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LONDON TRANSPORT

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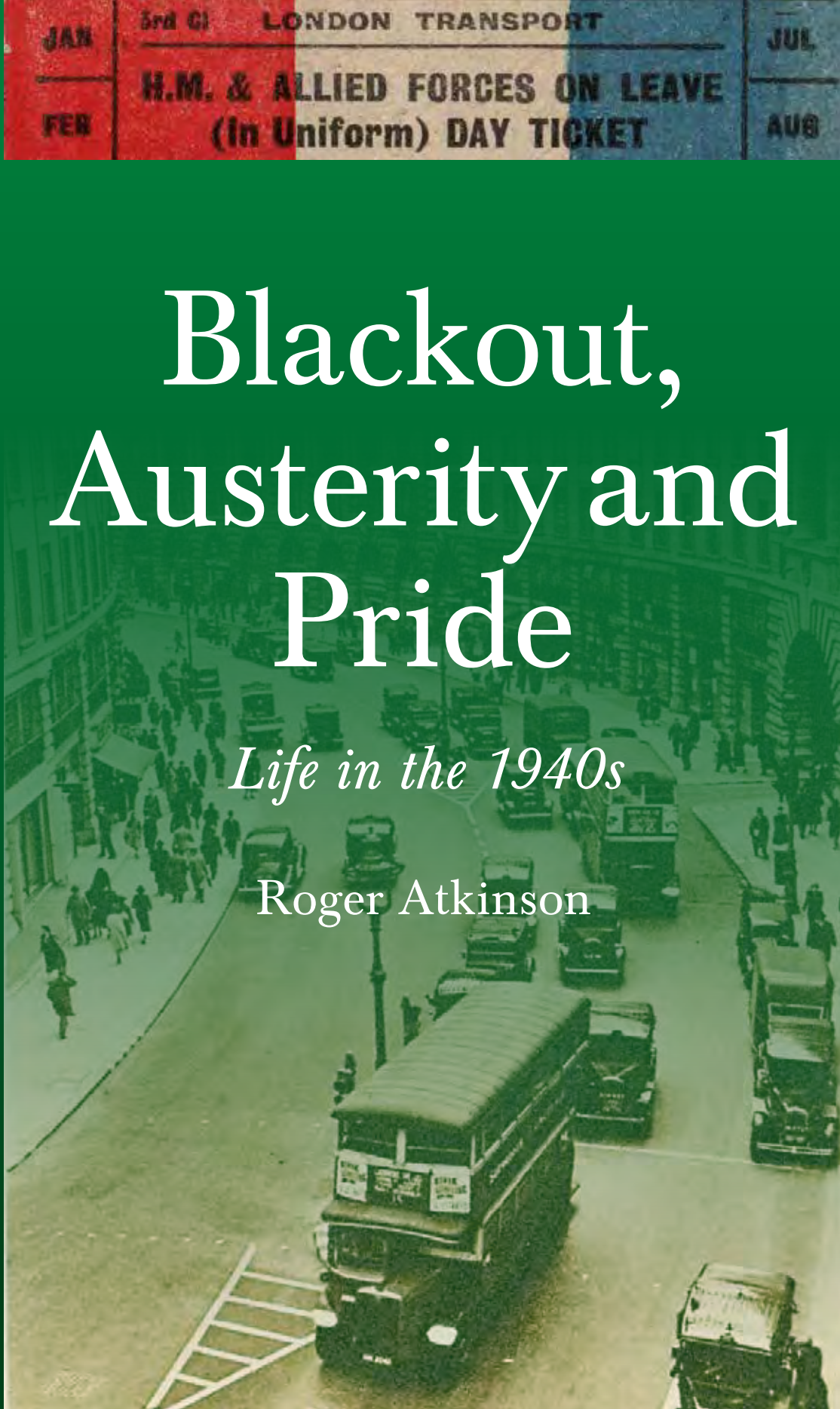
H.M. & ALLIED FORCES ON LEAVE
(In Uniform) DAY TICKET

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Blackout, Austerity and Pride

Life in the 1940s

Roger Atkinson



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First published June 2015

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Acknowledgements

My wife, Pam, many times told me that I had an exceptional memory and that I ought to write a book – she clearly thought me capable of doing so. But it is only now that I am a widower, that I have found the inspiration to do so. Pam had not failed to notice that for at least five-sixths of the time we were together I had been, as well as a collector of bus tickets, an editor of enthusiast magazines in the road transport field, particularly slanted towards history and bus tickets. At the same time, I had a good recollection of events in my mildly eventful youth.

So firstly, I thank Pam for posthumously inspiring this book. She herself left her own legacy in the form of public spiritedness in Chester. The two most substantial forms it had taken were the Playgroup that she ran in our house, 45 Dee Banks, from 1965 to 1992, and her fostering the concept which emerged in 1991 as the Caldby Nature Park. This was the preservation, as an open space, of a park along the valley of a stream, near both banks of which new housing was being developed.

Then in a wide, rather than a precise sense, I thank numerous friends who have shared my interest in buses, bus operation, bus travel and bus tickets. Some fruits of that interest have plainly been used in this book.

Hardly had I conceived the idea of what the book would embrace, than I broached it with Jenny Bradley of Slaidburn Village Archive and received swift encouragement. Several years ago, they had had from me a privately written account of my year at Dunnow Hall. The Slaidburn Village Archive has gone on, throughout my writing this book, being a refuge to which I have repaired several times for fresh encouragement and further material, with Helen Wallbank, who has taken over as Archivist from Jenny (now retired), maintaining the same ethos.

In the actual writing of this book, the first and foremost aide has been my daughter, Dr Catherine Atkinson of Hannover, herself the

author of two or three books, including (in English) *Debts, Dowries, Donkeys: The Diary of Niccolò Machiavelli's Father, Messer Bernardo, in Quattrocento Florence*. But I would also mention two other people who have encouraged me and who are worthy modern successors to my mentors of many years ago whom I praise under "Adult Education"; they are Paul Delrue the bookbinder and Kevin Canning the slater. I add also Alan Robinson, a local historian devoted primarily to the Great War, who has traced information relating to my father's service and located with fair certainty the (rather undistinguished) sector of battlefield on which he was cripplingly wounded in August 1918. Finally, David Cursons of St Christopher Club (for 'Chris' Old Scholars) for some very helpful advice; and, stemming from David, Judith Taylor for photographs and Gillian Hall for the agreeable meeting we had in the St Pancras Booking Office Restaurant. To any survivor of those elections 70 years ago described by the late Prince Rupert, who feels an urge to vent imprecations upon him or on me, please exempt Prince Rupert on the principle *De Mortuis Nil Nisi Bonum*.

