

A Conductor's Chronicle

Part 2 of 4

THE DAILY ROUTINE

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Southend, Essex Depot
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PART 2: THE DAILY ROUTINE

Having found my legs and learned the "basics" of what it meant to be a Conductor, as I described in Part 1, I found myself quickly falling into the daily routine of my new found life in the depot. Despite the variation of shifts each day and each week, there was a relaxed cadence to the work which became both pleasant and comfortably familiar. There were also plenty of opportunities for overtime, which I eagerly took on most occasions. However, no matter what

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any particular day's work was, at some point it became almost inevitably centred on the canteen!

“Weak and Sweet!”

That cry is forever burned in my memory! A procession of drivers and conductors would push open the swing doors to the canteen and call for a weak tea with two sugars. Often it was directed at no one in particular, sometimes the canteen staff would respond, sometimes it would be a fellow driver or conductor in the queue. It still amazes me the amount of sugar we all consumed! On a good day, with overtime, I could have as many as 8-9 cups of tea, each with two sugars! In fact, it got to be so much that I started to drink tea without the sugar after a while, and still do to this day!

Since, everyone worked different duties every day, it was easy to meet up and chat or eat with pretty much anyone and everyone every couple of days or so. This was especially true if you were working overtime shifts as well, which were plentiful at the time. For me it was a good way to earn that extra money for college, so I frequently took the opportunity when it was available.

There was almost always a running card game going in one corner or the other. It was called Kalooki and was a variant of Rummy. People were constantly joining and leaving, including my 'mate' Bill, and it seemed that some amount of money was changing hands too! Fred, my training conductor, was another one of the regulars at the card table, as was his Mum.

A Family Affair

While Bill was off playing cards, I would spend my time with others I had met, and worked with. There were several younger lads, conductors mostly, who hung around together in the canteen: Johnny Corder, Dave Molyneux, Steve Pettit, Johnny Allen as well as some of their younger drivers too: Tim Hutchins (I recall that his conductor was another Steve), Alan (Clark - I think, although I could be getting that confused with the lead singer of the Hollies or an Inside Right at Leeds United!), Ray Allen, Phil Brochen and several more. Although there was an obvious trend: many of the conductors were becoming drivers, and rapidly changing to (the then so called, and now politically incorrect) One Man Operation (OMO) duties, but many of them would still 'crew' for overtime.

It was also a family place, literally as well as figuratively. I have already mentioned Fred and his Mum, often playing cards together. Eric was now crewing with his wife, Rene, who I trained with. Their daughter, Denise, was dating Johnny Corder at the time. There were the Embersons: Jack and his wife were a crew; and their son, Dave, was a 400 driver.

Additionally, and one of my favourites, was Joyce, who was certainly like a 'mother' to all of us "young 'uns' ". Joyce was instantly recognisable. She was tall, thin, and dark-haired, and she wore white gloves to keep her hands clean from handling the money. She explained lots of the

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other 'operational' rules I needed to know, which weren't covered in my training, namely: Twirlies, Lurkers, Scratchers (more on these later) and more besides.

Although the canteen was many things to many people, it was mostly a noisy place. But every now and then even that was shattered by a booming "Winter's 'ere!" as either George or Bill (Winters), two of the OMO drivers (not related) entered, followed by the inevitable call: "weak and sweet!" However it was also a place where you could find peace and respite if you needed, when necessary.

He...

Unless, of course 'he' joined you! 'He' had been to Australia. I assume 'he' went out on the 'passage' in the late Fifties/early Sixties, when for around 20-quid the Aussie government would welcome you with open arms to go and live in Wogga-Wogga, or somewhere else equally forsaken. I had the pleasure of visiting there myself many years later on business (not Wogga-Wogga!, but Sydney and Melbourne) and can easily understand the attraction. I can also easily imagine why many Brits became homesick and turned into "Whinging Poms," reciting a laundry list of things that were wrong, missing, different, bad or whatever about Australia, much to the chagrin of the locals.

