



About QueenSpark Books

QueenSpark Books was founded in 1972 as part of a campaign to save the historic Royal Spa in Brighton's Queen's Park from being converted to a casino. The campaign was successful and it inspired participants to start collecting memories of people living in Brighton and Hove to preserve for future generations. QueenSpark Books is now the longest-running organisation of its kind in the UK.

More than one hundred books later, as part of our 45th anniversary celebrations, we are making the original texts of many of our out-of-print books available for the first time in many years.

We thank you for choosing this book, and if you can make a donation to QueenSpark Books, please click on the “donate” button on the book page on our website.

This book remains the copyright of QueenSpark Books, so if reproducing any part of it, please ensure you credit QueenSpark Books as publisher.

Foreword – Pullman Attendant by Bert Hollick, 1991

In 1935, fifteen year old Bert Hollick signed on at Brighton Station for his first shift on a Pullman Train. Working on the midnight shift from Victoria to Brighton including the famous Brighton Belle, he learned to ladle soup from a tureen at seventy-five miles per hour and serve a three-course lunch in a speedy fifty-eight minutes. Bert's life story is told in a style that conveys wonderfully the atmosphere of the Pullman Cars, as well as providing interesting factual details of railway life.

Bert worked at a time when a twelve to fourteen hour day was commonplace, and wages were a meagre £2 a week, despite providing a luxury service to everyday travellers. This book is fascinating personal history of a time long past, and will also have an appeal to historic train and railway enthusiasts.

Editorial team: Al Deakin, Mike Hayler, Nick Osmond, Darren Tabone, Tom Woodin

Copyright QueenSpark Books 1991
www.queensparkbooks.org.uk

PULLMAN ATTENDANT by Bert Hollick

Joining

I was employed by the Pullman company at the age of 15 years and, during my four years' service as an attendant, travelled thousands of miles on the various routes run by the then Southern Railway, leaving the company to go to sea just prior to the war.

I reported to the Company's office at Brighton Station and was issued with a pass, which allowed me to travel anywhere on the Southern Region. I was told to report to Head Office in Victoria Station, London. There I was measured for a uniform, which consisted of a dark blue jacket with gold braiding round the lapels and cuffs, including gold buttons. A pair of dark blue trousers with a blue stripe down each outer leg. A similar coloured peaked cap with gold braid on the peak and a band with PULLMAN CAR CO. attached. New uniform every year, peaked caps worn always outside car.

Salary £2 a week plus tips, average 3d or 6d (2 1/2p). All tips were pooled, and the attendant in charge would share out.

After a week's training in London I was detailed to my first Pullman car, named Bertha. On the Southern all trains were electrified. Apart from the all-Pullman Brighton Belle there were twenty electric Pullmans numbering 1-20, all possessing female christian names. Each unit would usually be in the middle of a six-coach corridor train.

Later I was to work on the Brighton Belle a few times, but mostly it was crewed by London staff. The Bournemouth Belle was hauled by a steam locomotive, as were other trains on parts of the railway system which were not electrified. These trains sometimes included Pullman cars.

Shifts

The main office was at Brighton station, for the Southern area. Each unit was rostered to a regular shift. Some units finished up at Littlehampton, Worthing, Eastbourne and Hastings the previous night, so the crews on rosters would book on at 7 am at Brighton and then catch various trains to wherever their unit was berthed. If late, one lost a day's pay and was sent home.

After ticking-on at 7.00 in the morning at Brighton Depot one would walk to the end of platform 2, jump down and across the tracks, and walk through the engine sheds en route to Lovers Walk sidings to join your unit. The smell of sulphur, soot and smoke was dreadful, as firemen cleaned out the fire-boxes of the engines. As a train would pull out of the sidings to go into Brighton Station, it would go through a washing machine, akin to a modern car-wash. If any windows on the Pullman Car were open, a certain amount of water would enter the Car. It was panic stations for the crew who had to mop up before running into Brighton Station.

If in the Lovers Walk sidings or any other sidings, overhead water pipes would fill the Pullman Car's water tank situated in the roof. If in a terminal station, railway staff would push a conveyance along to the side of the car, one man would climb up, via stepson the roof, and his mate would pipe water in. Also, either in sidings or terminals, carriage cleaners came aboard, sweeping the corridors, compartments and the Pullman Cars.

