

Andy Johnson, train driver  
Born 1952, Broxborne.  
Father, a butcher, mother, an office worker.

Andy grew up looking out of the window at trains. He had friends who worked at Hitchin depot, and was told there were jobs at KX so applied. He joined the railway on 3 October 1970, aged 18, and left in January 1997 when it was privatised, aged 44.

His first days were overwhelming, he came from Hertford, a small town. He was thrown into it and had very little money.

Skills. He started as an engine cleaner, then was tested on the rules, becoming a driver's assistant on diesel engines, working on local trains, shunting locos etc.

KX interesting place, big depot, lots going on, hadn't changed since the nineteenth century and the days of steam. He remembered it from visiting as a child.

The architecture was quite grim, dark, dusty, atmospheric. He was not used to being out in the middle of the night.

Trains. Although the trains were diesel there was steam heating on trains. So still atmospheric.

KX what made it were the people. Other drivers. The area was v rough, beggars, prostitutes, learnt v quickly you had to be aware of your surroundings, especially at night.

Job was different every day. He was learning on the job, being taught by other drivers, ended up sharing driving.

Progress was based on seniority. Started off moving empty trains, shunting trains, suburban trains, then Cambridge, Peterborough runs. You had a regular mate, got to know them. (Got v emotional). You moved on up through the links. Doncaster was known as the birth control link because basically working nights all the time. It was changed by the union so that night work was shared.

Next link was Leeds, then on to lodge link 1 to Newcastle. Anders Palace, "worst hotel I've ever been in". Sometimes people were still in your bed, or the sheets were warm. He had a friend so stayed with him.

They had a bit of time to kill so he managed to persuade his co-driver to visit Whitby bay and he was amazed by it. Had never done anything before when up there.

Typical favourite day - driving with his mate Willie Macloud on fast class 31 diesel to Cambridge, doing half the driving. Willie offered to couple and uncouple the train- amazing, most drivers wouldn't. Make a can of tea on the go and have a sandwich.

Hierarchy - v much on seniority, drivers were kings of the castle, inspector wd ask permission to come on board. Dealt with signalmen, guards, got to know the shunters, at the KX goods yard.

Social life - varied, drinking at the local railway club, more involved when in the union. People wd come in to pick up their wages and have a couple of pints in the club.

Nicknames Squeaker Powell, high pitched voice.  
Budgie Lester, always talking.

Perks - shunting job by Ally Pally, there was a sweet factory and they'd be given a box of sweets. At the Enfield goods yard, were given bananas.

Relationship with passengers - v little, guards dealt with passengers.

Least liked about the job - when didn't go anywhere, just sitting about. Tedious.

Worst days at work - nothing v bad happened. Worst was when a freight train filled with sand was overloaded. Speed limit was 25 mph. It was downhill from Potters Bar and although thd brakes were applied it was running away. Levelled out at Wood Green. Eventually it came to a stop. "Deciding whether to jump or not must be terrible."

Hazards - had to have faith in the system working with trains running at 125 mph.  
Suicides - he didn't have any but knew people who did. Union persuaded employers to introduce counselling. But had to persuade people then to go to counselling.

He became a driver aged 23, took a job at Hertford east. Then a better job came up at KC so after 2 years he moved back.

Union reps ran the rotas, 32 drivers, ran the depot, everything ran well. Got involved with the union when he went back to KX.

1982 flexible rostering dispute. Union supported people in need of help. Headquartered at the Cock tavern.

Miners strike, became involved with.

Discrimination - a manager didn't like a black driver, kept picking on him. When the union went to talk to him, they were shocked by his racist invective. "Thrown back in our seats".

Pay and conditions - paid well in the steam days. But pay fell behind. Unless you were on top mileage, it was average pay.

Tech changes, diesels but had steam heating.

HSTs 125mph. Drive to Newcastle and back in 1 shift.

Electrified suburbans 1976-77.

Privatisation - sectorised work, limiting opportunities. Doing same thing every day. Wanted to cut numbers, so was 44 and fed up so decided to take redundancy. Railway never recovered. Hard decision cos there was a shortage of drivers. Knew it was a one-time decision cos it was so stupid.

What did railways mean to him? Best time, union kept people strong. Big influence on him.

Cited a manager who was v difficult. Required union issues in writing. Had 100 issues so 4 of them sat and wrote 25 letters each!

Story - went to Finsbury park to get the train cleaned. Nothing to do so went for a walk to Highgate via derelict railway. Old BR had space to do that. Not possible now.