crossed his name out for the Hendon freight. When I had come on duty at 2pm and looked through the roster book to see if every job was covered, I didn't notice that his name was on two different jobs. What a good start to my career at Brent, I thought. Well, I plucked up courage and phoned Fred Gillard, guards controller at 'Pancras. "Fred, I'm afraid we've no guard for the Hendon - Derby. The guard who is down to cover it has just signed on for the relief to the Scotsman." (On 28th December 2012, David Ford – see end paragraph – told me that he had heard that Fred Gillard had just passed the 100 year mark, and still going strong!) I had already told the guard to go ahead and work the

passenger train, but there was still time to change that if Fred thought differently. "OK Spen," he said. He could tell I was worried about it. It was great working with Fred. I think he knew I was only 19, and so he always made me feel at ease. "Don't worry, I'll see what we can do". Fred came back to me a few minutes later and said that they had cancelled the "Mill Hill shunt" so that that guard could work the Hendon freight. Our guard was rostered to work the train as far as Kettering, so Fred asked: "Has the guard off the Mill Hill shunt signed for Kettering?" I looked at his route card, then answered, "No, he hasn't, only as far as Wellingborough" (Because so many Brent Goods Guard's rostered jobs took them north, all of them knew the road at least as far as Wellingborough) "Right then, I'll tell Leicester Control they will have to find a guard to work the train from Wellingborough to Kettering" said Fred. Of course the train had a late start. Mr Jones had a "skin" a few days later: "Please explain a late start to the Hendon - Derby." I had to go into his office and tell him what happened. I am afraid Jim got a telling off too.

The risk to life and limb is always not far away when working out on the line. I was doing the roster on the Wednesday night ready for the following week when Guard Richardson came to sign off, about 2am. "What have you got for me next week?", he asked. "Nothing at the moment", I replied. I looked at the roster book. "You're 10am spare. I can bring you 8am if you like." You couldn't move a man more than two hours either side of his booked time unless he agreed. "Or 7am, if you want to get away earlier." I was thinking of him covering for the latecomers, or the non-starters. "I've been spare this week and last. I'm fed up of doing just bits of jobs, or sitting around waiting time in the mess room," he moaned. "Haven't you got anything at all?" I knew that every job was covered, except the afternoon Queen's Road shunt, down the Barking branch from Kentish Town. "Guard Kearney is off sick this week, and his job is uncovered if he's still off sick next week", I said. "I could bring you on at 12 o'clock for his job, the afternoon Queen's Road shunt." The job was actually 12/15pm on duty, 1/0pm from Brent with traffic for the Barking branch. "I'll do that", he offered, "You can usually get away by about seven on that job. Put me down for 12/15pm, that'll be OK". The following week he worked the job on the Monday, and I signed him off just before seven. He liked the job, and said it was a lot better than being spare. The following day, when I came on duty at 2pm, I knew something was up as soon as I walked into the main office, before I even reached the small room where our desk was. "What's happened?", I enquired. "Guard Richardson's had an accident at Holloway. He's in Park Royal Hospital," I was told. He had booked on at 12 noon, and Jim told him that he had been told by Control that there was no traffic at Brent. He was to go on his engine, a Midland 4F, to Holloway, pick up a brakevan, and then proceed to shunt the stations and yards along the Barking Branch. When they got to Holloway they stopped the engine outside the yard. Guard Richardson had to find a brake himself, as there was no yard staff there. He came back and told the driver there was only one brake in the yard, and that was at the end of a line of coal wagons. "We'll have to draw the lot out onto the main-line," he instructed, "then loose shunt the brake into the empty siding next to them, put the wagons back, and pick the brake up." They drew the lot out onto the main line. Guard Richardson changed the points, gave the "hit-up" signal, and as the engine started pushing, he jumped onto the brakevan steps prior to going inside and screwing the brake down. Unfortunately he didn't notice that a raft of coal wagons was standing foul on the next siding. Reg Gates, the Assistant Yard Master on my shift, went to the inquest later, and told me that the driver said: "When he gave the "hit-up" signal I started the engine, propelling them back. Then I heard an almighty crash. I said to my fireman 'We've hit something, you'd better go and find out what's happened.'" The fireman explained, "When I walked back, I saw the brakevan and the leading wagons up in the air, and they had lifted the wagons on the adjoining line up in the air as well. Underneath was Guard Richardson. He could hardly breathe. He had been crushed between the brakevan steps and the first wagon of coal standing foul in the next siding. I ran up the embankment, found the nearest phone and called for an ambulance." Sadly, Guard Richardson died later that afternoon. His uncle was the on the local Union committee. He saw me when he signed off just before 9pm that