If a broken rail was found by the railway ganger, say between Haywards Heath and Brighton, the train would be diverted to Lewes then on to Brighton, making all concerned late home.

At all terminals, the wheel tapper walked alongside the train with a long handled hammer, hitting the rims of the wheels. By the tone of the clang, he could tell if there was a broken steel tyre. His word was law. If he said the train was being cut out, so be it. The crew of the Pullman Car would then have the problem of clearing all perishables and loading them into a large hamper, then delivering them to the terminal HQ. The food stock would then be put into a fridge.

Often the dynamo, slung under the bogey of a Pullman Car, would burn out. With no heating and lighting the unit was cut out, and the same procedure as above took place regarding the food stock, which would be taken to the nearest Pullman HQ. This was also done if a train broke down and was shunted into sidings.

After leaving passengers at Victoria or London Bridge, units went into sidings either at Battersea or New Cross Gate, then back to their destination station for the return journey in the evening rush hour. Whilst in the sidings the Pullman Car was cleaned throughout, veneer panelling polished, silver cleaned, kitchen, ice-box, pantry and toilet all scrubbed out. Average twelve hours work daily.

On travelling to Hastings, Littlehampton or wherever to join the unit, the crew would place one of the cushions in the compartment of the local train on their knees, and a game of I d nap would take place until arrival.

Occasionally, arriving at Victoria, a member of the crew had to go to HQ over something or other. If delayed, the crewman would race back to the platform, only to see the red tail light of his train leaving the station. He would then catch the next train down, still dressed in uniform and cap, and rejoin his original train as it began its next trip up to Victoria. Being one man short made extra work for the crew.

Running into a London terminal, perhaps in fog or ice etc, all services got out of roster, much as they do these days. A Pullman unit could stand in a platform for perhaps an hour, then a railway inspector would come along and tell us we were making for so-and-so, to Hastings or wherever.

If crews could not get to their destination to join their Pullman Car, because of bad weather etc, one would time it so as to join the train on its way to London.

I remember one shift. My unit started from Hastings at 9 am, so every morning after ticking on I, along with the other crew members, would catch the local train to Hastings. This was the nine o'clock to Victoria, 11.45 to Hastings, 3 pm Hastings-Victoria, 5.45 back to Hastings. The attendant in charge on this last trip would get off at Lewes, leaving one of the attendants aboard to take the unit through to Hastings, then having to travel back to Brighton, making a good 12-14 hours work.

Another turn I worked on was from Brighton to Victoria: 4.25 pm up, 6 pm down, 7.25 pm up, 9 pm down, 10.25 pm up, midnight down, arriving in Brighton 1 am. Then up to the siding to clear up, check stock etc, finally getting home to sleep at about 2.30 am. After the 9 pm down, one would feel worn out, but one still had two very busy trips ahead. The midnight train was the busiest of the six trips involved. After five hectic trips up and down from Brighton, the train would leave Victoria full with theatre-goers, all wanting drinks etc after a night out. I worked the midnight from Victoria to Brighton for about one year.

One of the attendants in charge of this turn was an alcoholic. At 5.25 in Victoria he would be across to a pub, back again in Brighton he would be across to the Railway Bell, and so on. By the time of the last two trips he was flat out, sitting in the vestibule of the car, hopelessly drunk. With all the business ahead I was left to serve, control and collect monies. The man in the corridor was too busy himself to assist me. But I coped, with no complaints from any passengers. After all I was an enthusiastic 17 year old at the time. After cleaning up and checking over the car in the Lovers Walk sidings till about 3 am, the other assistant and myself would somehow manage to get the man in charge, who was still intoxicated, to his home, ring the bell and leave him on the door step. This occurred every evening. The staff literally carried this man for about one year.

It was very depressing at times, especially on Sundays, when one had to don a uniform and work whilst other people travelled to a seaside resort for a day's outing.

There were night shifts too, running from the places mentioned. Sometimes these would only be two trips.

I remember missing the last train back to Brighton from Hastings, due to lateness, and managed to ride back on the footplate of an Atlantic type steam engine. Quite a thrill.

