

Interview with Felix Gomes - 10th October 2022

Interviewer: Chris Conway

Summariser: Rozanne Gomes

- Born 1953, Kenya.
- Joining the railways: started as a fitter at Bounds Green, told he was too old for an apprenticeship, so went to the recruiters that King's Cross completed the aptitude test and got the job. His instructor was Ivo Brooks 'Mr Railways' where he received training about trains and signals.
- First days- was a driver's assistant, then urged to become a driver's 2nd man. He was put with different drivers when he first started. He learned about steam heating, coupling, what responsibilities are cleaning the cab, and making tea!
- No progression at King's Cross so applied to another depot, had 6 months of training then the test and passed in 1984, stopped working at King's Cross, went to Watford Junction (not friendly set up), Euston, Mornington Crescent, Broad Street, Waterloo, Newcastle and lodged in poor accommodation.
- Drove HST's and Deltics class '55 beautiful to drive, temperamental engine with the coupling up, too much power and train could bounce off, but he mastered it well. Given half an hour to learn how to operate the new electric trains!
- Described King's Cross as very friendly, clean station, no problems with passengers. Used the gas tanks as a landmark to orientate when driving back into King's Cross.
- King's Cross was a very friendly depot - everyone helped each other. It is a very big station so it had passenger trains, freight sized trains, goods trains, and engineering trains.
- The area was not well looked after and the reputation that it had meant that there were druggies and call girls. Car park outside of the building was scary to get to as druggies were everywhere, someone was stabbed with a needle. Steve Forey and the Union helped to make things better for drivers.
- Favourite day included a trip to the country: Cambridge, Peterborough, Leeds or Newcastle - as you were free, kind of like being your own boss.
- Relationship with others was very good, everyone helped each other. Needed a good sense of humour.
- Social life - Coach trips to Southend from King's Cross. Annual reunion at Hatfield in August. At Christmas - a 'Santa Special' held at Gordon Hill and pantomimes the Gordon Craig Theatre in Stevenage, where someone dressed up as Santa and decorated a special train for the kids. You could swap turns for events you wanted to attend with your colleagues, to have some social time.

- Favourite moments - He drove last train and met Paul McCartney during his filming for 'Give my regards to Broad Street' and met Linda also.
- Hazards - Serious incident at King's Cross where someone was electrocuted. Another was when children were playing 'chicken' on the line, he had an incident at Alexandra Palace on Saturday afternoon, he just shut his eyes as he braked, one child escaped, the other did not. He was frightened and shaken up; put emergency break on and de-trained at Welwyn Garden City, which was the nearest stop and then reported to the depot. No support at first, usually an inspector should see you and escort you home, but that didn't happen. Driver went off sick, saw a railway doctor at Euston and received counselling advice. Lucky to have escaped King's Cross fire as worked late that day. Leaves on the line were also a hazard, different techniques on how to stop, reduce speeds, grit helped but sometimes there wasn't any control, so just prayer!
- Unfair treatment - Not treated properly at the beginning of his time in London as he couldn't get a job. Started office work but didn't like it, so moved to an engineering job and made parts for parachutes for 3 years, but couldn't get an apprenticeship there. Some older drivers didn't like you as drivers; and sometimes for women, excuses were made for them not being able to do things like coupling. At Watford Junction, there was some racism but he carried on working and the Union helped.
- Strikes - 1982 - One driver and a second man worked through and this was not popular amongst workers. The reason for this strike was for flexible rostering - they wanted to have 8 to 12-hour shifts which was then forced upon them. First strike was strange as not a lot of advice was given. There were some advantages after the strike, like some extra money.
- Technological changes- King's Cross took out all the signal boxes when they remodelled. Gives explanation of semaphore signalling versus colour light signalling.
- Time on railways gave him security, freedom and opportunities. It has advantages and disadvantages, but could work to his needs to help with his daughter after school.