'He' had clearly come back! Too many things must have been wrong, missing, different, bad or whatever. However, since doing so, 'he' had now become the opposite: a reformed Whinging Pom! 'He' could now recite a laundry list of things that were right, present, better, good or whatever about Australia, much to the chagrin of the listener: who was, on more than one occasion, me! Sometimes you wondered why the heck 'he' came back, although it was entertaining to watch him engage someone else in this conversation, especially since you were NOT the target!

And then there was Trevor! Trevor was a very flamboyant, extroverted character with mostly dyed (I always assumed) sandy-blond hair. I remember picking him up on more than one occasion at the Prittlewell Bell. As was fairly customary, when the conductor was working away from the platform, he boarded last and gave the signal to go. Seeing me at the far end of the lower deck, full of shoppers on their way into Southend around 10:00 AM or so, he'd bellow some outrageous comment or question to me. Of course I had no choice but to respond with an equally outrageous reply! Then, as we slowed down to an almost stop at the Vic Circus roundabout, he would pop the emergency button to open the doors, and say something loud and outrageous again and disappear off the platform. That, was Trevor!

Although he was ostensibly employed as a conductor, he worked much of the time in the canteen, pouring the inevitable weak and sweet teas, which, by the way, were otherwise as strong and sour as creosote! The canteen fare was very simple and predictable: meat, potatoes and two (cooked to death) veg, fried bacon, eggs, chips, baked beans, bacon or sausage sandwiches and so on. However it did seem to taste that little bit better when Trevor was doing the cooking!

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Learning the Ropes

Between riding along with Bill, and listening to Joyce, I quickly learned the ropes, and all the unofficial stuff not covered by my formal training. The first time we did a late, weekend Wood Green, arriving after the EN canteen had closed, Bill jumped out of the cab and signaled me to follow him:

"Where we going?" "You'll see!"

We wandered across to the L.T. Bus Garage and ate there. Bill even received a few nods of acknowledgment, so I surmised he had been doing this for years. One Sunday evening, we walked into the Underground station: Bill pushed open a gate, to the faintest nod of approval from an otherwise completely disinterested ticket collector, and descended down a short stairway into their canteen instead.

Bill also always used to remind when we were doing late night runs that I should bag up as much money as I could and leave it in the cab with him, instead of in my box in the cubby. It was actually a pretty common, and common-sense security practice, although I can personally never ever recall feeling like it was good idea that I had done so. Even so, I did as he suggested.

During my training I had learned that it was the conductor's responsibility to keep time. However, Bill would have none of that! He was driving so he set the pace. He would also try to predict the road conditions ahead, based on many, many years of experience. So we would wait a few extra minutes at Gants Hill, Romford, Brentwood, Wickford, Rayleigh Station, Eastwood Rise, Tarpots, or wherever. Given that we never got written up for running early or arrived anywhere outrageously late, I can only say that he was pretty good judge of things!

Scratchers.....

One thing that both Bill and Joyce were passionate about were *Scratchers*: those crews who would follow you along a stretch of road and let you do all the work; stopping behind you; never passing. It was always entertaining, for me at any rate, to hear someone vehemently complaining about being scratched down the London Road by some "Hadleigh #\$\$%^@ (you fill in the blank with your own imagination), or "those %^@#\$\$@#* Canvey %^%#@#\$%^&&*" and so forth. People would get so passionate about it!

It seemed very "common" along the London Road, where there were several different depots interworking the (mostly crew-operated) routes (Basildon (BN), Canvey (CY), Hadleigh (HH), SD, as well as the Corporation too), which could become quite congested at times. A sixth form buddy of mine, Les, who was doing the same thing I was, based at Hadleigh, would claim that Southend were worse scratchers than Hadleigh were. However, we could both agree on one thing: Canvey and Basildon were worse than either of us; and the worst of all were the Corporation! (Although, with due respect to our friends at Southend Corporation Transport

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(SCT), I have to say that I was never scratched by them at all!) I daresay that the SCT crews complained just as vociferously about the ENOC crews in their canteen!

