

Spotlight on George Case

George has been a well known member of our Society for more than 20 years and reminiscences of his working life have been published in more than one book in the past. The following is a transcript of one of the chapters of a book called 'Tales of the Old Railwaymen' by Tom Quinn. It is published by David and Charles (1998 ISBN 0715305441) and contains a large number of different stories from railway men. Indeed, George was instrumental in putting the publishers in touch with several of his inspectors who are featured in the book. It's an excellent volume, complete with illustrations and is highly recommended. George's chapter is entitled 'High Days at Holloway'.

I used to sing to Ribbentrop, Goering and Goebbels', says former signalman George Case with a grin. 'They came to Potters Bar as foreign dignitaries before the war when I was at school. They came each November for a service at St Mary's Church, Potters Bar, to pay homage to the Zeppelin crews shot down in the vicinity during the First World War!'

Surrounded by beautiful, large-scale model steam trains, George still lives in Potters Bar where he has spent most of his life. But he was born just a few miles away at Finsbury Park on the outskirts of London: 'I think we're an old Potters Bar family,' he says proudly, 'my father was born and lived all his life here.'

And railway work runs deep in the Case family. George's father was a guard for forty-five years – he started in 1917 – and his grandfather worked as a platelayer; George still has his father's NUR card for 1918. He can remember family stories of the perils of Victorian days on the railway: 'it was a rough old job being on fogging duty in those days; my grandfather had to stand there for hours on end in the freezing cold with his flags and lamps so the drivers had some idea what was going on.' Tragically he was killed in Hadley Wood Tunnel whilst on fogging duty in 1918.

It might seem that, with so long a family connection with the railway, George's career choice would have been virtually made for him, but it was actually a little more complicated than that, as he explains:

'I wanted to go in the Navy, but my dad said "No", and my mum said she didn't want me on the railways. After that I did start to get interested in trains; in fact, I was eventually so interested that I used to sneak off from school up to Holloway North Up signal cabin, one of the biggest cabins in London, to see if I could find out how the whole thing worked. I was mad keen to learn signals, but I wasn't quite fourteen then and I was supposed to be at school – though I suppose my dad was quite good about it in the end. When he found out I'd been learning semaphore he got me a semaphore instrument, and he'd sit downstairs while I sat upstairs in my bedroom, and we'd send signals back and forth. We had great fun, but I also learned a lot.'

By this time the war had started, so George decided he'd join the railways; and after the time he had spent learning semaphore at home he was now committed to a career as a signalman:

'I went down to Holloway yardmasters office. In those days you had to replace someone to get a job; in other words, if someone wanted to leave the railway, or if

they were joining the Army, you could take their place. If they couldn't find someone they couldn't leave. A mate of mine wanted to go into the Air Force so I jumped at the chance to replace him as telegraph lad, which is exactly how my dad had started. I got a reference from the vicar at Potters Bar and a school reference. As a matter of interest my mate Leslie, the chap whose job I was to take, distinguished himself by being the first RAF man to shoot down a Messerschmitt 109E, a plane that the British authorities were desperate to get a look at.'

George's father only realised that his son had left school after George had already been at work for a month – the school board man called at the house and the game was up.

'He was furious when he found out,' says George. 'He made me go back to school till I was legally allowed to leave and start work, which was on my fourteenth birthday, 14 November 1940. This meant going back for only a short time, however, and as soon as I could I went back to be a lad messenger. I started each day at 8:30am at Finsbury Park, and I had to go down to all the platelayers' cabin and signal cabins to pick up the mail for the yardmaster. I was a small boy and I had to carry a huge bag back and forth across the main lines – can you imagine being allowed to do that today! There were seven sets of lines and you just had to keep an eye out for trains. If it was foggy they'd detail someone from the shunters' yard to see you across the rails. Once I'd collected all the mail I'd taken it to the yardmaster's office and open it ready for the chief clerk who would arrive about 9:00am.'

The lad messenger was without question at the bottom on the pile, but as he dashed between various people doing different jobs George gained an insight into how all the parts of the railway worked. Apart from sorting out the post he had to look after the stores: 'I can remember taking massive blocks of soap out and cutting off huge chunks to cart to the various cabins. Then I had to deal with applications for private passes – these were reduced-fare tickets for railwaymen to travel. This was the London North Eastern (LNER) region so our forms were white.