night. “What was he doing coming on at 12/15pm when he was 10am spare?” he asked. I told him about our conversation the week before, and he seemed satisfied about that. What made it worse as well was that his fiancée was due to come over soon from the West Indies. He had been in England for some time, saving enough money to bring her over. Reg Gates, Assistant Yard Master on my shift, could see I was upset about it. “If only I hadn’t said anything, Reg, he would still be here,” I muttered. “It’s just one of those things, Spen, don’t upset yourself. He chose to do that job, he wasn’t forced to”, Reg said. Reg was one of the best. It was indeed a privilege to have worked with him.

In December 1961 Brent YMO was only closed on Christmas Day. In 1962 it was also closed on Boxing Day. It was my job to open up the office at 10pm. To do this I caught a local train to Stafford and from there a train to Euston. The train was very late getting into Stafford. What I didn’t know then was that there had been an accident at Coppenhall, just north of Crewe, when the Mid-day Scot ran into the back of a Liverpool — Euston train. I got to Mrs Rice’s at 9/30, just time to grab a bite to eat and then off to open up. It started to snow in London the following week. The first morning of snow, an Anglo-Indian guard by the name of Gallyot came to work wearing pumps as we would call them then, or light trainers. A couple of hours later I got a call from Bert Ings, the Yard Inspector in EWS and local clerical union representative. “You haven’t got a spare pair of shoes anywhere there, have you, Spen”, he asked. “Shoes?” I replied, “No, I’m sure there isn’t. Why?” “Well,” he went on to explain, “Guard Gallyot’s shoes were wringing wet from the snow, so he got a good fire going in his brakevan, and put his pumps on top to dry out. When he came to take them off again the rubber had melted on the hot stove and he can’t pull them off.” I bet he didn’t come to work in pumps again when it was snowing. Come to think of it, it wasn’t a good idea whatever the weather, bearing in mind the type of work a goods guard did. In July 2006 I received an e-mail from Guard Gallyot’s sister-in-law, who somehow had found my website and the mention of her brother-in-law. He apparently doesn’t remember the incident about his shoes!

When the snow was at its deepest, a guard who lived just down the road came to sign on for the 10.10am Brent Empty Wagon Sidings – Toton. Very few trains were running because of the snow, so he said to me: “Are we running today?”. I said “No”. “Good”, he said, and turning to the ever-present guards playing cards, “deal me in lads”. “Hang on”, I said, “there’ll be an engine off shed in about half an hour. You’re to go and relieve a Wellingborough guard on a freight train stuck in a snow drift between Luton and Bedford.” Not only the goods guard needed relieving, the locomen and the engine did by then! I believe he got about 13 hours in that day.

During December, I think it was, 1962, we had to suffer possibly the last real smog in London. To get from my lodgings to Brent Yard Master’s Office about ¼ mile away I used to take a short cut across “The Kop” (the north end of Brent Loaded Wagon Sidings marshalling yard), across the Up Sidings behind Brent No. 2 ’box, then across at least six running lines (Up & Down Local, Up & Down Fast, Up & Down Goods), and coming off the Goods Lines, right on the boarded crossing, were the entrance to the loco shed, the South Sidings, the Carriage and Wagon Repair Shed, and the Up & Down branch to Dudding Hill (eventually Kew and the Southern Region). Even in broad daylight it could be dangerous, but I really had to watch my step when crossing when it was dark. However, when the smog came down, there was no chance I would go that way, so I walked almost ½ mile down to the North Circular Road, where the traffic was completely at a standstill on both carriageways and abandoned vehicles lined both verges. I turned left for Staples Corner, and left again at Staples Corner up the Edgware Road. I caught up with a gentleman with the essential handkerchief over his mouth because of the smog. I could tell from his clothes that he was a railwayman, and obviously going on duty for 10 o’clock. “Is that you, Jim”, I asked. “Yes, who’s that?” he asked in reply. “It’s Spen from the Yard Master’s Office.” Jim was the man at the shed who rostered engines and their crews to their particular tasks, and I had spoken to him several times on the phone enquiring