Indeed, I can only ever remember really being scratched once, and I would hardly have noticed except for first the grumbling, then the shouting, followed by the indignant cursing, and finally, the raging epithets emanating from the cab. I was working a Canvey on overtime and it started just after we reached the top of Bread and Cheese Hill (Thundersley) and by the time we got the Elms Hotel (Leigh) I'm was stunned that driver could even see to drive: the air was so thick and blue in the cab!

Interestingly, I don't recall anybody really complaining of being scratched along the Eastwood Road routes to Rayleigh. I attribute that to several factors: less congestion, more OMO operation (11's, 19's from Chelmsford (CF), and Maldon (MN), Colchester (CR) and Clacton (CN) respectively), and less interworking on crew routes (mainly SD, with only a few Brentwood (BD) and Wood Green (WG) on 251's and, for only a short distances, HH and the Corporation) (*See Appendix – Summary of Routes*). I would occasionally see Les and his mate working 23A's, which would always perk up the trip a little, although to my knowledge we never scratched each other along the Eastwood Road, or down the London Road for that matter! I honestly think it was both more of a throwback to earlier times, when it may have been a bigger issue, and more perception than reality, and I really didn't mind the extra work myself anyway.

....Lurkers...

Frenzied signals were relayed from cab to cab; and from driver to conductor: Watch out, there's a *Lurker* about! Waiting on the blind side of a shelter, stepped back and obscured by a roadside hedge: an Inspector was on the prowl! They were also referred to as *Jumpers* and it was a tense moment, as he boarded: Were we on time? Were the blinds set meticulously? Had all the fares been taken? Were they correct? Was it a local man, a Chelmsford Chap or Basildon Bloke? It seemed to me that there were episodes when inspections were frequent, followed by long quiet periods in-between. It always caused a flurry of conversation in the canteen however when they occurred:

"I picked him up at the Carpenters and dropped him at Rayleigh Station"

"Yeah, I got him in Webster's Way"

"We got him on Progress Road going back the other way...."

I was only ever written up once; on a 6 out of Newington Ave. A young mother had boarded with both a baby in a pram, which I stowed under the stairs, and a toddler. Both children were under the age where they could ride free, so I took the mother's fare and thought no more of it. Eric, one of our local lurkers, must have boarded at the White Horse on Southchurch Rd. By the time I got back downstairs he had checked the lower saloon and was working his way upstairs. He met me back on the platform.

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"Not bad, but you missed a fare – only one child can ride free," he said as he smiled and handed me the write up. Eric was a kind and jovial man, and always treated me well, whenever he boarded. "Good job young 'un" he called out as he got off at Sutton Road.

Others weren't so fortunate. I recall walking into a very sombre canteen late in the morning one day to learn that, apparently, someone had been dismissed for "irregularities." Whilst several people were trying to ascertain all the details, others were consoling close friends and so on. We only had a short break, so I told Bill I'd meet him at SCB to pick up our next duty. I wandered down the High Street to get some fish and chips instead of staying in the canteen that day.

There were never too many Lurkers about very early in the morning or last thing at night. They obviously needed time to work their way out from, or back to, base. Whenever I worked the last Hullbridge (which always left me with the issue getting home, since that's where I lived!) several of the local lads and lassies would board at Rayleigh High St after an evening at the one of the Pubs: the Crown, the Half Moon, the Spread Eagle, the Paul Pry, or several of them! I was always pretty slow at getting the fares after letting people board at the High St, Rayleigh Station and sometimes the next stop at the NSS Newsagents. I would start working again after we turned into Downhall Road, knowing I could clear all the fares before reaching Rawreth Lane. By this time the local lads and lassies would have spread themselves around upstairs, taking up the last couple of rows if they were empty, and would be enjoying a smoke. Sometimes I wouldn't bother them for a fare, although they were always willing to pay: they were always grateful on those occasions.

Once in a while I'd let an old school buddy or two slide by, but on the two times I picked up my Mum going to Rayleigh and from Southend, she was absolutely insistent that I collected her fare. "I'd have to pay if it wasn't you" she said. So I issued her a ticket and left her the money on the counter at home instead!