A family source deserving thanks is Sue Atkinson who produced a wonderful sheaf of ENSA leaflets preserved by her father, Sgt. Carter of the Royal Army Service Corps, who rested in Rome after the battle of Monte Cassino.

Four outstandingly helpful outside sources have been Pennine Horizons of Hebden Bridge, the Kilmadock Trust of Doune, the Aberchirder & District Community Association and David Harman, the Managing Editor of Transport Ticket Society Journal. And, in these modern times, I acknowledge extensive use of the internet, including Wikipedia, to check my facts. I apologise for any mistakes that have survived both my daughter Catherine's checking and my own.

Roger Atkinson, O.B.E., Chester, March 2015

United Kingdom currency (£sd)

On 15 February 1971, the United Kingdom converted from pounds, shillings and pence (£sd) to decimal currency (£p). The pound retained its value, but was now divided into 100 pence, instead of 240 pence. The old currency, shillings and pence, had taken the form of 12 pence = 1 shilling, 20 shillings = 1 pound.

The old £1 note was displaced by a £1 coin and, in preparation for decimalisation, the 10/- (ten shilling) note had already been replaced by a 50p coin in 1969. Also 5p and 10p coins had replaced the shilling (1/- or 1s) and florin (2/- or 2s) coins in 1968. Other denominations of old coins, the halfpenny ($\frac{1}{2}$ d) the penny (1d) the threepenny bit (3d) and the half-crown (2/6 or 2s 6d) did not have precise decimal coinage equivalents and had to be withdrawn from circulation in February 1971 and replaced by the new $\frac{1}{2}$ p, 1p and 2p coins.

The usage of the term “shilling” survived for some years after 1971 in common parlance. In the 1940s, there had been no thought of any change in the time-honoured currency, and all prices were expressed in shillings and pence. For example, at times, during and after the war, the meat ration per person per week was $\frac{1}{2}$ (sometimes expressed as $\frac{1}{2}$ d or, less usually, as 1s 2d). In this book, prices are shown in the old currency.

The old currency was not as difficult as it may now seem. Perhaps the very first lesson in coinage recognition was the distinction between ‘copper’ and ‘silver’. Copper was heavy, but of low value; silver was lighter, but of more significant worth. The terms ‘copper’ and ‘silver’ were in everyday usage. Children were taught weights and measures and the UK currency in arithmetic lessons in school. These made them familiar with the routine calculations that they would face in everyday life (without pocket calculators). Children and adults alike were capable of calculating the cost of 2 ounces of butter (the weekly ration) at $\frac{1}{4}$ per lb. (Scales in shops indicated only the weight; they were not sophisticated enough to

also tell the price). Or a worker taken on by an employer for a 48-hour week at 9½d per hour would have known what his or her pay packet should contain, given that 9½d was a modest but not outrageously low rate of pay, which would not have attracted a liability to income tax.*

* Butter 2d; wages 38/-. (Weekly pay was often expressed in shillings; monthly salaries in pounds.)

KEEP CALM AND CARRY ON

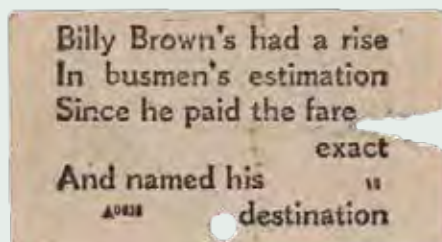
*There were things in life
interesting me more than
learning Mandarin Chinese.
There is only need for me to
cite two: I was interested in
places and buses.*



Wartime London bus

A fine picture, probably taken at Bromley North station, with several wartime features to note: The white-painted front mudguards, the masked headlights, the tiny aperture on the side lights. Black paint across the top and bottom of the destination indicator glass, limiting the points displayed, thus economising in the cloth needed for the destination blind. Anti-splinter gauze firmly glued on the inside of the windows, with diamond-shaped holes to look out through. Also the opened bus windows on a sunny day and the patient queues. The two eyes on the front of the bus, advertising the magazine *Picture Post*, were another familiar feature of the period.

Inside the bus there may well have been a London Transport poster showing a passenger trying to lift a corner of the window gauze, being admonished by Billy Brown of London Town: "I trust you'll pardon my correction; that stuff is there for your protection"



Billy Brown on London bus ticket

A black sheep in green uniform

I answered the doorbell and found a formidable lady in a dark green WVS uniform. “You will not know me; I am your Aunt Edna”, she said. “Do not worry, I have brought my own lunch” and she held up a brown paper bag containing a plaice. She rapidly assessed the dire state of our house.

An example of how grim it had become even before my father’s death can be cited. My mother was becoming so disabled with her advancing multiple sclerosis, that she could not get herself out of the bath; my father, with his wounds from the Great War never ceasing to trouble him, was too disabled to lift her. Our house at 89 Clarendon Road, Leeds had a peculiar feature. Whilst an attic extended over most of the bathroom, the space above the bath itself went right up to the roof. Thus the attic room ended in a fairly low wall at that point; it did not extend into the eaves. In this wall there was a vent, perhaps to extract the steam from the bath. My father, being an engineer, constructed a system of pulleys in the attic and lowered a rope through the vent and on the end of the rope created a sling or loop that my mother could put round herself, under her shoulders. She could get into the bath unaided, but when she was in it, he lowered the sling to her. She called out when she was ready to come out of the bath. My father worked the device. But he soon decided that, at the age of 12, I might be as strong and physically capable as he was, so he called me to the attic to see whether he had devised the pulleys well enough for me to work them. Neither of us could see my mother, of course; use of the pulleys was activated by gentle shouting. This Heath Robinson-style contraption actually worked extraordinarily well. But I admit that when Aunt Edna found that this was the sort of state in which my mother and I had been ‘keeping calm and carrying on’, she was more than a little shocked.