about which engines were coming off shed, so the guards wouldn't miss their ride. We walked along Edgware Road together. Just after relieving the other Jim at the Y.M.O., the guard for the 11/10 Brent Empty Wagon Sidings (EWS) – Toton would sign on at 10/15pm. That night it was Jack West who lived in the railway cottages at Cricklewood, half-a-mile away. He walked in on time. "Deal me in, lads" he said. There was always somebody playing cards in the mess room. I don't think some of them had a home to go to. He reached the signing-on hatch. "I suppose we're cancelled", he said. "Sorry, Jack, you're running", I informed him. Jim had told me that there were a lot of perishables in the EWS and they had to go that night. "But the driver won't be able to see the pegs (signals)", he protested. "No good, Jack, the perishables have got to run tonight." It took Jack about 14 hours to get to Wellingborough and back.

During that very cold winter of '62-'63, (the coldest January in London since 1838) the first job on nights, before I took my coat off was to stoke up the fire in the boiler room until I could get no more coke in. Every night, after our 10 o'clock cuppa, Reg Gates, the Assistant Yard Master, would go into his office and read The Log Book and the messages from Mr Jones, the Yard Master. Reg always called him "Guv", even to his face, but I always called him Mr. Jones. About half-past eleven Reg would call out: "Going 'round the houses, Spen, see you later". 'Round the houses' meant he was going to visit all the marshalling yards: 'The KOP' (north) end of Loaded Wagon Sidings (LWS), south end of LWS, West End Yard at West Hampstead, Empty Wagon Sidings (EWS), and South Sidings just outside the Y.M.O. Two other yards had no permanent staff. They were: Up Sidings behind Brent No. 1 'box, and Down Sidings by Cricklewood station. January 1963 was a very, very cold month. One night, Reg came back from his "walk around the houses", as usual, about a quarter-to-three. "Put your coat on, Spen, and come and have a look at this", he said as he walked in. I put my overcoat on and followed him out. We walked about 30 yards, far enough to look towards Cricklewood loco, where I could see several steam engines on fire. Strange to say 'on fire', isn't it, because if they are in steam they must be on fire. This time, though, the fire and smoke was coming from under the footplates, and licking around the cabs. "What's going on, Reg," I asked. "It's so cold, Spen, the injectors are frozen solid. They can't get any water into the boilers. So they've wrapped oily rags around the injectors and set fire to them, hoping the heat will melt the ice." We made our way back to the office. "Ever likely hardly anything's running tonight then", I said, as I put the kettle on. Reg needed a hot cup of tea after walking round the yards for over three hours. "You would think the injectors wouldn't freeze up, being so near the firebox", I continued. "Shows how cold it is", replied Reg. I expected a few trains to start running after that, but Reg came to me about an hour later to say that things were even worse now. The point rodding on the loco shed, because it hadn't been moved for a while, was held fast by the ground in some places. The intense cold had swollen the ground so much that it was preventing the point rodding from moving. Picks were used to try and break the soil away. Things didn't get any better until the weather became less cold.

Part of the film "The Password is Courage" starring Dirk Bogard was made at Scratchwood Sidings. I had to roster a guard every day to go there on the engine and make up the train until the spectacular crash took place. He came back day after day, done nothing for 8 hours, and said: "No action yet". Cricklewood driver stood in for Dirk Bogard on the footplate until a few seconds before the smash. April 2nd 1962 Fowler 4MT 42325 and train of 25 wagons wrecked. 10.25am St. Pancras – Manchester stopped specially at Radlett to pick up actors being filmed. Radlett was decked out as wartime German station.

"The Condor" was the name given to a fast freight train between Hendon, just ½ mile north of Brent, and Gushetfaulds depot in Glasgow. The name "Condor" comes from "Container-door-to-door". A Carlisle goods guard and footplate men worked the train from Carlisle to Hendon and return.