A wonderful sight leaving Victoria on the 1 pm to Brighton was running out of the station alongside the Golden Arrow bound for Dover and Paris, an all-Pullman train hauled by a beautiful Lord Nelson or King Arthur class steam locomotive, until our electric unit pulled ahead. Pullman boat trains also ran to Newhaven. These were steam trains also.

On arrival at Brighton station, after a days work, expecting to go somewhere in the town

in the evening, an Inspector would come aboard and tell us that because of a breakdown, perhaps of a unit in Eastbourne, the train would be going empty to Eastbourne, then up to Victoria and back. Bang goes an evening out. (No overtime payments).

Catering

On a six coach train the crew totalled four: the chef, who always had to have whites on, along with a chef's hat, an attendant in charge, an assistant who served in the car, and an attendant to serve refreshments to passengers on the other plain coaches up the corridor.

On a busy train the attendant would carry three trays, two on the right hand and arm, and one in the left hand. Very seldom any breakages, even at a train speed of 75 mph.

Regarding the storing of a unit, on arrival at the London station, a Pullman Motor Van would unload stores, ordered the previous day, to the unit concerned, plus large ice-blocks for the ice safe. No frozen foods then, all fresh veg, meat etc, all from the main stores at Battersea. Clean linen was delivered every day: table cloths, napkins and hand-towels. The soiled linen was returned to the Battersea Depot and laundered.

If a Pullman car was short of a certain commodity on arriving at Victoria, or any other terminal, the attendant would dash round to another Pullman Car on another platform, to obtain what was short. If lucky, the items would be transferred to the named car, being signed for.

The early turns would serve breakfasts, consisting of perhaps porridge, fruit-juice etc, kippers, bacon and eggs, poached or scrambled or boiled, toast and marmalade, tea or coffee. Price 2/6.

The busiest lunch turn was the 1 pm Victoria to Brighton, arriving at 1.58 pm. Food was prepared by the chef during earlier trips. The menu would start with hors d'oeuvres or soup served from a tureen, no easy task on a train travelling at 75 mph. Then there could be fish (halibut or Dover sole), roast chicken, chops, cutlets, or mixed grill, all with three veg. Sweets: Charlotte russe, fruit salad or apple tart with cream, steamed apple pudding with sauces, baked jam roll with sauce, etc. Cheese and biscuits. Coffee. Price 3/6. Cost of drinks: whisky 10d nip and gin, brandy 1/6 nip. Beers 6 pence. Cigars 1/6 and 2/-. The menu would be changed daily by the catering manager in London.

Fifty-eight minutes to serve drinks and a four-course lunch with silver service, and coffee, and then to collect cash from about 40 passengers. A good system was most vital for a good run. Unless you worked to a system, it could be chaotic.

On busy shifts with luncheon and dinners, the chef would sometimes get into a flap,

burning the soup, dropping a dish of vegetables and so on. He had a lot of work on, with the service taking place in the car, and the corridor attendant shouting orders to him. Once again if one worked to a system, all went well. In the heat of summer, the galley became a sweat-box. Strictly against company rules, the vestibule doors would be clipped back, letting in a rush of air from the speed of the train. It was a bit noisy but very cooling, especially for the chef.

Looking back, there was one attendant in charge whose name was Ball. Crews called him Bollicky Ball. Rather cruel really, for whatever turn he worked, there was always a lash-up. He really wasn't suited for the type of work involved. One used to dread working with him on a busy lunch trip. Everything went wrong. Instead of the usual good service, it became chaos. Other staff would have completed the lunch service and collected all the cash outstanding by the time the train ran through Clayton Tunnel, but not Mr Ball. At Preston Park, some passengers were just finishing cheese and biscuits but there was still coffee to follow. A mad rush was on to collect cash due. On arrival at Brighton, he would be on the platform, issuing receipts, and very often, drinks were forgotten and left off the bill.

In the car, serving coffee could be a nightmare. With a silver jug of coffee in one hand, and a similar jug of hot milk in the other, one would start to pour and mix the milk and coffee, when the train would lurch over a slight curve of track, and instead of finding the coffee cup, known as a demi-tasse, one would find the passenger's lap. After travelling the tracks for many shifts and months, the average attendant knew just where any curves, bends and sharp points occurred.

In the Pullman Cars, if a passenger required something, he or she would push a bell-button by the seat, and the number of the seat would light up red. The bell indicator would be situated in the pantry. In the corridor compartment, a button would be pressed and a metal flap would project outside the said compartment, showing the attendant where refreshments were required.