My father had died on the night of 15/16 August 1940, after we had heard that evening, on the 9 o’clock news, that waves of Ger-

man bombers were coming over Kent and London – the Battle of Britain had begun, though, of course, it had not yet been given that name. The Leeds Co-operative Society funeral department had helped me to organise the funeral in every way and had tracked down my Uncle Charlie in Bradford. He had then told various other uncles, aunts and cousins in that area and had arranged the place of burial. They had attended the funeral; but then we had heard no more.

So, accepting it simply as a fact of life that responsibility must now fall on me – after all, I was twelve years old – I took on the duties of shopping, getting our groceries from Ann’s Pantry, the local grocer with whom we were registered for rationing purposes, and I took my mother into town on the bus on Saturdays for any larger shopping. She was still just about able to cope with cooking and the trips to town. It is doubtful that either of us did any housework. There seemed to be some source of income (I am vague about this) so I was able to pay the rent and pay the coalman. I had a Post Office Savings Bank book that my father had opened in April, just after we had moved to Leeds. I still have the bank book and it has turned out to be an immensely useful and precise source of information for me in writing this book. I knew that my father’s will had left all his money to my mother. Adults knew what they were doing, so all that I needed to do was just to keep things ticking over. I admittedly was not sure about which adults were doing what; no doubt some were somewhere. This proved not to be the case.

As my mother and I could not make any use of our car, which I think was a Ford 8, bought new for about £115, perhaps in 1937, I accepted an offer from the proprietor of Ann’s Pantry to buy it for £15. Petrol was already rationed, but there was still a small ration for private use. I was having to pay a few shillings a week to a local garage for garaging the car, which was a factor in wanting to get rid of it. Nonetheless, £15 does seem to indicate that my parents had not instilled in me sufficient business acumen.

About a week after her visit to our house, Aunt Edna invited me (alone) to lunch with Miss Ewart and herself in a restaurant in Leeds. On a beam above us was written “Enough to tempt an anchorite from his cell”. I asked Aunt Edna what an anchorite was.

She, for her part, plied me with many cogent questions.

Apart from my mother, who was doing all that she could, various ladies, in that period from November 1940 to spring 1942, proved to be my salvation. Their succession was quite logical: Miss Ewart, Aunt Edna, Mrs Mann, briefly Mrs Hague, and then my cousin Lily. All, apart from Aunt Edna already introduced, have their roles explained later in the book.

But, to dispose of one obvious initial question: why had I never heard of my Aunt Edna? My father, Harold Watts Atkinson, born in December 1883, had been the youngest of the nine children of a frequently drunken journeyman cooper, George Atkinson. A 'journeyman' could be a skilled artisan, as my grandfather had been, but he was not a master cooper, the owner of his own cooperage. He simply found employment, week by week, at cooperages all over the Bradford, Bingley, Cullingworth area, either walking daily to and from his work or taking lodgings near the work.

George's nine children comprised five boys and four girls. Edna, by a wide margin, was the prettiest of the girls and attractive to men. Their mother died in 1893, when my father was nine. But the family, for the most part, stayed on in the same house. It was to this house, a few years later, that George brought home a drunken companion who made advances to Edna. Her elder brother, Charles – (later, of course, to be my Uncle Charlie) – tried to throw out the unwanted guest, but George obstructed him. Charles, aided by his brothers and sisters, not only threw out the drunk but hit his father over the head with a poker, to emphasise that they were not a family that tolerated inappropriate behaviour. George was carried out unconscious and left in the back garden. Next morning, they found a mound in the shape of George, but covered in snow. They carried him in, thawed him out, and he lived to a ripe old age, dying in 1916.

Edna remained an attractive lady but, for reasons not known to me, did not marry and, by 1910, must have been in her early thirties. She then seduced Robert Sacker, the German-born husband of her sister Lily. Unable to bear the shame, Lily drowned herself in the Bridgwater Canal, near Altrincham. Edna became the black sheep, expunged from the family records; never spoken of, never

spoken to, so it was quite correct that I had never heard of Aunt Edna.

She not only did penance by bringing up the Sacker children – and they went on to quite successful careers – but also made a successful career for herself. In due course she married a Wally Hill and became Mrs Hill; but Edna had no children. There was, however, one member of the family who did not toe the line and who conversed with Edna in Bradford, whenever they met. This was my cousin Lily, daughter of Aunt Amanda.

The arrival of Aunt Edna at our door in Leeds in November 1940 was an important development in my own life. I must emphasise that I never myself thought of her as a black sheep in WVS clothing; it was her brothers and sisters to whom she was the black sheep. In my eyes, she was the first member of the family to come to the help of my mother and me.

Reconstructing the story now

Some aspects of the account that follows are derived from memory, which can be fallible after 65 or more years. Many dates and details, however, are backed up by notes made in the latter part of the 1940s, or by bus timetables and my extensive collection of bus tickets; also by a surprising number of letters that I have fortunately kept. My original purpose in making those notes was to record buses and bus services that I had ridden on. I was not a bus spotter, interested in the bus number and whether it was a Leyland, an AEC or an Albion, so much as someone with a measure of curiosity about the actual journey that I was making on it. I had not the slightest notion at the time that I was creating a record that could be of interest years later. It is only looking back at them 60-odd years later, that I have appreciated how much they reflect far wider social history and capture the atmosphere of those early post-war years. I had begun making some sort of note of my journeys by perhaps 1944. However, the notes still preserved run from Decem-

ber 1945 to September 1948, a period that coincides closely, but coincidentally, with my military service.

My more deliberate, as distinct from ephemeral, note-making started with an account, in September 1945, of my first major solo venture as a 17-year-old, in embarking on an eight-day holiday of my own devising, starting from Shelf, near Halifax, and staying overnight successively in New Brighton, Morecambe, Carlisle, Glasgow (two nights), Newcastle and Saltburn, travelling almost entirely by bus, with only one short journey, Carlisle to Dumfries, by train. This was at a time when most of the places were unknown to me, and my advance knowledge of the bus services or timetables was limited.