The guard arrived to sign off about 5.45am. He would sign on again at about 6pm to work the train back to Carlisle. However, after a very bad snowstorm in early 1963, he appeared at the hatch to sign off about 2/20pm. (This could possibly have been February 6th, as that was the day the up "Royal Scot" was diverted via Newcastle and up the ECML to King's Cross due to Shap being blocked with snow, which probably became blocked after Ais Gill) "Where've YOU been?" I asked. "Line blocked by snow over Ais Gill, so we had to come over Shap, and I had to wait for a pilot at Preston to get us back onto our proper route". The poor fellow had spent about 16 hours all alone in his brakevan. I phoned Fred Gillard, Guards Controller at St. Pancras, and told him: "'Condor' guard signing off. Do you want me to send him home?" "If he gets his skates on he'll be able to get the 'Caledonian' from Euston. It leaves at a quarter to four. Oh, and find us a guard for the 'Condor' down to Leicester tonight, will you Spen?" I can't remember what day it was now, but we had a spare guard about 'Condor' time on three nights a week. His booked job on Tuesdays and Thursdays was to travel passenger to Leicester, get back to Wigston South Junction and relieve a train of empty petrol tanks from Duddeston Rd, Birmingham. If it wasn't a Tuesday or a Thursday I would probably be OK. There were rarely any spare guards between about 4 and 10pm. If I couldn't cover the Condor, Fred would have to look elsewhere, perhaps a St. Pancras goods guard (there weren't many of them though), or he might have time to get a Wellingborough guard up to Brent to work the Condor back. Of course, the importance of 'The Condor' justified even cancelling a local trip job to provide a guard. That would be up to Fred and 'Pancras Control.

We did make the occasional bad mistake with the rostering, of course. One particular day I heard that a returning Brighton – Bedford day excursion for old age pensioners had arrived at Clapham junction to change engines, locomen and guard. Our guard had booked off sick the day before, and Jim hadn't covered the job. It was the sort of job you'd take a guard off freight for and report the freight as 'no guard' to St. Pancras Control. The train stood at Clapham Junction for well over an hour before a guard who had signed for the road to Brent could arrive to take charge of the train. I felt really sorry for the OAPs on the train. But why didn't the locomen on the engine know they had to pick up the guard as they came off shed? This was an area, looking back, that we could have prevented mistakes like this.

Looking back now, I guess I was guilty of breaking the law one Saturday night. I came on duty at 10pm and Jim told me that a guard due to sign on at 2.10am had just reported sick. There was nobody to cover his job, which was one of the usual weekend track relaying trains somewhere down the main line. Jim went home, and I waited for Fred Gillard, the St. Pancras guards' controller, to ring in as usual to see what jobs were uncovered. Just then a guard came to sign off. "No Sunday job for me, then", he dejectedly said. "No, I'm afraid not", I replied, "but wait a minute" – I looked at the clock – "no, sorry you can't do it, you won't be able to get enough rest." "What job's that then?" he asked. "It's 2.10am for a track relaying job near Elstree, but you'll only have four hours rest, you can't do it". "I'll be OK", he said. "I've had an easy job this afternoon. I can get some rest before I come back." Are you sure?" I asked. "I'll be here, 2.10am", he replied. "All right then, 2.10am. See you later," I said. He came on time at 2.10am, I signed him on, told him where his train was, Empty Wagon Sidings if I remember correctly, and off he went. However, somebody must have noticed that he was back after only four hours rest, probably one of the card gang in the mess room. There was nearly always a group of guards playing cards, any time, day or night. Word got round to the Guv, Mr Jones, and I was summoned to his office. I explained that although I knew a guard was entitled to nine hours' rest, I thought that if it was OK with him he could come back after whatever suited him. My priority was finding a guard for the job. A lot of men would be waiting around if that train didn't leave the sidings. The Guv told me in no uncertain terms that it was a Board of Trade Regulation, and that meant law. If a job was uncovered, and I could do nothing about it lawfully, then all I had to do was inform 'Pancras Control and let them decide what to do. And that

was that.