'At 10:30am I had to make tea for the entire office staff, then I'd run messages for all and sundry. I even had to measure up the railwaymen for their uniforms – it must have been a funny sight. There I was, a little lad of fourteen or fifteen, putting the tape measure round these huge men. All the railway uniforms at that date were supplied by Lotteries of Liverpool Street.'

Inevitably, as the newest and youngest recruit, George had to put up with a lot of practical jokes. He remembers being asked to get red oil for some lamps and green oil for others, and of course he fell for it and spent long periods looking for things that didn't exist. But occasionally the jokes backfired:

'I remember in my very early days going across the tracks to the platelayers' cabin at Holloway to see Mr Hudson, also known as Soapy. When I got there he said "Casey." – they all called me Casey – "I want a privilege ticket. I want to go to Delhi". I said, "Do you mean Delhi in India?" and when he said "yes", I believed him. I just said, "On, that'll be the pink form as it's outside our region". I asked him what route he wanted to take and everything – I don't know how he kept a straight face. Anyway, I

made out the appropriate form and that afternoon the form went into the yardmaster's box.

'A short while later I heard the bell ringing violently to tell me that the guvn'r wanted me. He was a Mr Keys and I always remember how he wore a pince-nez on the end of his nose.

"Case," he said

"Yes sir," I said

"This application form from Mr Hudson."

"Yes, sir. His old aunt is sick and he wants to visit her," I said

"Think you'd better get Hudson," he said

'So I set off across the rails to the platelayers' cabin and found Hudson, who was a very big man, busy playing cards.

I said "Mr Keys wants to see you."

"What the bloody hell does he want," roared Hudson

"It's about your privilege pass to Delhi."

"You haven't filled it out, have you, you silly bugger!"

'I could hear all sorts of bellowing from Mr Key's office after Hudson went in, and he came out looking very sheepish. There were no more tricks like that afterwards.'

When George started work even a boy of fourteen was expected to do a forty-eight hour week. Each day finished at 5pm weekdays, and at noon on Saturdays, with half an hour for lunch. Occasionally George, like the other workers would finish at ten past the hour, or ten to – 'I'm buggered if I can remember why!' he says.

George worked as a messenger boy for a total of only six months; during the war years, job changing and even promotion was far easier than it had been before the war, simply because of the shortage of men. 'I got myself a new job, but in the usual way of the time I had to get a replacement for my old job before I could move on. I was lucky, because I managed to get a friend called Mo Kantor to take my place as a messenger boy. His dad was a furrier in Potters Bar and though you might have thought he'd have followed in his father's footsteps, he joined me on the railways. I taught him everything I knew in the messenger boy line, and then became a telegraph lad at Holloway, South Down Cabin.'

George's first wage packet contained just 14s 6d but 2d of that disappeared immediately into what was then called the 'Lloyd George', an early unemployment tax. Despite getting himself a new job with extra responsibilities, George had to accept that he was not going to receive any more money. The rule on the railway was that you didn't get a pay rise, whatever you were doing, until your next birthday. Thereafter at each birthday you received a further 1s rise.

'They had a terrible initiation ceremony for all new entrants,' remembers George. 'They'd grab you when you went in the platelayers' cabin, sharpen a cut-throat razor right in front of you, and make it really look like they were going to cut your privates off!' However, having survived the perils of the platelayers' cabin intact, George was subsequently amazed to discover how much responsibility a fourteen-year-old was expected to cope with:

‘You went straight into a signals cabin where you learned to fill in the train registration book. In a busy box you’d have 4 pages of booking per shift: each line of entry in the book had 10 items that had to be filled in – the time the train was offered, the time it was accepted, time passed on, time passing in the rear and so on. It worked out at 10 items per line, 40 lines per page: a total of 400 items per page, and there were 4 pages each shift!

‘That was a hell of a lot of entries for a young lad. At the Holloway signal cabin I did 6am to 2pm and 2pm to 10pm shifts. You had to be there at 6am, and if you were the least bit late they knew straight away because the bookings would not be there, and of course you couldn’t add them after the event.’

Despite the heavy workload of the registration book there were other, equally onerous duties. George had to use the telephone, tap out telegraph messages, and once a week get down on his hands and knees to scrub the signalbox floorboards till they were white. The massive metal frame the levers were held in had to be black-leaded every week, too: ‘Anyone who has ever done that will know what a filthy job it is. The black-leading used to get everywhere – on your clothes, up your nose, all over your face. But they wanted it to look smart and clean and well looked after, which it did. At Holloway there were fifty levers that had to be polished, too. Signalmen were always proud men, who wanted their cabins to be just right.’