The account of that September 1945 epic was written for a reason that itself reflects an aspect of social history. There were no computers or e-mails or mobile phones; not a great many private households were on the telephone, so one communicated by letter, the Royal Mail providing a superb service. I wrote the account on my return to Shelf simply to tell my then girlfriend, Catherine Wood, who lived near Cambridge, what I had been doing. I no doubt included mention of the abiding dislike of Newcastle-on-Tyne that my one-night-stop in 1945 implanted in me. My previous night was in Glasgow. So, in one day's travel, by bus all the way, I had gone from Glasgow to Edinburgh, then down the coast via Berwick-on-Tweed, so that my final arrival in Newcastle was after dark, quite late in the evening. With nowhere pre-booked to stay, but seeing a reverend gentleman – all clergymen in those days wore dog collars – I asked him if he could direct me to a bed and breakfast. He pointed me to a doss house. It provided me, very cheaply, with the most dreadful accommodation I have ever endured! For example, I noticed no paper in the lavatory, so I asked the landlady for some. She counted out four individual leaves torn from a toilet roll and told me that that was my ration. Newcastle has never redeemed itself.

That account of my September 1945 travels was typewritten, but any carbon copy that I kept was lost years ago. Fortunately, my subsequent notes from the period December 1945 to September 1948 have been kept, the originals having stayed in my posses-

sion. They are a mixture of typing and manuscript. My father had bought me, literally two or three days before the outbreak of war in 1939, a Remington portable typewriter – which I still have, as an antique relic. But in 1945, it was my most valuable personal possession. In my final postings in the army I had it with me, but obviously I did not risk taking it when first called-up or under training.

Turning to the Notes from the period 1945 to 1948 and that I still have by me, they have little merit, save for their being a contemporary record, affording a view of what one took as largely mundane, but worthy of mention, in their 1940s context. Just a taste of them: the two paragraphs below are from a five quarto-page typed account.

My Remington portable, taken out of its carrying case.

Note that it proclaims: “Assembled by British labour at the Remington typewriter factory London from parts made in the U.S.A.”



Typewriters

Typewriters belong to the past. Nowadays one uses a computer keyboard. Note the physical effort needed with a typewriter. Typewriters had no motors in them. Striking any key required the strength in one's fingers to move the mechanism. The chosen key was propelled from its 'bed' to flip over, with some force, and press the ink ribbon onto the paper so that the letter, number or symbol on the key appeared on the paper. Every individual letter of every word involved a key stroke. Typewriters were precision instruments and they worked; but, outside the field of home usage, they were operated by typists, almost invariably female, and employed literally as typists. There were, of course, grades of typist – copy typists who copied from hand-written drafts, shorthand-typists who took dictation from whoever was sending the letter, and then typed it out from their own shorthand notes and, at the top of the tree, secretaries who were shorthand-typists who acted also as receptionists, functioning as what is now generally called a Personal Assistant. The typewriter and the typist more or less coincided with the twentieth century, coming in as it began and replaced by the computer as it ended.

London to Bradford by bus

13th/14th December 1945

At Rushden I boarded the Kettering bound United Counties bus, which departed some 40 minutes before the one which I [had] expected to catch. A Bristol double-decker of the same design as the Eastern National on which I had ridden. While waiting for the bus to depart I was an interested spectator of a temporary breakdown of one of the company's Guy Arab war-time buses which was loading at the stand in front for Northampton. Some five minutes after its scheduled

departure time the driver emerged from his cab and wandered to our bus to see if the crew were about, which they were not, and then returned to his bus and called to some hefty workmen seated therein and asked them to push the bus. As the bus had to start up a slight gradient, this was no easy task but after about 20 yards, the bus started to move under its own power. The workmen boarded and it departed. It is noteworthy that most accidents to buses in the way of breakdowns seem to occur to these Guys, as witness the breakdown of the Guy at Dalmellington on my Scottish Tour.

.....

At Loughboro' I had to wait for the Barton last bus to Chilwell Garage. Barton, which I had experienced for only two very brief rides, were known to me as one of Britain's finest companies, with no expense spared for luxury. A duplicate, to Kegworth Garage only, pulled in, loaded and departed. The queue for the Chilwell bus was fairly long. It arrived, a single-decker Leyland, and loaded. I was lucky enough to get a seat, but the bus left late and packed to the doors. The conductress, an almost middle-aged lady, made no effort to collect the tickets. Half the passengers were drunk. The conductress soon proved herself to be under influence of liquor. A soldier, only semi-sober, took charge of the bus, giving bell signals and calling out the stopping places. As the passengers began to thin out, some of them tendering fares, though the conductress pocketed the money and issued no tickets, the rowdiness increased. When there were no longer any standing passengers, the conductress donned her Setright Register and began to collect fares. I tendered my 1/5d single and received a ticket which could possibly be 1/5, if the 5 hadn't printed well, but it looks more like 1/-, in which case the conductress will have got the money. Meanwhile, the soldier continued as auxiliary conduc-

tor. Nearly an hour after we had left Loughboro' the passengers had dwindled to half a dozen and we were nearing the terminus. The conductress stopped the bus and alighted, saying she was going home, (she presumably lived thereabouts), and the bus went on without a conductor, strictly contrary to the law, the soldier continued to deputise in the post.

A note from an account of a journey on Christmas Eve 1945, a trip round Skipton, Clitheroe, Blackburn and Burnley.

Willebrew tickets were issued, and in an effort to save tickets the conductor was telling passengers to share tickets if they booked single. Consequently, the man next to me and myself both booked 3d single to Clitheroe [from Chatburn, on a Bolton-by-Bowland bus] and received a 6d ticket to share between us.

WILLEBREW SYSTEM		WILLEBREW SYSTEM
WILLEBREW SYSTEM		WILLEBREW SYSTEM
WILLEBREW SYSTEM		WILLEBREW SYSTEM
WILLEBREW SYSTEM		WILLEBREW SYSTEM
120	1 23	Adult
NI	2 24	Child
2/1	3 25	1 ^d
3/1	4 26	1½ ^d
4/1	5 27	2 ^d
5/1	6 28	2½ ^d
6/1	7 29	3 ^d
7/1	8 30	4 ^d
8/1	9 31	5 ^d
9/1	10 32	6 ^d
10/1	11 33	
11/1	12 34	
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17/1	18 40	
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19/1	20 42	
20/1	21 43	
21/1	22 44	

Willebrew System
 Protected by
 Patent 21210
 Williamson, Printer
 Ashton-under-Lyne

Bolton-by-Bowland Motor Services "Willebrew".

6d Single issued 24 December 1945 for two 3d fares

The status of the bus in the 1940s.