Staff were not allowed to consume food stocks aboard, except cups of tea. The usual procedure was to dash out on arriving at the destination, purchase chops, veg etc, and the chef would then prepare the staff meal, for consumption either en route or in the sidings.

On one shift, I rushed out of Brighton Station to buy some chops and veg, for the staff meal. The butcher in Terminus Road knew all the crews. On entering the shop, the butcher said, "Hello Bert" and, in fun, drew what he thought was the back of his knife across the nape of my neck. Unfortunately, it turned out to be the cutting edge. I felt nothing until getting back on board, the attendant in charge said, "What's the matter with your neck?" For my white collared shirt was all blood around the neck. Not being able to replace the shirt, I had to stay out of the car, and all I did was wash up with the chef. Staff were not allowed to drink on duty, but it went on. A drink could be obtained any time of the day once the train was on the move, and at prices which seem ridiculous at

present-day cost:

Whisky and gin	10d nip
Brandy	1/6 nip
Beers	6d each
Minerals	4d each
Cigarettes	
Players	6d for ten
Woodbine	41 for ten
Weights	4d for ten.

During the trip a Pullman Inspector would join the train and would check out the state and condition of the Pullman Car. Any faults would be reported to Head Office at Victoria Station, and the attendant in charge would be called in and reprimanded.

The Pullman Car itself was made up as follows. Kitchen: electric stove, grill and oven, store cupboards, hot water urn, a sink, and crockery. Alongside was the ice-box. Next to the kitchen, the pantry: crockery, silver, glasses, wines, spirits, beers etc and expensive cigars. Kitchen waste etc was emptied from bins aboard into incinerators at depots. No ash-trays were to be emptied out of any windows. A lighted cigarette end could blow back into an empty compartment and start a fire.

The seating on a Pullman car was:

First class: twelve comfortable armchair seats with antimacassars, glass-topped tables with brass lamps and ash-trays (four separate seats in coupe). A separate cubicle for VIPs etc.

Third class: 16 seats, 4 at a table, again with glass tops, ash-tray and table-lamp, but just ordinary seating. Table cloths and napkins always on tables.

The toilet: tiled and mirrored, with wash-basins, hand-towels etc.

Various light refreshments were also on trays to passengers in compartments, on tables which were fitted into the compartment. These tables were stowed in the corridors. Pullman supplement fares were: 1st class, extra 2/-; 3rd class, extra 1/6; pot of tea and toast or biscuits, 9d; coffee and biscuits 10d; separate jugs for milk and coffee.

I would often take the driver a cup of tea up front in the cab and found it most interesting, entering tunnels, swinging over points, tearing through stations at 75 mph.

Again, I would take the guard a tea, looking through the periscope at signals ahead along the roof of carriages.

Tips, Perks & Time off

Regarding tips, on a pot of tea and toast, cost 9d, a shilling would be offered and the tip would be the change left over. On a luncheon, say the bill came to 5/-, 6/- would be left, a 1/- tip. Whisky and soda, 10d whisky, 4d soda, 1/6 or 1/9 would be left. Any royal parties or special parties would sometimes send a donation to Head Office which would subsequently be split up and issued to the staff concerned. I found the best people for tips were the professional bookmakers. They spent money like water.

One or two attendants in charge twisted the chef and assistants out of tips. All tips were pooled, but some senior staff took far more than their share. To offset this, tips made on baggage handling were shared between the other staff, but not the man in charge.

On the 5.25 Victoria to Brighton in a first class compartment, professional bookmakers would gamble en route. I would erect a table, and put a table cloth over it. I would then go to Smiths the newsagents at Victoria to purchase a new pack of cards which cost 1/-. No refreshments were required for the gentlemen concerned, but every evening a 10/- note was given to me. Many theatre stars etc tipped quite well, leaving perhaps 5/- to go into the pool. Max Miller was not one of those, he was very mean when it came to tipping.

There was also a certain amount of misrepresentation of cash and stock. In other words, a fiddle or two. With whisky and gin at 10d a nip and 32 nips to a bottle, on the cars it paid staff to purchase a bottle of whisky outside, and sell it to the customers. On a busy lunch train with about 30 lunches, staff would purchase about six chops and vegetables outside, serve them on the luncheon menu, and probably book in about 24 lunches. A small drop of soda water in a double whisky would certainly help the stock of the Pullman Car.