Messages from the signalbox were sent up and down the line via the block bells – basically a brass bell in a mahogany case – and this too, had to be kept sparkingly clean. ‘Even the screw heads on all the bits of equipment were polished regularly with Brasso,’ says George with a smile ‘A good cabin was a gleaming mass of metal, at least as beautifully kept as a cab on a locomotive.’

It was accepted practice that the telegraph lad would operate the levers while the signalman had his breakfast. This was all a bit unofficial, but wasn’t difficult, says George, because the signalman was always on hand if you got stuck and it didn’t take long, anyway, to become familiar with the way the system worked.

‘Mind you, there was a knack to pulling those levers – they weren’t power-assisted or anything, so you had to put your weight behind them. Distant signals were more difficult simply because they were farther off – down below the cabin were the rods and linkages that led off up or down the track, and for a signal a good distance away you were moving a lot of metal, although counterbalancing weights were fitted to make things a little easier. Some points were particularly difficult: first you had to unlock them, then get clearance – that is, prove that nothing was on that bit of track – then you had to open the bar-point lock, a lock lever that kept the points where you wanted them. Only then could you go ahead’.

Signalboxes were almost like closed worlds with rules of their own and the signalman and his telegraph lad, if he had one, had to be self-sufficient. There was a stove for heating up tea and even meals, and there were chemical loos..

‘The poor old telegraph lad had the job of emptying those too!’ says George, ‘What a terrible job that was, although at the Holloway box I was lucky because one of the

platelayers used to do it, more often than not. But when I had to do it I had to walk across six or seven sets of track terrified I might slip and terrified I might have to move quick if a train came along and of course moving sharpish was very likely to make you drop the loo. I remember when Chitty Mason, a cattle-truck cleaner at Holloway sidings, was emptying this loo, and he tripped while crossing the tracks; of course the contents of the loo went everywhere – Dusty Day, the signalman I worked for at the time, could hardly operate the leavers he was laughing so much.’

Signalboxes were held strictly to account in the old days; if there was an accident, however minor, the telegraph lad’s entries were checked in the registration book, so everything had to be spot on. The big clock in the cabin was checked every day at 10am, and if it had to be corrected even by half a minute, a note to that effect had to be entered in the book. When a relief signalman came on he would rely heavily on the telegraph boy who usually knew a great deal more about the business of that particular box than the temporary signalman:

‘I remember at Holloway South the relief signalman was George Gunn – he was known as Gun Gun for some reason – an enormous fellow who didn’t like any of the drivers. The drivers all knew this, and to tease him they used to slow down as they passed the box and pretended to shoot him, a sort of reminder of his nickname. It used to infuriate George who would report the drivers. Once, for no particular reason, he told me I’d been cheeky: “Get on your stool and stay on it for the rest of the shift,” he said. So I sat there for a while, and then he went to the back of the box where the big old range provided heat and a place to cook his breakfast. All signalmen cooked their breakfasts in the cabin in those days. He used to have half-a-dozen eggs, half-a-dozen pieces of bacon, sausages, fried bread – you wouldn’t believe anyone could eat so much, he absolutely packed it away. Anyway, on this particular day I think he must have spent a bit longer than usual cooking because by the time he’s started eating, we were into a very busy time; in fact we were suddenly so busy that he asked me to move the points – but I told him I wouldn’t because he’d told me to stay on my stool. I had the pleasure of watching him running back and forth between his enormous breakfast and the levers, and all the while he was cursing me. In the end he got so cross that he threw his breakfast, plate and everything, out the window!’

By this time the war was in full swing and the main control offices for the railways were evacuated from London; for example the King’s Cross control room went up to Knebworth in Hertfordshire where it remains to this day. At the Holloway box George and his signalman would frequently receive what was called a London Central Yellow warning if enemy bombers were known to be in the area during the day; a London Central Red meant the bombers were really close.

‘Sometimes I wondered why they bothered to warn us,’ says George, ‘since there was nothing we could do. We just sat there like sitting targets and dimmed our lights a bit. It was mainly gas lights in those days so they were pretty dim anyway, and all the windows were blacked out with a hole left just big enough for the signalman to look out and peer up and down the line’.