By the time of the Second World War, public road transport in towns and cities throughout the United Kingdom was provided by trams, trolleybuses or motor buses. In most cases, the provision of these urban services was by the municipality – in other words, “the Corporation”. In many towns the electric trams, which had been the municipal pride and joy in the early 20th century, had reached the end of their viable life, and had already been, or were now scheduled to be, replaced by trolleybuses or motor buses. Trolleybuses were often favoured since, like the trams, they used municipally supplied electricity. (Many municipalities ran their own gas, electricity and water undertakings.)

Inter-urban and rural bus services were run by a mixture of large companies and smaller, often village-based, local firms. Control of all public road transport lay with government-appointed Traffic Commissioners, with two exceptions: London, where control was vested in the statutorily created London Passenger Transport Board (LPTB), and tramways. Tramways normally had their own individual Acts of Parliament by which they had to abide.

Swiftly after the outbreak of war, the Ministry of Transport became the Ministry of War Transport, and the Traffic Commissioners were vested with enormous powers as Regional Transport Commissioners. They were able, for example, to require operators to work services jointly, instead of in competition, obliging them to accept each other’s return and season tickets.

By the end of 1942, when petrol shortage had become very severe and, with the loss of Malaya to the Japanese, a rubber shortage was also rapidly developing, all long-distance express bus services, for example, London Transport’s Green Line services, had been suspended. Some ordinary bus services had been split into two parts to make changing buses necessary and thus travel more difficult. The government widely publicised the question, “Is your journey really necessary?”

Not many people owned motor cars. Those that did found themselves with a limited, eventually non-existent, petrol ration

for private motoring. Hence ‘everyone’ used the buses (or trams or trolleybuses) and knew, with great facility, their local services and times and their (usually good) reliability. Traffic congestion was not a hazard, but the bus might come along already full.

Indeed, services were not always reduced, although the Regional Transport Commissioners’ pressure for cuts grew stronger, as the petrol and rubber shortages worsened. There was universally a curfew on last journeys at night, exceptions being allowed only for limited later buses back to military establishments or night shift buses to factories on war work. Buses generally were very heavily used, bringing the necessity for a legal requirement for six or more persons waiting at a bus stop to form a queue. The chain that the conductress hooked across the platform was in regular use at peak hours or on 9 p.m. or last buses. She then rang three bells to tell the driver that the bus was full and should not stop again until he got a single bell, meaning that a passenger wanted to get off.

A wartime notice that appeared on Coventry Corporation buses:

YOUNG SCHOOLBOYS AND SCHOOLGIRLS
The conductor is required to direct young
schoolboys and schoolgirls to the lower saloon
where she can better look after them

For information in town centres if there was not an enquiry office, there would almost certainly be a stand inspector or regulator. Some of these would only give information about their own employer’s buses, but members of the public passing by could be fruitful sources of (generally correct) details of where to wait and what to catch – the public had a strong ethos of helpfulness.

In the 1940s, therefore, it was not unusual to develop a youthful interest in buses. The difficulty lay in finding information about bus services remote from one’s own local patch. The removal of all road signs and milestones and the non-availability of maps did not help. One or two youngsters persevered.

Now we come to what may seem to be illogical: apart from that initial introduction to Aunt Edna in autumn 1940, the account of my life in the 1940s starts in 1945/6, but goes back to the period 1939 to 1944 by way of diversions. This is partly because those earlier years have to rely heavily on my memory as a boy of 11 to 17 years old. Another strong reason for not simply following my life story through chronologically is that I am writing about many facets of life in the 1940s, using my own progress through school and the army only as a frame on which some of them can be hung. It is important to note that I have not overcome my addiction to going off down by-ways.

Learning and discovering in 1944/5

Let us plunge straight away into one of these diversions. Reproduced below is a letter from the Ministry of War Transport, in March 1944, addressed to Bernard Lloyd at St. Christopher School, Letchworth. I was a boarder at St Christopher, from September 1942 to July 1945. Bernard was a day boy who lived in Welwyn Garden City and came to school each day by train. Bernard was interested in trains; I was interested in buses. I cannot remember why it was Bernard, not I, who wrote for a list of bus companies; but the important point is that the Ministry's reply was helpful, pointing us to an annual directory, "The Motor Transport Year Book".

I followed it up in the Easter 1944 holidays in Bradford library, where they had the 1941/2 edition of the MTYB. It was the last issue ever produced; publication did not resume after the war. It was a goldmine, and I absorbed it virtually cover to cover. Later, Bradford library disposed of it as out of date and useless. Viewed in a different light by a librarian with greater insight, its archival value would have been profound. Thus I obtained knowledge of all our main bus companies, their addresses and areas of operation.



Ministry of War Transport letter

Letter March 1944 on dull, grey, flimsy-quality, reduced-size paper.

Also, by some date in 1944, I had become aware of the weekly publication *Modern Transport* – even in its restricted wartime form a marvellous, wide-ranging source of information on non-military commercial transport.

Bernard and I set up LATIB, the Lloyd-Atkinson Travel Information Bureau at school. It dispensed travel information to anyone

at school who sought it; not many did. I had my Remington portable typewriter with me and mustered enough money to send 10d in stamps to a lot of bus companies asking for a copy of their timetable book. Almost all replied, and I have, even now, a remarkable collection of company and Corporation letterheads from 1944/5. Some sent timetables, often pre-war. Others replied that they were out of print and returned the 10d in stamps. The wartime timetables that I did acquire were of enormous interest; I accumulated

Deliberate anonymity

A wartime Blackburn tram at Blackburn Boulevard with a masked headlight and a white-painted bumper is shown here. But there is a rather more subtle pointer to this picture being wartime. The barely distinguishable lettering on the side of the tramcar reads either CORPORATION TRAMWAYS or CORPORATION TRANSPORT. Before or after the war, those words would have been preceded by the name BLACKBURN; but in the period of great fear of German paratrooper invasion, not only were all signposts removed, but a few municipalities went to the extreme of deleting their own name from their buses and trams. Blackburn, probably correctly, concluded that German paratroopers would not have been well enough briefed to identify where they had landed just from seeing the Corporation's coat of arms, which did still appear on their vehicles, or from destination blinds showing WILPSHIRE or CHERRY TREE. And, better still, PRESTON NEW ROAD could really have confused them; and some cars, running on the route through Darwen showed, I think, the destination, CEMETERY.

