

ORAL HISTORY OF KINGS CROSS RAILWORKERS

DRIVER

INTERVIEWEE GORDON ANDERSON GIBSON (known as Andy)

DATE OF BIRTH 1957 Barbados

PARENTS OCCUPATION Father worked on the railway

Mother at home with family

INTERVIEW LOCATION ASLEF, John Street, London

DATE 10th October 2022

This interview covers a range of matters relating to the career of a train driver but might be of particular interest as Andy was unfortunately involved in a major rail crash (Potters Bar) and he freely talks about that day.

Andy had no particular interest in the railway but he applied for his first job upon leaving school at the age of 17. He was offered 3 jobs but on the advice of his father took the job offer from British Rail as it was more money.

He talks about his first job at BR which was cleaning the steam boilers based at Hitchin. Andy then describes how he progressed to a driver's assistant and undertook his training over 5 years at the training school in Enfield. He mentions his motivation and how he is proud about passing his drivers exams first time which at the time was very rare at that time.

Andy moved to Kings Cross after he had qualified as a driver and noticed a significant difference from Hitchin where he had been the only black person. Andy speaks at length about the working atmosphere at Kings Cross which was very supportive and very mixed in terms of the makeup of the workforce. Social activities made up an important part of Andy's life at Kings Cross and he describes the sporting and social activities that he was able to participate in.

Andy discusses his relationship with management and how this has changed over the years. In his formative years as a driver management was generally a consequence of upward promotion and thus the managers had 'done the job' and therefore understood much better the operational issues than the managers of today.

He describes the life of a train driver and the pleasures of train driving. Like many drivers his favourite train to drive was the Deltic and he describes the sensation of driving a Deltic and how it was a difficult train to drive. Andy also talks about how he enjoys his current role training drivers but also that it cannot compare with the act of driving a train.

Andy also talks about the challenges that drivers face with obstacles on the line and sadly fatalities that occur. Andy was the driver of the train that was involved in the Potters Bar train crash that occurred in 2002 and in which 7 people lost their lives. He talks about how the accident unfolded and his immediate actions in the minutes following the crash to make the line safe and halt other trains on the line. His emergency training stood him in good stead but due to the infrequency of train crashes he speaks about the anxiety of not knowing whether the theoretical training would work in practice, thankfully it did.

The crash was clearly a significant event in Andy's life and he was exonerated from any fault (the crash being a consequence of defective track maintenance) he discusses the support that he had following the crash and more generally the support that is available to drivers who are confronted with incidents involving persons on the track and the need for mental fortitude and resilience. During his time at Kings Cross, he has stressed how the working community is from a variety of backgrounds and races but has always got on and he has not experienced any direct racism although he acknowledged that the role of women in the workplace still has its challenges.

The railway has provided Andy with job security and a worthwhile career for over 48 years which has flown by