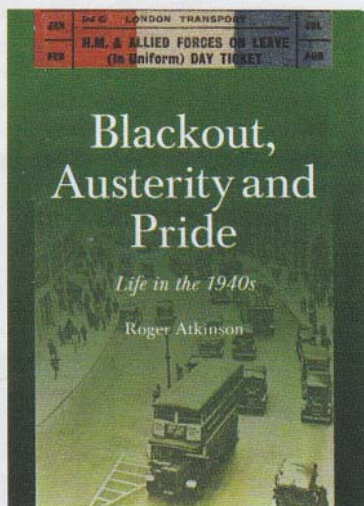


BOOK REVIEWS

Blackout, Austerity and Pride: Life in the 1940s

By Roger Atkinson, published by Roger Atkinson Publishing, 45 Dee Banks, Chester CH3 5UU [ISBN 978-0-9933007-0-7] - price £22.50 post free in UK; order either by cheque payable to Roger Atkinson, at 45 Dee Banks, Chester CH3 5UU or visiting website www.memoir1940s.org.UK on which there is a payment by card Buy Now facility.

One is struck by the book's appearance: a hardback of generous proportions with an attractive dust jacket featuring a LTPB LT class vehicle (this reviewer's favourite bus) surmounted by a forces' day ticket. Some might err in supposing it to be a bus enthusiast's publication. The expansive and lavishly illustrated text offers much more - an authoritative social history personally witnessed. The text



is rooted in precise recollection, checked by painstaking research. A childhood far free from trauma, but escaping the bloodshed of war, he writes with affection for those who were significant influences.

Instead of a boring narrative following a strict chronology, the reader is taken hither and thither as events trigger observations relating to the future and past. The device of including 'text boxes' offering mini essays on related topics works effectively: more accessible than footnotes or end notes.

Much transport literature pays scant attention to its wider social relevance. What the author does is to encourage the reader to look at transport and to examine the means used in their historical context. It was an age, for example, when most would use public transport, take for granted the related routines, and where the young would be expected to make their way unescorted. Therein, in part, the product of austerity, bus, tram and trolleybus provided efficient transport with a democratic stamp.

The narrative awards a key role to a Mrs Mann. This powerful Dickensian character enters

the author's life at a critical moment. On the cusp of being sent to an orphanage, she takes charge, successfully demanding of a solicitor that he travels immediately to London and make application to a judge in chambers that our author be made a ward of court. That task executed, Mrs Mann systematically at key moments kindly interviews her ward, over tea and cake, giving him unambiguous direction.

The period for the author was one of regular movement through the country yielding a comprehensive knowledge of place and transport. Education and social encounter were not serious challenges and he seems to have blossomed everywhere, be it boarding school, the army, or early employment in the Inland Revenue.

It seems cavil to offer criticism but it is noted that there are occasional repetitions. An index and possibly a bibliography might have been included. This reviewer would have relished an essay on the Garden City concept and transport, a study possibly inadequately examined by historians, and of which the author could surely write with authority.

REVIEW BY ROBERT McLOY