Ipswich Corporation Transport took this to the extreme of even taking the name Ipswich off their tickets, leaving them showing “[blank] Corporation Transport Services”. In the initial enthusiasm for anonymity some local authorities tore down bus timetables, but this led to protests that the measure was inconveniencing the local populace much more than the Germans.

nearly a suitcase full, pre-war and wartime. When I went into the army I handed it to a friend in Wibsey for safe keeping. His mother destroyed the entire collection.

However, the letters, being less bulky, had stayed safely in my possession. And other miracles do happen. From the school's archives I have been sent, unsolicited, photocopies of a LATIB briefing that ran to several pages, detailing Penzance to Wick by train in 1944, then returning from John o'Groats to Land's End by bus.

The hazard for soldiers parachuted into enemy territory not having much idea of where they had landed proved, later in the war, to be a very real one for our own invasion army after the D-Day landings in June 1944 in rural Normandy. Parachute drops could be well wide of their intended points of rendezvous.

See also Removal of Direction Signs textbox on a later page.

A wartime Blackburn tram



DESTINATION		TIME	FARE COMPANY
PENZANCE	dep	7.25 am	GWR L.M.S.
BRISTOL	arr	2.12 pm	
"	dep	3.5	
BIRMINGHAM	arr	5.41	
"	dep	8.15	
CREWE	arr	10.10	
"	dep	10.30	
INVERNESS	arr	10.15 AM	
"	dep	12.26 pm	
WICK	arr	6.38	

Trains (in 1944) from Penzance to Wick. Note the 12-hour overnight journey Crewe to Inverness, the journey onwards to Wick taking over six hours. (Courtesy of David Cursons, St Christopher School Old Scholars' Archive)

Macrae & Dick letter 15 November 1944

INVERNESS
18/11/44

TELEPHONE
OVERSEAS IDEAS
RAILS -
TAIN -
PORT-WILLIAM -

DAY'S NIGHT GARAGE
& REPAIRS

WASH APPROPRIATE
AGENTS -
OTHER -

WARRANTY
TOP WARRANTY
BY FULLY QUALIFIED
MILL & COOK -
WARRANTY

CJM/WK

RAIRS

TAIN

FORWARDERS TAKE AND SERVICE A STOCK OF VARIOUS WIRE

Macrae & Dick Ltd.

*Automobiles, boats, Engines &
Crashpumpers,
& Heavy Contractors*

INVERNESS

15th November, 1944

PORT-WILLIAM

TELEPHONE
DICK - INVERNESS
DICK - RAILS
DICK - TAIN
DICK - PORT-WILLIAM



SPECIALISED IN
AUTOMOBILE REPAIRS
& SERVICE

OFFICIAL REPAIRERS TO

R. Atkinson, Esq.,
"Arundale",
Barrington Road,
Letchworth,
H E R T S.

Dear Sir,

As requested in your letter of the 10th inst., we have much pleasure in enclosing herewith time-table of our Bus Services.

Assuring you always of our best services,

Yours faithfully,
For MACRAE & DICK, LTD.
W.K.

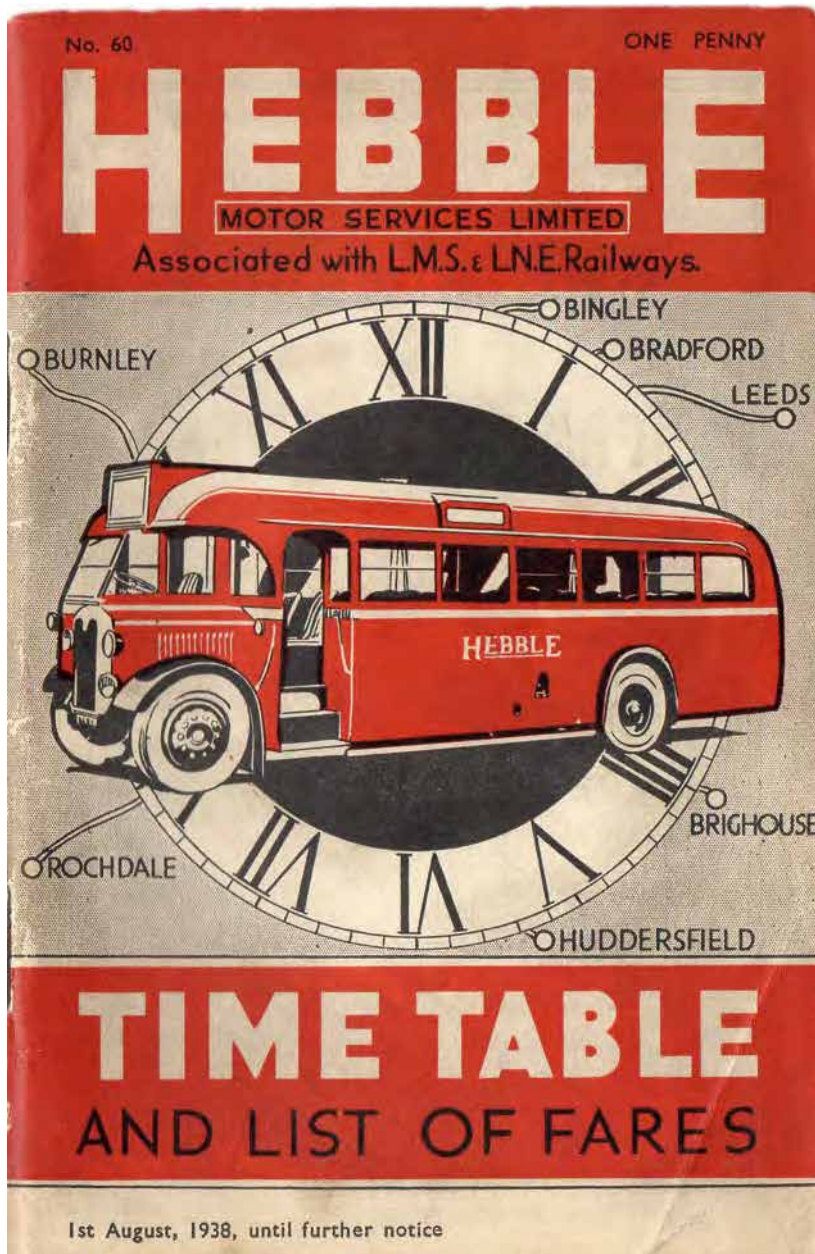
The rail journey took 35 hours (with no overnight hotel stop); the bus journey took eleven days, with ten overnight stops, with the bus travel costing (to the best of my ability to estimate it at the time, not having fares for all the bus companies, £2.5.1). This is followed by a sample of one of the letters from bus companies.