....and Twirlies

Every weekday morning at around 8:55 AM, marauding packs of *Twirlies* would gather at bus stops waiting to pounce on the first bus that came along. As the doors jack-knifed open they would simultaneously blind you with the light reflecting off their plastic covered passes and verbally assault you with:

"Am I/Are we/Is it TOO EARLY?"

They were trying to steal a lead on the day and use the half price fare card issued to pensioners for use after 9:00 AM. Most often I would let them on, especially if it was cold or raining, unless we were really full or extra busy: they were only going to pay half price on the bus behind anyway.

The ones that used to annoy me were more subtle: they would just get on and wait until you asked for fares, often waiting until after 9:00 to offer you the money! Apparently, it didn't

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matter to them that they had boarded before 9:00: "Well it's gone past nine now hasn't it dear?" they would offer by way of explanation. Most of the time it was not worth the argument, but every now and then I'd insist that they would have to pay the full fare, particularly if they had boarded at a stop where the time-tabled departure was clearly before 9:00 AM.

What seemed to confuse them, and, indeed, most passengers for that matter, was how quickly you would learn who had got on where, how much they had paid and where they should get off. I'd say that even on a 'three bell-er (no room left)' I was able to get that right for over 80% of the load. Not bad for a load of 70 seated plus more standing!

Fares please?

The other very surprising item was how quickly the fare structure became ingrained into your head! I always carried my fare table book with me, but rarely used after the first few weeks, unless someone was asking for an "odd" journey: Canvey Newlands to Thorpe Bay; Tottenham Hale to Shotgate, or whatever! There seemed to be four types of passengers when it came to collecting fares:

Those that would simply give you an amount of money, correct or needing change: "22p";

Others who said where they were going, and would have the either the correct money, or need change: "Kent Elms";

Some who would say where they wanted to go to and have to be told what the fare was, despite the fact that you suspected (or knew, because they had done the same a week or two before!), they knew what it was: "Vic Circus" "That'll be 12p!"; and

Those you had to ask: "where to luv?"

When it was busy, during rush hours, the former were the most preferable, which was normally the case for the commuters going to the stations! Of course, if they were all piling off at a particular stop and hadn't paid, it was amazing to see how many of them had the correct change and just handed it over! The rest of the time, though, it didn't much matter to me how they asked.

Time for a change

After a few months Bill and I found less to talk about, and it was becoming more frequent for him to cover at the Board as well. I welcomed the breaks. Also, with some newer drivers completing training too, the inevitable happened: Bill and I went our separate ways and I teamed up with my new 'mate', Johnny Corder.

Johnny was a good driver and he learned his craft well. As a conductor he had experienced riding behind the good and the not so good drivers, and that carried forward into his driving as well. We complemented each other more in terms of age and other interests and therefore had

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plenty to talk about. He knew that we would not be together for a substantial period of time. Even if I hadn't gone onto college as planned, the inevitable march of OMO would have ended the partnership. But for several good months we operated as a real, well blended crew.

For example, if I was working "up-top" two distinct foot stomps above the cab, or on the blind housing were given as the signal to go. Alternatively, two short raps with a coin on the bulkhead glass "inside" were sufficient. Like me, Johnny was also ambivalent to scratchers and the like.

We both liked the steady cadence of a Wood Green although, for a time, there were plenty of road works to contend with around Woodford. I also would try and give Johnny the 'all clear' along the Eastern Avenue section between Newbury Park, through Barley Lane and the Moby Dick roundabout and onto Mawney's roundabout in Romford, so he could wind it up a little! However, it seems to me, even now, that we had our clearer runs coming back from 'the Smoke', rather than going up. This may have had something to do with the way the SD duties were distributed throughout the day. Conversely, neither of us really liked going to Grays. There were too many turns on and off the A13: into Basildon, Corringham/Stanford-le-Hope and Orsett. It just didn't seem to flow very well.

