

Friern Barnet & District Local History Society

INTERVIEW BY PERCY REBOUL WITH FREDERICK HARVEY ON 24 AUGUST 1980

PR: Fred you were born in 1903 - that makes you 77. And you were born in Stanhope Road in North Finchley. What do you remember about your old house that you were born in?

FH: We lived in a flat in Belgrave Terrace. I went to school at Christchurch School.

PR: What did your father do?

FH: He worked on the building, scaffolder, labourer.

PR: Did he work for a local firm?

FH: He worked for Stonald up in Whetstone.

PR: What about your mother?

FH: My mother died in 1921, when I was quite young.

PR: How many were there in your family?

FH: I am the youngest, there is George the eldest, and Mabel a year younger. They were both born on Christmas Day. Then I had a sister Alice, between them and me.

PR: What age did you start school then?

FH: We went to school at five. I went to Squires Lane School.

PR: Did you enjoy school?

FH: I didn't mind going to school. You had to learn then. I didn't want to leave. War broke out while I was there.

PR: You left the Squires Lane School when you were 14?

FH: That's right.

PR: So you had your first job in 1917?

FH: That's right.

PR: How did you get your job?

FH: You had to go round asking for jobs and I got a job at Lush & Cooks, Dyers and Cleaners. I took the laundry round and collected the money. Lush and Cook had some old Ford cars called Tin Lizzies. It was down Hendon Lane by the school.

PR: Was the tricycle lettered with Lush & Cook?

FH: Yes. I had to pedal round and collect the laundry. When I was with the van it used to go up Gravel Hill and it would stop on the incline so I had to sit on the bonnet and fiddle with the sparking plugs

PR: What did you do after the War?

FH: I had to leave Lush & Cook because they wouldn't give me a rise

PR: What were you earning then?

FH: Eighteen shillings a week and I wanted a pound. I went with my father on the building at Cricklewood. I was a labourer.

PR: How long did you last?

FH: Not long, I got fed up with that. I was unemployed and I got a pound for 10 weeks from the Bureau and if you didn't sign on for 3 days a week you missed it. So I joined the Army, the Middlesex regiment.

TALK ABOUT THE ARMY.....

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PR: When did you leave the army?

FH: I came out in November 1928. You had to think about looking for work. I got a job in St Pancras Cemetery. It was a very hard frost that time. A lot of people were dying and I had to fill in the graves. Then I got the push from there, went back on the Bureau. I was outside the Bureau office and a bloke said "They're taking people on the trams". Money was tight and I walked from the Bureau at Finchley, near the Swan and Pyramids to Manor House, to the MET Head Office. The bloke gave me a form to fill in and I posted it back. I had to wait until the following March (1930). They gave me a temporary job, for the summer season.

PR: You must have had some kind of training.

FH: I went to Acton depot for 3 weeks and if you didn't pass you didn't get any money and you got no Bureau.

PR: What were they training you in?

- FH: How to go round collecting the fares and to learn the different roads. If you came from Finchley they trained you on the 19 trams you'd go from Barnet to Tottenham Court Road. You had to learn the road properly the 21 road went down from Finchley depot, down Woodhouse Road, through Wood Green and Finsbury Park. You had to learn that properly; I had two exams then I passed out.
- PR: You had to learn the road; did they actually stick you on a tram so that you got familiar with the route?
- FH: You went on a working tram with a conductor and you had a uniform.
- PR: Did they teach you things like adding and subtracting?
- FH: You had to know that, you learned that at school
- PR: When you did this three weeks training they were testing you out?
- FH: They also taught you safety – what would you do if you had an accident – you had to tell the police and make a report out when you got back.
- PR: And what about dealing with passengers?
- FH: A lot of people didn't know that you could put them off. If someone gave you a dud coin, they wouldn't take it in over the counter – they'd break it in half – and it had to come out of your own pocket. If you were rude to passengers you either got the sack or a day off.
- PR: The trams weren't competing with each other
- FH: No they were all MET. We were competing with the Overground buses. On the trams you had a workman's fare up to 8 o'clock and all the passengers used to flock for the cheap fares. After 8 o'clock there would be three or four Overground buses and they used to turn round at the Swan & Pyramids, the numbers were 508 to Wandsworth Bridge, the pirate buses.
- PR: What were the wages?
- FH: It was the highest paid job in London. We got about £3, the average pay for a labourer was £2.10.0
- PR: What hours did you work?
- FH: Eight and a half hours straight off. It started at 4 o'clock in the morning and you'd do four journeys from Barnet to Tottenham Court Road which would take 8 hours, no tea break. You would start at Finchley tram depot, go to Barnet and then start from there. We used to work Saturdays and Sundays and in the summer

you got no Sundays off. You would work seven days straight off and when you got a rest day, you'd go in at half past one on the Sunday you got eight hours off and by the time you'd paid in and walked home and you were back at 8 o'clock in the morning. It wasn't a rest day, they pinched half of it. You had seven days holiday. It was paid but there was a catch in it you'd start your holidays on a Sunday, you'd send your wife and kids on the Saturday and you'd follow down on the Sunday.