University or Army? – 1945/6

Mrs Mann was one of those women such as my Aunt Edna who played a role in rescuing me from the dreadful situation my mother and I found ourselves in after the death of my father. She became legally my guardian. I saw her only for about two to three hours on three occasions a year. At each half-term break from St Christopher School, I caught a train from Letchworth to Kings Cross, then a 73 bus to Oxford Circus, followed by a trot down Regent Street to the ABC café where I met her. (The Aerated Bread Company [ABC], with about 250 teashops in the London area, was a rival to the more nationally familiar Lyons chain. Colloquially, Londoners usually referred to the Areated Bread Company.)

At the spring half-term in 1945, Mrs Mann had warned me that my boarding school fees had gone up to £64 per term; the money was running out. But, at that stage, she was still urging me, rightly, to do well in my Higher School Certificate exams and get into Cambridge University. I had not yet taken the Higher exams, but had done well in my School Certificate in 1943, gained Matriculation exemption, brushed up my Grammar School Latin and had actually secured the offer of a place at St John's College, Cambridge.

At the summer half-term, in May or early June 1945, in the ABC café as usual, Mrs Mann wasted no time on chit-chat. She said to me in about seven sentences: "The war is now over. [It was over with Germany, but not with Japan]. We are in the period of post-war reconstruction. You are an orphan and you have no family to worry about what happens to you. [My mother was still alive, but in a Home for Incurables; my cousin Lily, some other cousins and



Front cover of 1938 Hebble timetable book

happen. Then a figure in mediaeval costume began to descend the stairs, holding a dagger before her. It was Rosie Marshall, now 13. She recited Lady Macbeth's soliloquy as she came down. I neither know, nor care a tuppenny damn, whether she perhaps got some words wrong. It was an utter triumph for Dunnow Hall, that cheeky, rebellious Rosie held the entire school breathtakingly spell-bound by her performance.

No word had leaked out about the preparation that had gone into this; but Rosie had been on the trip to Madame Butterfly. She had taken in far, far more of the atmosphere at the theatre than I had, and had, one must suppose, told Miss Williamson on the bus back, how thrilled she had been. And Miss Williamson and Dr Fitch had seen their chance.

Blackpool 1942

I do hope that you will love a trip to Blackpool. But before we go, we have to explain why it virtually had to be Blackpool and not, for example, Scarborough or Bridlington. The government in London feared invasion, or even spies transmitting messages to German U-boats lurking off our eastern and southern coasts. And there were complications about what to do with any alien living there. One was allowed to be prejudiced in those days, and all the more so in wartime; so all foreigners were suspect. By the early summer of 1940, several Defence Areas had been proclaimed under Regulation 16(a) of the Defence Regulations and – though I have not checked the detail of this – further areas seem subsequently to have been proclaimed.

Initially at least, these caused problems. In a parliamentary debate on 10 July 1940, the Home Secretary was asked many questions. Replies included the following:

In the case of the original Defence Areas, that is, Eastern and South-Eastern, with the exception of West Sussex and part of East Sussex, lists of [railway] stations

within the Defence Area are displayed at all stations, and the booking clerks draw the attention of intending travellers to the list. It is intended that in the other areas a parallel practice shall be adopted.

There is no permit system for entry into ... Defence Areas. Visits for purposes of pleasure, recreation or holidays are not permitted, but visits for business purposes, to see sick or aged relatives or evacuated children are not interfered with. ... Although in the initial stages some misunderstandings occurred, the intention of the Defence Areas Orders is now generally appreciated

Parents are not encouraged to visit evacuated children, but are permitted to do so.

At the close, two MPs got in rather pertinent final remarks:

Mr DE ROTHSCHILD: Is it the intention of the government to leave evacuated children in these dangerous areas any longer?

Mr DE LA BÈRE: Is it not clear that there is a good deal of unfinished thought on this matter?

By 1942, no doubts remained. If you lived in the West Riding, you really only had two practical choices for a holiday destination (if you were lucky enough to be able to have a holiday at all) – Blackpool or Morecambe.

School term at my new school that autumn, St Christopher, must have begun about Tuesday 8 September. This means that Lily and Walter got married on Saturday 29 August, because they took me to Blackpool on their honeymoon. (Lily was a slightly unconventional person.)

We took the bus down to Halifax, to the terminus in Albion Street, then struggled with suitcases down to the railway station to catch a train to Manchester Victoria. (In peacetime, one would have taken a motor coach direct to Blackpool; there were dozens of them. In wartime, such provision for leisure travel was forbid-

den.) At Manchester, the London, Midland and Scottish Railway was having problems providing enough trains; a significant part of Manchester's populace was trying to get to Blackpool. The motor coach services from Manchester were likewise suspended "for the duration" (of the war). The strain at times was beginning to tell; the war was seeming endless; we had had three years of it, and we were still two months short of the second battle of El Alamein (in Egypt, against Rommel's Afrika Corps), which is regarded as the turning point of the war, and nearly two years short of D-Day.

Eventually, the newly-weds and myself were crammed into a non-corridor train and we made the trip from Manchester to Blackpool. 'Non-corridor' means a coach made up of a series of separate compartments with 12 seats in each. No access to a lavatory, no scope for a ticket collector – or anybody else – to come down the train. You simply stayed wedged in that compartment from Manchester to Bolton, Chorley, Preston, Kirkham, Lytham, St Annes, Blackpool South and finally, I think, the long-closed, though convenient, Blackpool Central station. (Closed November 1964, under the 'Beeching' cuts.) And the first thing that you had to do on arrival was to queue for a Train Regulation ticket to secure a place on a specified train back to Manchester on the following Saturday. Only after that, could Lily and Walter begin to celebrate their wedding day by getting out into Blackpool itself.

Lily had booked a bed and breakfast with a landlady of that tough breed who ruled that her clients should be out of the house by 9, and not to return until after 5. It was not the landlady who had the privilege of having you as customers; it was you who had the privilege of staying at her B & B; and you knew that from minute one.

In Blackpool, sometimes Lily, Walter and I would go out together – for example on the tram to Fleetwood – but for a lot of the week, I was free to wander as I wished; but with not very much pocket money. Lily showed me the outside of Yates's Wine Lodge, which she and Walter liked to drop into; but I was too young to be allowed into such an establishment, under the strict licensing laws of those days. We walked for miles on the promenade, from Gynn Square to South Shore, and went on the various piers, thronged

with people, including a good many from Scotland. There were no Blackpool lights, of course. Every evening the blackout prevailed.