After a busy day one would go across to the Railway Bell public house, by Brighton Station, for a nice pint of beer, cost four pence.

On days off, three or four crewmen would organise an outing. I used to go fishing with others in a boat off Banjo Groyne, no engines then, we had to row out and in. Sometimes we would go to dances and sometimes to midnight films shown at the Regent cinema. Holidays were one week off, and staff could claim a free pass to anywhere in England.

A steam engine driver had three boats by Banjo Groyne. His name was Buff Harris, if anyone remembers him. Cost of the boat all day: 4 crew at 2/- each.

In the summer months many northern firms would have a staff outing to Brighton. The Black Cat cigarette firm called Can-eras was one. The train would arrive at Victoria and about 1,000 people would board a 12-coach set. Crates of beer would be loaded into the guards van and Pullman staff served the beer, with sandwiches made up by the chef, along the corridors. This would be repeated on the return journey.

Summer time, a crew would be sent through to Hastings to man a schools' special. Leaving Hastings, the train would pull into Bexhill Station. There on the platform were hundreds of school-girls with their straw hats and hockey sticks, boarding the train bound for summer holidays. A lot of business was done in minerals, sandwiches etc, but there was a noise just like a monkey-house. In Bexhill there were many private schools in existence at that time.

Regular party travellers were the Brighton and Hove Albion, going to an away match. Tables would be set up in reserved compartments and a light meal cooked and served by the Pullman crew. Usually it was boiled mutton and veg.

On Sundays during holiday time, a two Pullman unit train, with twelve coaches, would leave Victoria for Brighton at about 10 am with 1,000-1,500 passengers aboard for a day out to Brighton. Very little catering could be done, for the compartments and corridors were crammed tight, and the same on the return journey, leaving Brighton about 8 pm. A long day for the staff, who still had to get back to Brighton from Victoria. Then tick-on at 7 am the following day.

Where Gatwick Airport is now there used to be a race-course, and the Brighton Belle would be taken over for a Royal Party, visiting the races. The conductor man in charge of the Belle would be responsible for supplying the party with their needs.

The Brighton Belle was used for opera-goers leaving Victoria about 3 pm, every seat taken by ladies and gentlemen in full evening dress travelling down to Glynde near Lewes to attend opera at Glyndebourne. Teas and refreshments would be served en route. The Belle, now passengerless, would go onto the sidings at Eastbourne, and then pick up the opera-goers at Glynde in the late evening.

Famous Travellers

Notable people of all classes travelled Pullman. I have attended to Haile Selassie, the Emperor of Abyssinia, Hore Belisha, Gracie Fields and many other stage and screen celebrities, Lords, MPs, Kings and Queens. I also attended to the following people: Duke and Duchess of Norfolk, Duke and Duchess of Buccleuch (Scottish), Tommy Farr the boxer, and Lord Burberry (of Mackintosh fame). Royal parties to race courses.

Many stage stars and wealthy people would come aboard, leaving the porter to load their luggage into the vestibule of the Pullman car, perhaps eight or ten pieces of luggage piled on top of each other. The attendant always hoped for a good tip when unloading.

Regulars were the Crazy Gang, direct from the Palladium. They would join the train at about 11.30 pm, occupy the coupe, a private enclosure on the Pullman Car, hand steaks or whatever to the chef, give him a tip, and by the time the train was due out they

would have had their meal, and then the table would be cleared and they would settle down to play cards.

I do remember working a Pullman car out of Brighton when Tommy Farr came aboard to sit in the First Class. This was the start of his journey to America to fight Joe Louis for the heavyweight championship.

Queen Elizabeth, now the Queen Mother, would often travel by train to a function or whatever. Red carpeting was laid along the platform, up to the entrance to the Pullman Car. Top hatted railway officials, the Managing Director of the Pullman Car Co. and many others. I was surprised at seeing her majesty at a very close distance, how much her features were made up cosmetically. Only the conductor would be allowed to make contact with the royal party.