‘In the back of the cabin at Holloway they fitted a steel shelter, actually inside the cabin. Old Dusty used to get nervy when there were bombers about, so he’d go into the shelter at the back of the box and tell me to get on with it. If bombs fell nearby I

was supposed to dash into the steel box with him and sit on his lap – it was so small there was only room for the two of us that way. It always seemed funny to me, sitting there with this great big registration book open on my knees while Dusty held up an oil lamp so I could continue to fill the book in.

That metal box shelter was a complete waste of time, too –it was just a heavy steel box, so if the cabin had been hit it would have gone crashing down through the floor and we'd have been killed anyway. I suppose the idea was that it would at least protect us from flying glass.'

London at this time was definitely a scary place to be: all over the capital throughout the Blitz the German bombs could be heard going off, followed by the sound of anti-aircraft guns.

'Bombs often dropped near us,' says George, 'because the railways were a prime target. One night a massive bomb hit the ground right in front of our box, but by a miracle it just buried itself and failed to explode. If it had gone off some employees would have been killed, for sure.' As well as the constant risk of death at work, George had to cope with the very real danger of being killed at home. Like many Londoners, George has a fascinating tale of a narrow escape:

'It was 26 February 1941 – I can remember the exact date – and late that evening our next-door neighbour came round and asked us to join her. My dad had told my mum not to leave the house whatever happened because his theory was that if a bomb was going to get you, it would get you wherever you were, so might as well stay in the house. So my mum said no and we stayed put. A short while later our neighbour came in again; she was upset, and asked us again to join her. I think she just wanted company. Anyway, Mum again refused, and she stuck to her guns until the neighbour became hysterical. Then at last we relented and trooped into next door. A short while later our house took a direct hit and there's no doubt at all that if we'd stayed put we'd have all been killed; as it was they had to dig us out! There was a lot of bombing in the Potters Bar area because there were three railway tunnels in the area, and the Germans knew they would cause huge disruption if they managed to damage any of them.

'We moved to my grandmother's after that, and her roof was then blown off in an air raid. My mum was getting a bit paranoid by now – she thought the Germans were really after her, so she went to Devon to her mum's and dad's house, and would you believe it, she was bombed out there, too!'

To be continued ...

Spotlight on George Case Part 2.....

As the war went on, George was promoted to relief telegraph boy; he also started doing night duties. Despite the difficult hours and long journeys, the job of relief telegraph boy was considered prestigious:

‘In 1943, when I was seventeen, two of us were selected to train as signalmen. I knew a lot already from my days as a telegraph lad, but to be a full signalman you had to know a hell of a lot more, as I quickly discovered when I was sent to the signals training school at Hatfield.’ This school was established in a former royal waiting room on one of the platforms, and the story of how it came to be there provides an interesting glimpse of the relationship between railways and royalty in former times.

Queen Victoria had often visited Hatfield, because it is the nearest station to Hatfield House, home of the Cecils. In order to accommodate the Queen, the platforms at Hatfield were built staggered – in other words, they are built in such a way that they do not face each other across the tracks in the normal way. This meant that when the royal train stopped at the station, there was no chance that another train could stop opposite the royal train, and so there was no risk of the Queen being ogled by her subjects. The Hatfield royal waiting room was kept in perfect order, but in fact it was never used – until 1943 when the national emergency persuaded officials that they’d better make some use of it. And so it became a signals school for young men like George.

‘When my mate and I turned up at Hatfield we found we were joined by two trainee telegraph girls and three women training as guards; they were the first women ever to be trained in those jobs. Our training lasted three weeks; we were given a test to see if we knew the rules and regulations, and then we were off to our own signalboxes. I was sent to Crews Hill on the Hertford Loop. Every frame – that’s the bit in the box that the levers are in – is different, so you had to be trained for the specific box you were going to work in. At Crews Hill it was what was called a porter signalman’s job: in other words it was a tiny station where you did a bit of everything, signals, booking clerk, station master, porter. In fact there wasn’t much signal work to be done, and you only really opened up the cabin to shorten the block or to perform shunting duties. The more block sections you had, the more trains there were, because there was only one train to a block. The idea was that so long as you knew there could only ever be one train in a block section, you knew the trains were being kept safely apart. But you always had to keep your eyes and ears open for things that weren’t quite right – as a train went by you’d always look at the back of it, for example, to make sure its tail lamp was there: if it wasn’t, it meant that half the train had got lost somewhere! That really did happen in the old days when wagons were loose coupled.

