

ORAL HISTORY OF KINGS CROSS RAILWORKERS

INTERVIEWEE	Ray Knight
DATE OF BIRTH	1951 Middlesex Hospital, Central London
PARENTS OCCUPATION	Father French Polisher. Mother at home with family
INTERVIEW LOCATION	ASLEF, John Street, London
DATE	12 th October 2022

Ray worked at Kings Cross for 35 years and during that period of time had a wide variety of jobs from platform supervisor to stores manager and was even the receptionist for the CEO for a short period. He also played a prominent role in NUR [which became RMT] as the local representative, eventually ending up as Branch Secretary. This interview covers the variety of work he undertook at Kings Cross and his role within the union.

Ray started off as a cleaner and describes how the men used to clean the outside of the carriages and women the inside. He describes very graphically some of the hazards when walking along the track and between the carriages when cleaning and later when undertaking inspections. He explains the extent to which this was unhygienic and the lack of health and safety standards that applied at that time. He talks about the use of gas-powered lamps when inspecting the underside of carriages and relates a literally hair-raising story when his hair got caught in a train-door hinge!

Ray discusses the 'family' atmosphere working at Kings Cross and how over a period of time he would know everyone who worked there. He makes reference to the fact that many of his colleagues were of Caribbean or Asian heritage and although upon reflection he could see that some decisions could have been seen to raise equality issues the workforce were completely integrated and there were no tensions between colleagues on a day-to-day basis. However, he does discuss the tension between being 'the boss' but also the union rep supporting his colleagues. Ray describes his first meeting of NUR that he attended and his experience of that meeting and how it enthused him to become a rep and eventually Branch Secretary, a job that he did for 22 years. Being involved so heavily in the union could make it difficult to integrate with his day job but the management accepted his role and he always managed to work around it.

An interesting part of the interview is Ray explaining how the system of redundancy worked within British Rail and despite being made redundant on a number of occasions he was always found alternative employment at Kings Cross as a consequence of the redundancy process that the union had negotiated. It also explains how he came to do such a large range of jobs within the station.

He is asked, given the wide range of jobs that he held which was his most rewarding and that was as training coordinator where Ray gained a great deal of satisfaction of improving the skills of young railwaymen and women. He also discusses being responsible for the stores and the idiosyncrasies of the job. He is asked about the perks of the job to which his response is 'I was never short of a pen'.

One of the most difficult issues that Ray had to deal with was the night of the Kings Cross fire where he was on station duty. Although a fire in the underground Ray explains the impact upon the running of the main line station and the difficulties of communication and decision making that night.

Ray is extremely proud to have worked for the railway in its various incarnations for his entire working life. Whilst the privatisation of the railways brought new challenges and working arrangements he managed to work with the changes and is proud to have embraced new technology and to have seen the organisation grow in relation to diversity and equal opportunities.