The Duke and Duchess of Buccleuch travelled on a First Class Pullman from Brighton to Victoria, reserved seats of course. They disembarked at Victoria with a trolley load of luggage. The train then shunted down to Battersea sidings. On tidying up the car, the attendant in charge found a fairly large jewel box, which was unlocked and contained beautiful jewels belonging to the Duchess. The attendant was about to walk back to Victoria to report the loss, when two detectives came aboard and asked if we had found a jewel case, which of course we had. No letter of thanks was received from the Duke and Duchess.

A regular traveller to Victoria from Brighton was the nephew of Lord Baden Powell, the Chief Scout. Now this relative had been a brave man in his time. He was a World War I pilot, and was shot down. The war affected him and he became a dipsomaniac. He lived in the Kemp Town area of Brighton with a taxi-driver's family who kept an eye on him. He was known to the police for his drinking habits and they would see him on to the train at Brighton, and meet him at London Victoria. At times he would be locked in a compartment. He would offer an attendant as much as 10/- for a nip of whisky costing 10d. Quite a lot for a single scotch. Crews had strict orders not to serve him, but he got his drop of scotch from some crews.

With respect to the person concerned, a neurotic young lady travelled on the 5.25 pm Victoria to Brighton every evening. She sat in what we used to call the horse-box, just half a compartment. She would ask, after ringing the bell continuously, for a glass of hot milk and a straw. Being a busy train, she would call the attendant three or four times about the condition of the milk, not hot enough and soon. A right pest. We, the crew, used to call her "scrag-ends". I believe she was a very clever linguist and spoke many languages. She worked in a government department in Whitehall.

These days prisoners are transported to jails by van, but in past times prisoners handcuffed to a policeman with an assistant would board the train, and be locked in a reserved compartment.

Incidents & Accidents

Going through a tunnel at the same time as a steam train, an attendant would dash through the car closing all windows, hoping to shut out smoke and sulphur fumes.

On one trip to Victoria, as the train was running into platform 13, an attendant had opened the Pullman door ready for passengers to disembark. The speed of the train was about 5 mph, just before stopping. On platform 13 there was a bend, and as the train went into this bend, the attendant lost his balance, and slipped down between the platform and the train. By a miracle the wheels of the carriage went over his bill book in his uniform pocket. He escaped unhurt but was up before the boss at head office for opening the door before the train had stopped.

At terminals the dustbins on the cars always had to be emptied into an incinerator. At Hastings, my working chum and myself had emptied the bin and were on our way back to the Pullman unit. Now, alongside the live rail was a concrete ledge, acting as a protector. Being young we used to walk along the top of this ledge, pretending to walk the tight rope. Unfortunately my foot slipped on to the live rail. There was no flash, but the bin shot out of my hand and into the air about 5ft high. At the same time, I felt a terrible thump at the back of my neck as though someone had given me a hard rabbit-punch. No burns but a real shake up.

Train slowing down. On looking out of the window I saw the smouldering remains of a cow, electrocuted after straying onto the live rail.

Often there were weather conditions to attend to. In summer time the heat was terrific in the galley for the chef cooking lunches etc. Winter time, ice and snow on the third rail played havoc, fog and landslides held up units for hours. Many trains finished up at a depot not on the roster.

On one journey in thick fog the train left Victoria at 11 pm, stopped, started etc, eventually arriving in Brighton at 6 am the following morning. A seven hour trip which should have taken one hour. Complete stock sold on Pullman Car.

Once the train I was on ran into the buffers at Victoria station. A hard, sudden jolt occurred, sending everything in the galley onto the floor. Crockery smashed, wines, spirits, glasses broken. The train was taken out of service and the crew had the job of cleaning up.

One night the 11 pm Victoria to Brighton, travelling at about 60 mph, jumped the rails about one mile north of Hassocks. Luckily the driver managed to halt. The bogies were pushed up through the floor of the first two coaches. It was pouring with rain and blowing a gale, and all the passengers and crew had to walk along the track to Hassocks station, along with Max Miller, who wasn't very pleased.

Looking out of the window going over the tall viaduct near Balcombe, I thought what a disaster if the train jumped the rails at sixty or seventy mph, and crashed way down into the fields below.

