

## AN APPRECIATION OF PROFESSOR TONY MELLOWS

By Derek Mauri (at the school 1947-1953)

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**Professor Tony Mellows**

With interest I read in the 2018 *Old Croydonian* the report of the visit to the Priory of the Order of St. John and particularly the details of the remarkable career that Tony Mellows built for himself. I knew Tony and, for a while, we were inseparable friends and reading his obituary took my memories back to that September day in 1947 when approximately a hundred boys congregated at The Crescent: the year's new intake.

I was allocated to Form 1P, Mr Parkinson, whose practice it was to arrange his class in alphabetical order of surname with Baney in the far left corner, following through the alphabet to finish with Woods at the right end of the front row; so it was that Derek Mauri and Tony Mellows came to sit together. At this point let me say that Tony was a lad of ample proportions and quickly received the nickname of 'Tubby', and that is how, with affection, I choose to remember him. We soon became acclimatised to the realities of being at Selhurst as well as to each other's likes, dislikes and interests as our friendship began to form. Like most eleven-year olds at that time we collected stamps, were interested in Scouting, eventually both becoming members of the 66<sup>th</sup> Croydon Sea Scout Troop, and above all we were both fascinated by railways and trains. Yes, we were train spotters, eventually extending our interests to buses, trolleybuses and trams!

Initially, our base of operations was East Croydon station, on the long-closed footpath that ran towards Park Hill on the east side of the line. It was a time when the whole Fairfield area was still undeveloped; before the Halls, College, car parks and underpasses were built and new roads laid out.

It wasn't long before our interests expanded and, on our bikes, we ventured further: to Beckenham Junction to see the trains to East Kent, still steam hauled, electrification not having penetrated east of Chatham. There was also the Continental traffic, with trains like the all-pullman *Golden Arrow*. In the opposite direction we explored as far as Wimbledon for trains to Southampton, more boat trains, the *Bournemouth Belle* and trains to the West Country - the *Atlantic Coast Express* finished up at Ilfracombe and Plymouth and many places in between!

In 1947 Croydon, Beckenham and Wimbledon were Southern Railway, soon to become the Southern Region of the nationalised British Railways, but other railways beckoned, and a ten

pence (4½p) half fare ticket on a 68 bus took us to Euston Station (London, Midland and Scottish) and after a short walk along Euston Road to St Pancras (also LMS) and Kings Cross (London North Eastern). Except for one platform at Euston used by electric trains everything else from all three stations was a steam-hauled Mecca in our eyes. It was at Kings Cross that two twelve year old boys experienced a Rite of Passage when they were privileged, for the first time, to witness the magnificent spectacle of a spotless blue-liveried, streamlined 'Gresley A4 Pacific' perform a beautiful ear-splitting symphony of thundering steam, smoke and hot oil as, with the sure footed grace of a ballerina, it lifted fifteen coaches of an Edinburgh express off into Gasworks Tunnel to climb the bank to Belle Isle, Finsbury Park and on Northwards. One of these, *Mallard*, holds the World Speed Record for steam traction of 126mph.

Of all the London termini we visited my favourite was Paddington, the only terminus in London for *God's Wonderful Railway* – the Great Western. (Western Region of BR). Unlike many of the London termini where trains were presented with a stiff climb almost from the end of the platform, the line from Paddington, laid out by Isambard Kingdom Brunel in 1838, was like a billiard table – almost flat all the way from London to Bristol, so there were fewer explosive departures. Nonetheless it was still a stirring sight to witness the magnificent spectacle of a beautiful Brunswick-green liveried 'King' or 'Castle', its brass work polished to perfection, its footplate clean enough to eat your dinner on, its exhaust echoing from the surrounding buildings like shots from a gun, set out with its train of spotless chocolate and cream coaches bound for exotic places like Penzance, Bath, Cardiff, Birkenhead, and Haverfordwest!

Every station had its 'spotters platform', a platform which gave free access to the best view of the general comings and goings of arriving and departing trains. It is amazing in the current tyranny of *'elf and safety'* to remember how perhaps twenty or thirty boys, of all ages, could congregate on a totally unprotected platform-end, inches from passing trains, without being bothered by authority, but then in those days we knew how to behave.

From trains our interest soon extended, via the Underground, to the other equipment operated by London Transport. Very few new buses had been produced during the War. Consequently in the late forties and even into the fifties LT was maintaining its services with a fleet of mostly old, obsolete and down-right 'clapped out' vehicles and we saw it as our task to ferret out those ancient veterans, wherever they were, before they were consigned to the scrap heap and to history. To do this our travels took us north, south, east and west across London. As well as the central area red buses there were the green country buses and in our time we visited most of the LT bus garages, from Watford to Sevenoaks and Epping to Woking – there wasn't much of the system we missed. This gave us an encyclopaedic knowledge of the lesser known byeways of the City. Even today I can often come up with an idiosyncratic route from A to B, a useful facility when drivers or guards are playing silly b\*\*\*\*\*s!

But nothing lasts and by the time we reached the fourth form other calls on our time limited our chasing after buses and trains. Exams were becoming a serious consideration and my close association with Tubby really ended when we moved into the fifth form, he to 5 Arts to achieve his career target, maintained since I had first met him, of 'the Law'; while I went to 5 Science with vague thoughts of the regular army. Tubby would have still been at Selhurst when, on the day I was 17½, I enlisted in the Royal Military Police and was sent to look after the Suez Canal for Her Majesty – but that's another story.

I have maintained my interest in trains and still read the *Railway Magazine* every month. It is amazing how often items in its pages remind me of two boys in their school caps and short trousers, happily munching our sandwiches as the trains passed by.

Tubby, sorry that you've run out of road. Sincere congratulations on your magnificent career achievements while you were down here. It was a privilege in that special time in our formative years to be your friend: perhaps somewhere in Heaven there is a platform-end wreathed in smoke and steam where one day we will meet again.

D.J.M

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