There was also some unfamiliar territory to cover as well, where Johnny's experience as a conductor came in handy: The open top Seafront 67's now covered a lot of roads no longer traveled by crews anymore, as these had largely been turned over to OMO duties; and there was a schools relief 7 (and a 3) to Shoebury. There were two or three duties with 'long' 29's to Belgrave Rd, and we also had an occasional morning rush hour run into Basildon (14). However, I'm not sure Johnny was so familiar with where he was going once we got into the industrial estates there either. But we managed to survive, and enjoyed the dead head back to SD. Curiously I never remember a returning evening 14 duty, but I guess that must have been a BN duty, or maybe we just left the passengers there!

There was also a 22C to Runwell Hospital on a Sunday, which I only worked on once. My brother assures me that after that journey I recounted a story of a lady upstairs, sitting in the front bench seat of FLF Lodekka, with an open suitcase, underwear scattered around the seat and the destination blinds housing, changing her bra! I can't recall that at all, which means I have either totally blocked it out of my mind (most wise) or it was reminiscence from someone else that the trip reminded me of. Regardless, if it didn't happen to me, I'd still put money on the fact that it did happen to someone!!

However, as a mark of the operating difficulties and declining ridership, by the time I had returned for my third and final summer in 1976, all these "odd" runs had mostly gone. The two exceptions were one of the long 29's and, of course, the seasonal Seafronts.

So first with Bill, and then with Johnny, I had easily settled in to the daily routine of early and late shifts, with or without overtime. Pretty much every week we were scheduled for at least

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one Wood Green and one Grays, intermingled with the staple *fare* (pun intended!) of Hullbridge's, including the Lower Hockley/Dome and Rawreth Lane variants, Canvey's, 6's, 25's, 29's and Sutton Cemetery's. But no two journeys were alike and, as I explain in Part 3, some were just downright bizarre!

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Appendix – Summary of Routes

