

Friern Barnet & District Local History Society

HISTORY OF JOSHUA KIDD BRUCE WRITTEN BY HIS GRANDCHILD BEATRICE DOBIE IN A LETTER DATED 21 AUGUST 2005

My grandfather, Joshua Kidd Bruce, was born on 3 November, 1871 at Westhill of Airlie in Angus/Forfarshire. He was the second child and son of Andrew Bruce and Catherine Anderson Kidd, his wife. He was one of eight children, five boys and three girls. His second sister, Emily, died in infancy.

The family moved in his early childhood to Wester Jordanstone in Meigle, Perthshire. In the veterinary school. He attended Alyth School and gained entry to the Veterinary School of Glasgow University at the age of fifteen. He qualified at nineteen and as he could not practice until he was twenty-one he spent the two years as a demonstrator.

I believe he had a brief spell practicing as a vet in either Ayr or Oban, I think the latter. He came south about 1894 as veterinary officer to London Tramways. He also had the management of the depots and stables. He pioneered in the latter in the successful treatment of equine pneumonia. He also made regular trips to Dublin and Brittany to buy horses for the trams. He was also approached and sold horses to the Royal Household on one occasion. This latter gave him and his family a permanent pass to the Royal Mews.

He married on 15 July 1908 in St John's Tuebrook, Liverpool to Beatrice Mary, younger daughter of John Smallwood of Smallwood, Cheshire. They made their home at 90 Talbot Road, Highgate and were first residents of the house. For the rest of his life he started his holidays on 15 July, a month in Strathmore, followed by a month in Kent.

To be specific to London Transport, my grandfather introduced the Rover ticket, later extended to all London Transport. Re the Workmen's ticket, I have heard that the conductors would make the late shift or after the night shift at their stop. Christmas Day saw half day working introduced. Men with young families were off until the afternoon, while others did the rest of the day. He felt that if he wanted Christmas Day with his children, so did his men. The leading London art schools such as The Slade and St Martin's were approached and designed several classic posters.

My grandfather sympathised with the miners but felt he had a duty to keep London moving and went on air to say that the men must either return to work or hand in their uniforms, as they would be deemed to have resigned. His death was reported in Churchill's emergency paper. He then rang my grandmother to say not to think he was dead! She assured him that she did not believe he was speaking from the other side!

He used to encourage men at sports days and so on, by attending whenever he could. He often took his daughter, Catherine, with him. At the weekend, he used to take his children and follow a tram line from one end to the other to see how they were running and to show interest in his men. One route travelled regularly was from Archway Road to High Barnet.

The family had a bulldog who boarded trams. I believed for most of my life that he had only made one trip where he occupied an entrance to the platform. Passengers did not want to get on or off around him and the conductor was equally reluctant to approach what was actually a gentle, kind dog. My grandmother was telephoned and went on another tram to fetch him! I learnt a few years ago from Roma Blackwell (née Archibald)*, then in her 100th year, that the dog was a frequent traveller!

There was, I imagine, at any rate by the late 1920s, a certain amount of emergency planning for London. I know that my grandfather felt that the introduction of trolleybuses was a retrograde step as he believed the overhead wires would be very dangerous in the event of aerial warfare.

Although he came south to look after the horse trams, he managed the transition to electricity happily. My grandmother remembered all her life riding down Highgate Hill on a horse tram and up on the first electric one.

He believed that the wartime work of the women in the former male preserves made it inevitable and right that women must have the vote and that women, rather than the suffragettes, had achieved it. He went on one occasion to visit a conductress who had broken her leg. He was distressed to learn that she had put her leg out to stop the tram slipping back on a hill as she thought he would be upset if it got damaged!

Finally, a new colour was being considered for trams. My mother was asked to suggest a colour. She chose 'claret'. It looked appalling. It was, I think, on the northern section and she was delighted when it was repainted in due course.

*quoted with permission of her daughter, Gillian Seagrave

He became General Manager of the London Tramways Company. One of their horse trams can be found in the National Tramways Museum.

Joshua Kidd Bruce died on 23 September 1931 at Edmonton (*source: Ancestry.co.uk*)

Typed out by David Berguer from a handwritten letter
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