Some people scorn Blackpool; but from that very first visit, I have always found, repeatedly, that it has strange fascinations. It needs to be approached in the spirit of the poem “The Lion and Albert”, as rendered by Stanley Holloway:

There's a famous seaside place called Blackpool,
That's noted for fresh air and fun,
And Mr and Mrs Ramsbottom
Went there with young Albert, their son
A grand little lad was young Albert,
All dressed in his best; quite a swell.
With a stick with an 'orse's 'ead 'andle,
The finest that Woolworth's could sell.

AT SCHOOL IN LETCH- WORTH

*One dark evening, she
scratched on my hut door.
She could not call out;
she might have been heard.
The door could not be opened in
the blackout until I had switched
off my light and the electric fire.
Then I could admit her.*

Parisian holiday – July 1947

When my 10-day leave in July 1947 came round, my school friend, Mike Drazin, suggested that we go to Paris for a week. Neither of us, of course, had ever had any opportunity of going abroad before. It was Mike's initiative, and he arranged it all. We made the journey by train and the Newhaven – Dieppe ferry.

By 1947, one had huge numbers of British soldiers in the British Army of the Rhine, as well as some civilians with the Control Commission in Germany, but they were accommodated in army camps or in British-controlled enclaves. The numbers of purely

Open-platform Paris buses

One of the greatest joys of Paris in 1947 was that the buses were virtually all old ones with an open platform at the rear on which passengers could travel. Hardly any new fully enclosed buses had been introduced, but they did progressively take the place of the older buses over the next decade or so. The rear open platform was a venerable feature of travel in Paris. Neither of the two pictures – one adjacent, one at the beginning of the Chapter – illustrates the entire bus, but between them they capture the atmosphere.

The letters CMP on an adjacent sign in one of the pictures could be misleading in respect of the picture's date. Under the German occupation, the Vichy government of France transferred all the Paris buses into the control of the Chemin de Fer Métropolitain de Paris (CMP), primarily because fuel shortage had heavily reduced the number of buses that could be put into service throughout the war, leaving the Métro as the principal public transport service.

This control continued after the war until the setting up of the Régie Autonome des Transports Parisiens (RATP), which took over both the Métro and the buses from 1 January 1949. My 1947 visit to Paris was in CMP days; both pictures are from RATP years. To the passenger, the distinction would pass unnoticed.

tourist visitors from Britain to the Continent were still small, so we were more novel to the Parisians than tourists are nowadays, and Parisians were utterly fascinating novelties to us. Everything about France introduced us to sights and customs new to us. Bear in mind that we did not have television and that our films were practically all English or American. Nobody we knew had been to France and could tell us, warn us or encourage us regarding what we might expect – except we knew that English banknotes were like gold-dust and that exchange control regulations were extremely severe.

Every vista from the train window was exciting – the steam locomotives at Batignolles as we came into Paris, the strings of wash-



Paris bus

On this bus, at the service 92 stop at l'Étoile in 1950, the COMPLET sign has already been dropped (just below the indicator blind), but the chain has not yet gone across and the orderly queue of elegantly dressed passengers still presses forward.

ing hung out and the street furniture were different to England. We suddenly had to talk in French and, far more difficult, understand what Parisians were saying to us. Only the sellers of dirty postcards at the principal tourist attractions seemed proficient at English, as well as, without fail, knowing us to be English.

Mike had booked us in to a small hotel near the Gare de Lyon. We took a No. 20 bus straight there from Gare St Lazare, giving the bus conductor an opportunity to amuse the passengers by cringing back in terror when one of us said “Gard du Lion!, s’il vous plait” – an unfailingly standard turn by conductors on the No. 20s which, as the week progressed, we saw repeated more than once and were able laugh at, along with the French passengers.

Happily, we found the fares cheap – at least in terms of the exchange rate we were receiving for sterling; I am not sure that Parisians considered them cheap. Let it suffice to say that we did some conventional things, like going to Versailles; but we ate very frugally – oeuf au plat miroir unfailingly each evening – and both of us delighted more in absorbing atmosphere than in paying homage to tourist attractions. Both of us were fascinated by the bookstalls by the Seine, though we had little money to spend. Mike and I did not do everything together; he might go to a park and read, while I walked from the hotel to the Bastille and spent fascinated hours studying and absorbing the various outer suburban independent bus services that terminated at cafés in the vicinity, and picking up some tickets from the pavements.

A point to stress in relation to the 1940s is that, in 1947, French recovery was behind what we had achieved in England, except perhaps in terms of food. Thankfully, for example, there was no bread rationing in France, though I quite early learned not to walk along with a loaf tucked under my arm. Someone would come up behind me, quickly twist off the protruding end of the loaf and saunter off eating it, to the amusement of other passers-by. Can modern holidays, involving air travel and package tours, or even ‘gap year’ sojourns in Thailand or Australia, compare with the enormous, yet simple excitement and novelty that Mike and I experienced in France? (I hope that some of them can.)



Blackout, Austerity and Pride

Life in the 1940s

is a memoir, written primarily from actual experience. It tells how an alert and intelligent boy, effectively orphaned at the age of 13, sets out to gain a foothold in life. Aided by some resourceful women, he unites a thirst for knowledge with a growing passion for places and buses and a strong sense of duty.

The autobiographical elements are deftly woven into a more general background narrative of wartime and post-war life. The work gives valuable and thoughtful insights into a wide range of topics, including, evacuation, life in the blackout and popular songs, the universal use of bus services, the absolute overall authority of government, yet a strong presence of municipal pride. It embraces

some long-lived consequences of the Great War, in the form of cripples, spinsters and unemployment, as a background to his childhood; then in his teens, service in the army, GIs in Britain, ammunition dump clearance, all-in wrestling, courtship and attitudes to sex as well as the thrill of holidays in France when the Continent had been for years unknown save as a battlefield.

The narrative takes the reader to many parts of Britain: Yorkshire, Lancashire, Norwich, Aldershot, Edinburgh, Doune and Aberdeen, Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Letchworth and post-war London. Finally it introduces the impressive functioning of a government department using methods that now seem antediluvian.



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