Still being interested in railway signalling, I often thought as I passed within 20 yards of Brent Junction No. 1 on my way to and from work, that I would like to visit one of the boxes in the area. I never saw anyone in No. 1 box, because I was so close to it as I passed and couldn't see inside, it being rather tall. I asked Reg Gates, the Assistant Yard Master on my shift, if there was any chance he could fix up a visit to No. 1 box. He said that he didn't know any of the men who worked there, so couldn't help. This wasn't surprising, as Reg wouldn't have any need to visit the box or talk to the men there. Reg did say, however, that he would ask the signalman at Brent Junction No. 2 if I could pop up the box for a few minutes. Reg knew the signalmen there, because the box dealt with all the traffic in and out of Brent South Sidings. So I added Brent Junction No. 2 to my list of boxes visited. I was only there a short while, just to say 'Hello' and 'Goodbye, thank you'. The box had a large clock over the door. I thought it a bit strange that time was important enough in freight train sidings to warrant a large clock. Freight trains didn't run to time that well, did they? Having said that, it was noticeable at Brent that the Brent – Toton coal empties, which left Empty Wagon Sidings at 10 minutes past the hour, nearly always departed on time. There were about 7 of these trains a day. The 11.10am, however, consisted of mixed freight, not empties. It was known as The Dust, because it called at Sundon Cement & Lime Works, north of Luton. They came past the Yard Masters Office on the down goods, and with a 9F hauling 100 empties, you thought the train would never end! They went through Hendon station, then up and over the Up and Down Fast lines to come down again onto the Down Slow at Silkstream Junction. By that time, the down local passenger, which had left St. Pancras on the hour, and Cricklewood at 12 minutes past, would be well clear of the junction to give the empties a clear run.

Working the 10pm to 6am shift one Saturday night/Sunday morning in spring 1962, Reg Gates, the Assistant Yard Master, told me to be careful coming to work for 10pm on Sunday night. Workmen were laying 6-foot deep drains between the Down Local and Up Fast lines outside Brent Junction No. 1 signalbox. There was often a lot of water lying about in that area after a long spell of rain. Reg said that the board crossing across the lines would probably be taken out. As I walked down from the end of Brent Terrace towards the Cop end of Brent Loaded Wagon Sidings, I could see large bright lights in the distance. I got to the crossing. I stepped over the two rails of the Up Local line, and the first rail of the Down Local Line. I stood on the sleeper, looking over the second rail. If there was a trench, this is where it would be. I stared down at what I thought was the ground. It looked perfectly normal dirt. I stepped over, and down I went. I think the workmen cheated a bit because, after I had hauled myself to my feet again, I could just see over the top, so it was about 5 feet deep. There was a bright light that had been turned away from the trench. It made where the trench was even blacker. I got out of the trench, but could hardly walk. I had twisted my knee. I worked until 7am Monday, came back for 2pm in the afternoon. On the Tuesday Pat Guthrie had agreed to swap turns with me, so I was back again at 7am Tuesday. I was rest days Wednesday and Thursday, so I got one of the lads in the office to cover for me so that I left work about 1pm to get the train from Cricklewood station to St. Pancras, then the 1/55pm train to Manchester via Derby and Stoke-on-Trent, which of course took me almost home. I was carrying my suitcase full of dirty clothes for mum to wash as well, so by the time I got home my knee wasn't half in pain. I was off work for 2 weeks, but I didn't let anyone know at Brent that it happened somewhere I was not supposed to be, although Reg Gates guessed, of course. My driving test at Cricklewood was due towards the end of my sick leave, so I had to travel to my lodgings with Mrs Rice, stay overnight, take my driving test (which I passed, thank goodness), and travel back home – a round trip of 310 miles just for a driving test, what with a bad limp, and only just able to push the clutch pedal down!

In late May, I think it was, 1963, Jim left to go back to Rugby. That meant that me and Pat were working 12 hour shifts most of the time, which curtailed my visits home to see my family (and get my clothing washed by mum), so by July 1963 I was ready to leave the railway, not without a

little sadness, and return home. (The Goods Guards Clerk who worked 12 hour shifts with Pat Guthrie after I left was David Ford, who had just got the job as Relief Goods Guards Clerk at St. Pancras, covering Brent as well. Although I never met David, he contacted me by email in 2010, having seen this website.) I was courting Muriel at that time and neither of us fancied living in the London area. Muriel came from a large family who all lived close to where she lived and didn't want to live far from them, so I put my notice in and left the railway for good.