Again, a Pullman unit I was on ran into the rear of a train outside London Bridge Station. Back in the car, whisky, gin etc crashed over in the pantry, and every item shot out everywhere. Quite a jolt. Eventually the unit was shunted to New Cross Gate sidings. I went to the front to inspect the damage, and the cab was just a tangled mess. The driver was killed instantly.

Often there were suicides of people throwing themselves in front of trains. One I remember at Haywards Heath, when a man's shoe and shattered leg ended up under the Pullman car. The whole train would be taken out of service. If a suicide had taken place somewhere along the line, the train would slow down, and looking out to the other track, you would see four policemen with a large tarpaulin sheet walking along, and another two policemen with gloves on, picking up remains and throwing them into the sheet. Not a pretty sight.

Often carriage doors would be left open and an oncoming train would smash into it, shattering windows.

More than once an axle, either under the Pullman car or a carriage, would overheat. This was called a hot box. Smoke and the smell of hot metal would seep into the Pullman car. The train would crawl along to the nearest station and passengers transferred to a relief train. It used to be a bit of a scramble collecting cash from Pullman passengers for refreshments etc which they had partaken of.

Another fault often happening was a flat tyre. Suddenly a bang-bang, continuous, would be heard. The cause was the iron brake-shoe holding fast onto the steel brake-band around the wheel, thereby distorting the brake lining. Again the unit was taken out of service and a light steam-engine would pull the train into sidings and await repairs.

The Company had a lot of trouble with race gangs. Race specials were part of Pullman service, sometimes not very profitable, and after the racing, many race-goers were drunk on getting aboard. I was on a race train from Plumpton to Victoria. Crowds swarmed into the car and corridors, all demanding teas etc. This was the era of the razor gangs. A drunken race-goer, big and rough, demanded a seat in the Pullman. Staff tried to ease him into the corridor, but this lout pushed his way into the car, picking up tea-pots and smashing the table-tops. All hell was let loose. An attendant pulled the communication cord and the train came to a halt. The driver and guard came along the track, phoned from a box, and on arriving at Haywards Heath Station, police came aboard and took the said person off the train. During the rumpus, not one race-goer or bookie raised a hand to control this person.

I remember another drunken fight in the corridors with windows smashed. Fights often occurred in compartments, breaking windows and lights. The train would stop at the next signal box, information passed on, and at the next station police would board the train.

A regular traveller on the 8 am Brighton to Victoria used to come to the Pullman Car and order two large whiskies. He drank this down with shaking hand with some of the drink trickling down his neck. Then he would order the same again. Evidently he worked on the Stock Exchange, and was brilliant at his job.

Orders from Chief Office were that corridor attendants had to canvas every compartment for refreshments. Very often an attendant including myself would open a compartment door with all the blinds pulled down, and surprise a loving couple, well into the throes of love making. Refreshments were declined. I have canvassed Max Miller in a first class compartment and embarrassed him at the same time by finding him in a compromising position with his secretary. She travelled with him quite a lot. I remember on the 5.25 pm Victoria to Brighton in a first class compartment on a Friday night, a business man, well the worse for drink, with a gorgeous female. Sitting next to the man, she had both her breasts outside her dress, and he was fondling her. Strange as it may seem, there were other business men in the same compartment, but the female didn't seem too bothered. Another of those dirty weekends in Brighton, which were the talk of the day.

Any damage to Pullman Cars such as broken windows etc, and they would be shunted to the Pullman works at Preston Park, Brighton.

How true I do not know, but non-stop trains from London to Brighton switch off the motors and coast down from Haywards Heath to about Clayton tunnel.

The end of an era

In general, all the crews were good and hard-working lads, very pally. It was a pleasure to work alongside them, apart from long hours.

Alas, some crew members were to lose their lives in the oncoming war. Time moved on and after the war the Pullman Car Co. came to an end. Now all the Pullman Cars except the Brighton Belle have gone. Some of the cars were scrapped, others sold as caravans, small cafes, summer-houses and various other modes of use.

The Orient Express, now traversing the European Continent, is the only train in these modern times alike to the Pullman Cars. This train is all Pullman Cars (steam stock) but well renovated, and giving first class service.

Modern times. The railways provide buffet cars, not a patch on a Pullman unit. Gone has the glory of first-class service, of comfort and good food, never to be seen again on

the Southern Region of British Rail.

Copyright QueenSpark Books 1991
www.queensparkbooks.org.uk