	2	Southend Central Bus Stn -Victoria Circus -Westcliff -Leigh -Hadleigh -Thundersley - Benfleet (Tarpots) -Pitsea -Basildon -Corringham -Stanford-le-Hope -Orsett -Grays
	3	Shoeburyness East Beach – Thorpe Bay – Bournes Green – Southchurch Road – Southend Victoria Circus – Westcliff – Leigh - Hadleigh – Thundersley - Benfleet(Tarpots) – South Benfleet Stn – Canvey Leigh Beck
(PM School Relief)	3	Southend Victoria Circus – Southchurch Rd - Bournes Green - Thorpe Bay - Shoeburyness East Beach
	5	Shoeburyness Blackgate Rd - Thorpe Bay – Bournes Green – Southchurch Road – Southend Victoria Circus – Westcliff – Leigh - Hadleigh – Thundersley - North Thundersley Benfleet(Tarpots) – South Benfleet Stn – Canvey Newlands - Leigh Beck
	6	Newington Ave - Hamstel Rd – Southchurch Rd – Southend Victoria Circus – Central Bus Station – Westcliff Station – Prittlewell Chase/General Hospital. – Bridgewater Drive - Kent Elms Corner
	6A	Newington Ave - Hamstel Rd – Southchurch Rd – Southend Victoria Circus – Central Bus Station – Westcliff Station – Carlton Ave – Arterial Road - Kent Elms Corner
	7	Southend Central Bus Station – Pier Hill – Kursaal – Eastern Esplanade – Maplin Way – Shoebury – Eagle Way/Constable Way
(PM School Relief)	11	<i>Southend – Prittlewell - Eastwood – Rayleigh – Battlesbridge – East Hanningfield – Great Baddow – Chelmsford</i>
	14	Southend Central Bus Station – Prittlewell – Kent Elms – Arterial Road – Rayleigh Weir – Basildon Industrial Estate
(Weekday AM)	19	<i>Southend – Eastwood – Rayleigh – Battlesbridge – Maldon – Colchester – Clacton</i>
	22	Shoebury Cambridge Hotel – Thorpe Bay – Woodgrange Drive – Southend Central Bus Station – Victoria Circus – Prittlewell – Eastwood – Rayleigh – Hullbridge Anchor
	22A	Southchurch Lifstan's Way – Woodgrange Drive – Southend Central Bus Station – Victoria Circus – Prittlewell – Arterial Road - Eastwood – Grove Road - Rayleigh – Hullbridge – Lower Hockley Church Road - Dome Caravan Site
	22B	Southchurch Lifstan's Way – Woodgrange Drive – Southend Central Bus Station – Victoria Circus – Prittlewell – Arterial Road - Eastwood – Grove Road - Rayleigh – Rawreth Lane
	22C	Southend Central Bus Station – Victoria Circus – Prittlewell – Arterial Road - Eastwood – Grove Road - Rayleigh – Rawreth Lane – Rettendon – Runwell Hospital
(Sunday Only)	23A	<i>Leigh Station – Leigh – Elmsleigh Drive – Kent Elms – Eastwood Rise</i>
	25	Leigh Church – Chalkwell Park – Westcliff – Southend Victoria Circus (Deeping)
(Short)	25A	Leigh Church – Chalkwell Park – Westcliff – Southend Victoria Circus – Central Bus Station
	27	Southend Central Bus Station - Victoria Circus – Westcliff – Leigh - Hadleigh – Thundersley – Benfleet (Kenneth Road) – South Benfleet Stn – Canvey Winter Gardens – Eastern Esplanade
	29	Southend Central Bus Station – Prittlewell – Fairfax Drive – Blenheim Chase/Mountdale Gdns -Woodcutters Arms – Eastwood Belgrave Rd
(Weekday Evng.)	29A	Southend Central Bus Station – Prittlewell – Fairfax Drive – Chalkwell Park Schools
	61	Southend Central Bus Station – Victoria Circus – Southchurch Rd – Bournemouth Park Rd – Sutton Cemetery
	61A	Southend Central Bus Station – Victoria Circus – Southchurch Rd – Bournemouth Park Rd – Prittlewell Ecco Works
(Weekday AM/PM)	67	Eastwood Kent Elms Corner – Elmsleigh Drive- Leigh – Chalkwell – Sea Front - Pier – Kursaal – Lifstan's Way – Southchurch White Horse – Temple Sutton Cluny Square
	151	<i>Canvey – Benfleet – Pitsea – Basildon – Billericay – Shenfield – Brentwood – Gidea Park – Romford – Ilford – Woodford – Walthamstow – Tottenham – Turnpike Lane – Wood Green</i>
(Shared CY, BN, BD, WG duty)	251	Southend – Eastwood – Rayleigh – Wickford – Billericay – Shenfield – Brentwood – Gidea Park – Romford – Ilford – Woodford – Walthamstow – Tottenham – Turnpike Lane – Wood Green
(Shared SD, BD, WG duty)	400 (OMO Limited Stop)	<i>Southend – Westcliff – Leigh - Hadleigh –Thundersley – Benfleet (Tarpots) – Pitsea - Basildon – Romford – Wanstead – Leyton – Dalston – Islington – London Kings Cross</i>

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Example Vehicles

KSW Open Top	http://www.sct61.org.uk/gallery/engall2a/en2383
Early LD with long grille	http://www.sct61.org.uk/gallery/engall3/en2453
Early LD with split rear "cathedral" windows	http://www.sct61.org.uk/gallery/engall3/en2467
Later LD with short grille	http://www.sct61.org.uk/gallery/engall3/en2491
Later LD with single split rear window	http://www.sct61.org.uk/gallery/engall3/en2522
FS	http://www.sct61.org.uk/gallery/engall3/en2539a
FLF with "old" short grille	http://www.sct61.org.uk/gallery/engall4/en2740a
FLF with "new look" grille	http://www.sct61.org.uk/gallery/engall4/en2820
FLF6LX Semi-Automatic	http://www.sct61.org.uk/gallery/engall5/en2919
VR	http://www.sct61.org.uk/gallery/engall6/en3028a