

An Inspector Calls - Premier Travel

Another story from Alan M Watkins

Something of the flavour of Premier Travel and of the people who ran it (The Lainson and Matthews families) is somewhere in this post.

Mr Hill was the Chief Inspector and the man on the road normally but the growth in traffic for express services, excursions required a second Inspector to be based at the tiny booking office in Drummer Street, Cambridge.

I might add that on busy summer weekends it was not unusual to find Mr Lainson taking bookings in the office with the usual enthusiasm that he always displayed.

This Inspector, who I am not going to name, was to all intents and purposes a most affable chap, very efficient at what he did, and was praised at one Christmas party for bringing in extra business. He had a great deal of authority in arranging the express work and as always with PT was left to get on with his job without interference from anyone. Like everyone else at PT he was also trusted completely.

He was entirely responsible for charting the express services, No 5 Birmingham-Clacton a serious money maker for the company in the summer months. He was also responsible for notifying the Traffic Manager of the vehicle requirements for pre booked Express Service passengers.

Unbeknown to anyone this Inspector had a triple life - he had three ladies on the go at the same time and by a clever systematic fraud (keeping most of the money from duplicate coaches as but one example) he eventually managed to extract nearly £9000 pounds out of the company. In those days, early 60s £9000 was a lot of money even if it does not have the same resonance today.

He was found out by the most simple means. A family complained about their journey to Clacton and demanded their money back. But no copy of their ticket existed. Premier Excursion/Express tickets were triplicate carbon paper issues: Top copy to the passenger, pink copy retained by the seller (agent), third copy to 15 Market Hill. As the Inspector was in charge, all "third copies" were sent on to him.

Premier Travel, not surprisingly, said they had no record of the journey being undertaken by the family. Disgruntled family then went direct to West Suffolk Constabulary who, in the days when police took a passing interest in possible criminal activity, took the matter up with the company.

West Suffolk Constabulary visited Mr Lainson who explained the situation as he knew it but also called on the Inspector who broke down and confessed to what he had been doing, something the police obviously relayed back to the company.

At his home they found thousands of second and third copies that he had issued but which had not been returned to the company. All told it was a lot of money in those days.

Of course it is very remiss, slipshod even, for the company not to have married up A and B here and there but as I say everyone was completely trusted. There were no late night "pay in" facilities and as a part-timer I frequently went home with £50 or so at the end of a weekend and was simply expected to pay it in when I next signed on which I, and countless others, did.

The Inspector was called in front of Arthur Lainson and again confessed all. He was dismissed on the spot.

Then there began an interesting series of correspondence (which I have) between a Detective Chief Superintendent and Mr Lainson. They wanted to prosecute, of course, and wanted the company to provide the evidence in court.

Premier Travel declined to do so which led to further exchanges between the police and Mr Lainson.

I will quote from his final letter to the Detective Chief Superintendent:

"The Board have voted unanimously that we do not wish the matter to be pursued further. The employee concerned has been dismissed from our service and the losses absorbed by the company. Such reparations as may be necessary to individuals have been fully met by the company as no doubt they will confirm to you.

"Our view without dissention is that (name) has been sufficiently punished by his dismissal and his inability to obtain a reference from us in any attempt he may make to seek further employment.

"On that basis we do not wish for the matter to be further progressed and reluctantly must inform you that we are not in a position to provide further information."

That looks pretty strange in 2007 I agree but that was the man. I am also proud of the fact that my personal tribute to Arthur Lainson was read out at his funeral by Margaret (or Mother as he called her).

She, in turn, called him Husband.

Different era, of course.