PR: Were there inspectors on the routes?

FH: Oh yes, they were dead hot. If you'd make a mistake by punching the tickets on the line; they'd get on and ask where' this bloke going to. If you didn't do it right you'd be in trouble.

PR: I read somewhere that a good driver would try and keep the tram steady

FH: They didn't worry about that, I can tell you.

PR: What sort of trams were they?

FH: When you went up the stairs on the Bluebell you had to be careful, I called them the lighthouse stairs, twisty, and when you came down you had to change hands because you had a long ticket rack in your hand.

PR: When you first joined, what sort of trams were they, open?

FH: Yes we had the open tops, then the closed in, vestibule types. When my driver came to work he had an oilskin coat on because there was no windscreen. During the winter I had a big coat, with thick pads on top and fleecy lined. You had to wear a hat, no brown shoes, only black ones and you had to buy them yourselves. If you weren't properly dressed you were sent home. The Depot Inspector used to run his hand up and down the tram to check whether the cleaners had done a proper job.

PR: What was the fare structure?

FH: The workman's fare from Tally Ho Corner to Cricklewood used to be fourpence return, the ordinary fare was fivepence. When you were going from Barnet to Tottenham Court Road you'd get a cheap fare down to the Winchester, or the Archway which was the LCC area. The LCC trams used to run from Moorgate up to Tally Ho Corner and turn round there and they had to come under our fare system. With the workmen's you had three tickets – a ticket down to the Archway, then a fivepenny LCC ticket down to Abbey Wood or somewhere. It was a complicated business. You had railway tickets for travel on the tube, sixpence to Tottenham Court Road. The cheapest fare was from Tall Ho Corner to Hampstead tube station, threepence. It was a combined ticket. One inspector said

“give this lady a ticket, she’s got no money” and I had to the money in, my money. About a month later the boss called me in and gave me three penny stamps, used. I won’t do that again I said, they’ll have to walk

PR: What routes did you work?

FH: The 19 from Barnet to Tottenham Court Road, which was 8d single fare, and 8d return if it was workman’s. The 21 from Tally Ho to Holborn. The trams that went under the Kingsway subway were from Highgate depot, a 33 and 35, they were trailer trams.

PR: When did they start putting modern trams on?

FH: They came in 1934. They mad a big difference. The Felthams had a door at each end and you could get 100 passengers on and they were nice and warm. And when you stopped, everything stopped; you wouldn’t dare pass a tram until it unloaded.

PR: Were you unionised?

FH: You had to join the Union. It was effective in that they improved the conditions

PR: You said that you didn’t get a cup of tea in the morning

FH: We used to take a white billy can and stop at the Indian Restaurant by the Swan & Pyramids (it wasn’t an Indian restaurant then) and fill it up. You’d get a can of tea for about twopence and a sandwich, beef dripping slice for a penny, a great doorstep. You’d go and collect the fares then go and have a munch then go back again. We had no break at midday and no meal until we got home. The Union then got us 20 minutes off, but by the time you walked from Tally Ho to the depot it was time to go back. Then it went to a half hour break.

PR: How long were you on the trams?

FH: 37 years and 10 months.

PR: The trams must have been gone by then.

FH: Yes, I was on the trolleybuses

PR: What were they like?

FH: I was on the last tram at night and we had to go out at 8 o’clock in the morning with the first trolleybus.

PR: Had you had special training?

FH: No.

PR: But the drivers must have had some.

FH: The drivers did, but not the conductors. I always remember the first one, we had to go down to Tally Ho Corner to Hammersmith via Willesden and Horn Lane Acton. Going round the corner at Acton you had to pull the frog and I pulled it down and let it go too quick and we were stuck for an hour. When I got home I couldn't get up because of the vibration because with a tram you knew when the driver was going to stop, because he shut off, you could hear the click as he turned the power off, but with a trolleybus there was no warning.

PR: Did it play havoc with your feet, this job?

FH: If you had a good driver it was OK.

PR: Which did you prefer, the tram or the trolleybus?

FH: The trolleybus was the best; they were cleaner.

PR: Do you have any affection for the trams at all.

FH: You got used to it. The first time I went into the depot when the buses took over it was like a smog because they used to warm the engines up. The diesel gets on your chest.

PR: But you didn't have too much illness?

FH: I was lucky.