‘I had a bit of help at Crews Hill in the shape of a lad porter who had better remain nameless. But for the sake of the story let’s call him Monty. All I can say is, he was a real no-gooder; he was always late and he was always up to something. He was supposed to light the station’s oil lamps as well as the oil lamps in the signalbox when he arrived, so if he was late it was a real nuisance. One day I was up in the box when a young lad walked up to me and said “I’ve come for the oil. Is Monty about?”

“No,” I replied in complete bafflement.

“I’ve got the can,” he said and proceeded to wave it under my nose.

“What?” I said.

“Don’t you know the dodge here?” came the reply.

‘Well it turned out that this chap had been buying our lamp oil from Monty at 6d a go. I put a stop to it immediately.’

Crews Hill was situated in the middle of a large area of nurseries so much of the freight traffic was associated with this industry, and one of George’s most delightful stories arose as a result of this connection:

‘One morning the stationmaster, who looked after three stations including Crews Hill, turned up early. He asked me to stay behind and told me that the best kept station competition was to be judged in the area that day and he wanted to win the prize. There was £2 in it for the station master, 10s for me and my mate Joe Ward, five bob for the lad porter and a little something for the booking clerks; the total prize was a fiver.

‘Crews Hill had plenty of flowerbeds so we set about re-whitening the edges of these, and then the stationmaster sent us down to the nearest nursery, which backed on to the station, to get some plants that were in flower and would therefore look really good. We raced off with several big barrows, came back with the plants and buried them in the soil complete with their pots! Within a couple of hours the whole station was transformed – it looked absolutely beautiful. A little later the special train arrived with the district superintendent aboard. Our stationmaster began sucking up to him like mad – “Would you care for a piece of this cake? My wife made it this morning,” and suchlike. Anyway, the superintendent was impressed and said so. He got back on the train, having said we were in the running for the prize, and off he went. As soon as he was out of sight, the stationmaster shouted to us to get the barrows, dig up the plants, still in their pots, and take them straight back to the nursery! Disgraceful really, but we won first prize.

‘This particular stationmaster used to take vegetables and fruit from the owner of one nursery if he failed to take delivery of his coal within a specified time; he should have been fined, really, but the stationmaster was happy to take the grub in lieu! When the circus trains used to stop at High Barnet this same stationmaster – then a lad, but his dad was stationmaster – used to charge the local kids a penny to watch the elephants being exercised; that’s how he got his nickname, Jumbo!’

Like most railwaymen, George continued to move around a great deal as he changed jobs. After two years at Crews Hill he went to Cuffley Station, then on to Palmers Green, then Enfield, all posts in the North London/Hertfordshire area. He got his first job on the main line in Hornsey Number One signalbox:

‘Hornsey was a bit scary at first because you were dealing with expresses. I’ll never forget the first day I spent in the box on my own – it was a hell of a responsibility because you didn’t get any second chances; what you did had to be spot on, or there could be a disaster. I spent three weeks in that box being trained; it was a bit like the system with drivers where they had to know the road, in other words the route, before they were allowed to drive the engine over it. With signals you had to know your box before they left you to get on with it. On the day you were finally to be tested the

district inspector would come along, then the regular signalman would step back and say to you, "All right lad, get on with it!" The two of them then watched to see if you made any mistakes.

'Each track had a bell telling you a train was coming and a bell telling you the train was going away, and there were eight bells at Hornsey, covering four sets of tracks. The bells were on a shelf above you and each one had a different tone, so you had to know which tone was which in order to answer. If you got the wrong bell, the man who'd sent you the signal would signal back with a sarcastic ring. I know it's hard to imagine, but you really could ring the bell sarcastically; if I made a mistake and replied to the wrong signalbox when a bell rang, the returning signal would instantly make me aware that the other man was saying, "Come on you nit-wit get it right!" You didn't want to let yourself down in front of people, so you very quickly got to know the sound of each bell!'

At peak periods George found that he was dashing around pulling levers for all he was worth, but there were slacker periods when he could heat up something to eat on the range at the back of the box. All signalmen cooked, and many would take the ingredients for a complete roast dinner if they were working on a Sunday. 'I remember one old boy used to nip out of the box, run across to a nearby allotment and help himself to some onions which he then added to his meal,' says George with a grin.

After Hornsey, George moved to Wood Green, to a box that overlooked the racecourse at Alexandra Palace: 'That was great, because from my box I had a better view of the horses than anyone anywhere on the track itself. I'd often look out the window, too, and see my father, who was a guard, waving to me as his train went past, and all the drivers waved so you never felt too lonely. You could also telephone your mates in signalboxes up and down the line.'

A signalman who worked on what was known as a continuous cabin had to work for twenty days before he was allowed a day off, and this would include two twelve-hour Sunday shifts. Shifts were either 6pm-6am or 6am-6pm, so the hours were long. When the union negotiated a reduction in the hours from forty-eight to forty-six, more staff were needed to cover the rest-day relief.

The contingency that all railwaymen dreaded in the pre-electronic age was bad weather, particularly fog, but for the signalman there were also the practical difficulties associated with relatively primitive equipment. 'If a signal lamp went out you could be in trouble,' remembers George. 'When they were trimmed and lit – they were all oil – they were supposed to last eight days, but through human error, badly trimmed wick or whatever, perhaps high winds, they might go out. This was particularly dangerous if a light went out on the gantry above the lines and the signalman might have to re-light it. Those rickety old ganties high above the rails were bloody awful places to be, I can tell you, and in bad weather (when you were most likely to have to go up there) they could be terrifying. I remember going up to light a lamp when there was a terrible gale blowing and it was pitch black. I didn't think I'd ever get down, and when I did, I hardly knew where I was. It was pitch black that night.'

'Fog was the biggest killer of all because fogs then, the old pea-soupers, would reduce visibility to a few feet. Everything slowed down and we'd bring the fog signalmen on.'

George continued as a signalman until 1955 but his obvious abilities, combined with the shortage of men in the years following the end of hostilities, meant he was promoted to assistant controller.

This was at Knebworth and I was eventually responsible for everything from King's Cross to Barkston in Lincolnshire. I had to know every inch of those 108 miles as well as the sections of loop line. A class five assistant controller, which was where I started, was at the bottom of the pile; you had to do all the record keeping, check that all the trains were running on time, stoke the fire in the office and make the tea for all the controllers.' By starting at the bottom as an assistant controller George lost £3 a week in wages, but the prospects were good. After four months he went back into the signal grade (his assistant controller job was., as a summer relief only). Soon after that he was sent to Peterborough which, in the 1950's was incredibly busy.

'The first thing I remember about that job was that I was put in charge of giving the drivers salt tablets! They were regulation issue because driving was such warm work, and losing too much salt through sweating is very bad for you. I also had to go to the drivers' barracks in the town and wake them up in the morning. I'd walk along in the dark with a list of names in my hand tapping on various windows with a long pole.'

By 1955 George was working as a full-time assistant controller, and by the 1960s he'd taken over as assistant stationmaster at King's Cross. 'I'd known I wanted that job years earlier when the assistant stationmaster at King's Cross had said to me, "Where's your hat?" I told him I didn't have one – I was a signalman at the time, and signalmen never did, but he obviously had no idea. Anyway he sent me home, so off I went. But halfway along the platform he called me back and told me to go to the stores and get something for my head. I went, picked up and scrubbed out the words "Ticket Collector" which were printed on the front of it. That assistant stationmaster then asked me what my ambition was, so I said I wanted to be an assistant stationmaster like him so I could boss people about the way he did. "Get out, you cheeky devil!" he replied. I did nearly twenty years as an assistant stationmaster, and for much of that time I was acting stationmaster. It was a great job.'

Signalboxes all disappeared in the late 1970's and early 1980's and these days trains are all monitored and controlled electronically; but George wouldn't have missed a minute of his early years: 'I'm glad I had my time working the old levers. The men I worked with both then and later on were a great bunch, and there were some very funny moments. I remember particularly Chitty Mason who kept the platforms tidy at Kings Cross. One day Princess Margaret had just arrived and was about to get off her train when Chitty spotted a poodle using the red carpet in an unmentionable fashion outside her carriage. Quick as a flash he leapt over, picked up the poodle dropping and put it in his pocket. He walked calmly over to me and simply said "That was a near miss, gov!"

'Perhaps the funniest thing in all my forty-three years' service was my meeting with Anthony Barber when he was Chancellor of the Exchequer. He borrowed two bob

from me, and would you believe it – some flippin’ chancellor – he never paid it back!”

The End