

Billy Baldwin

Time	Topic / Event
0.00	<i>Intro – name and address of interviewee</i>
0.17	<i>Q – When born? 8th March 1925. How old now? 93</i>
0.24	<i>Q – Where born? 9 Station Road, Lydney.</i>
0.33	<i>Q – What did your family do? Father a fireman with Great Western Railway, originated from Oxford. Married mother who was a local girl – Kear. Her half-brother was Harold.</i>
1.20	<i>Long pause</i>
1.27	<i>Q – That was your mother? - That's where you were born - Where did you go to school? Lydney Council School, from age five. Went to Barnstaple – father was sent there as an engine driver in 1935. He worked in Barnstaple and Taunton.</i>
2.18	When he worked at Lydney he would do Lydney to Taunton one day and back the next.
2.33	<i>Q – Did you enjoy school? It was Lydney Secondary Modern School but called the Craft School. Headmaster was Mr Allen, then Mr Cox.</i>
2.58	<i>Q – When did you leave school? Left in 1939, at age of 14. Worked six weeks with school mistress's husband, Fred Hale, a local builder. 'Found it heavy going' – e.g. putting chimneys on rooves. Equipment was stored at Tutnalls and was taken by hand cart. Sounds like a hard job? After six weeks took an apprenticeship at Watts Factory Limited, where Tesco's now stands. Did 2 years and 5 months there. Starting wage was 4s per week. Went to 6s per week after 12 months. Third year was on 8s per week!</i>
5.04	Pretty hectic there. Sold a lot of accumulator charges, high and low tension batteries. Had old steam radios. Most people couldn't afford radio sets which were £4 10s so would pay a deposit then 2'6 per week but often couldn't afford even that. Then they would be reclaimed.
5.52	<i>That was when the war was on? Did it change things at all? The American Army was in Lydney – had a camp nearby. Did you see much of the Americans in town? Not a lot. Friends with some.</i>
6.42	<i>What did you do next? Applied for job as an engine cleaner at Lydney Motive Power department on Church Road. Had a cursory medical at the engine shed. Then had to see Dr Tom Wallace, the railway doctor in Cardiff – he was a rugby international at that time. Then went with father to Swindon, at a B and B for 7'6 in Park House, Swindon. Passed a medical there. Think a letter came, saying I could start.</i>
8.09	In engine cleaning days worked with Russell Slade, Wallace Titchmeadow...(pause) ...Nelmes, Wilson. (Mentioned a box containing material related to this period).
8.50	<i>Q – Where were the sheds where you cleaned the engines? Just below the church. The lines ran from the yard into the Tin Plate works.</i>
9.09	<i>Q – What did the job involve? Engine cleaning. One would clean the tops, with soap and water, next would clean the tops with cotton waste. You would climb the steps on the side and clean it off, or kneel on a sack to clean the interior frame.</i>
9.58	The locomotive engine is divided into two parts. A left hand engine and a right hand engine. All the knowledge about the engine was taken from the left hand wheel.

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	The left hand side rod was on the bottom and the big end on the top. The other followed a quarter of a turn behind (gestural demonstration).
10.39	Also would clean under the bottom of the boiler – all the connecting rods. Cleaned everything the driver came into contact with when oiling the engine. Two other men cleaned all the couplings.
11.38	The shed men cleaned out the smoke box. <i>Was engine cleaning more important than what the shed men did?</i> That was the start of promotion to being a footplate man. Ted was a shed man – they took over when the men came in exhausted at the end of a shift. They would drop the fires, load coal into baskets and tip it into the bunker. Outside was a ten ton sand pit. A cleaning duty was to put sand over a fire to dry it out. The next morning the engine would have two sand buckets and two sand hoppers on the front and others (gestural demonstration). To make sure it was running properly, would pull a lever and tap a pipe.
13.45	Were allowed $\frac{3}{4}$ hour to prep the engine. For some engines were allowed an hour (e.g. for a 16 or a 25). Used to go via Severn Bridge as far as Stoke Gifford.
14.08	On a Saturday night, after crossing the Severn Bridge the swing bridge was closed on the Sharpness – Gloucester canal – so couldn't get back that way. Would either go to Berkeley Road South or Berkeley Road. Initially would go over Tender first from the Lydney Shed - Lydney Junction – Severn Bridge – Sharpness (gestured to show use of points) meaning engine was at front to go to Stoke Gifford.
15.05	<i>Q – Were you taking the engines out after cleaning them?</i> Tuesdays – Fridays did that, but on a Saturday came back via Gloucester on a Sunday morning. That was often Tender first, open to the elements with just a sheet on the top. A long trip!
16.00	<i>Q – Why did you go to Stoke Gifford?</i> Taking FoD coal and brought back the empties. <i>Was this when you were on the footplate – after you finished as an engine cleaner?</i> Yes. <i>Did you see the Brabazon's planes there?</i> Yes. Saw them (unclear)
16.55	On odd occasion, closed the Severn Tunnel – called it the Hole (long pause) <i>They closed it?</i> Occasionally at weekend – probably for maintenance. <i>Why was it called the Hole?</i> Don't know.
17.35	<i>Recap. Q – How long did you carry on delivering coal?</i> Workforce was divided into links. First of all you went into the Private link - shunting, in Lydney Yard or Lydney Junction Yard. Then you would move into the Goods' link for 2 years. If you passed you were promoted to the Passenger, doing push and pull from Lydney Town, to Berkeley Road and back again. <i>When were you promoted to that job?</i> Well, had 18 months working at Gloucester Shed. (wanted to show interviewer a book)
19.27	<i>You're giving a very interesting history. Q - about the job going to Berkeley and back.</i> Did two years before that.
19.48	<i>Q – Frequency of trains going over the bridge?</i> 7.10 in the morning from Lydney Town to Junction. This connected with the one going over the bridge. Another train went from there up to Gloucester and connected with the London Paddington express. It then came back, allowing the express to pass. Then carried on to Cinderford for about 11 a.m. Then came back Cinderford – Staple Edge – Eastern United Colliery – Soudley – through the tunnels –to Bullo Pill. <i>Through the Hay Tunnel?</i> Yes.
21.28	<i>Q – How did engines manage the gradient there?</i> No problem – needed brakes coming down. Guard and his assistant in the brake van would use the hand brake. Used to stop in Soudley. Needed to use the accelerator to move the train from Soudley on to Bullo Pill.
22.23	At Bullo Pill, before the main line, was a sand drag – an inverted track with sand, so if you did come off the track would go into that and not onto the main line. Would

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	stop for water at Bullo Pill on way to Gloucester and then more water in Gloucester. The coaches had gas lighting, so had to go in for gas at Gloucester.
23.14	<i>Q – How was the gas carried on the train?</i> In cylinders in the roof sections. There were a lot of young firemen from South Wales at that Yard, who slept in camp coaches in the sidings at Gloucester Central, rather than in lodgings.
23.52	A bridge used to go across to the LMS (<i>London Midlands and Scottish</i>) station - there is a Superstore there now.
24.06	<i>Q – Type of engines?</i> 20 class, a small 0-6-0 tank. An auto engine was used on the push and pull – that was a 14 class. And there was a 23 that used to go to Taunton. In father's day it went from Lydney to Taunton, stop the night and come back the next day. Later on used to work an 11 day fortnight. Would work from Tuesday to the following Saturday, then have a couple of shifts off.
25.05	<i>Q – On the push and pull how many journeys across the river would you do?</i>About 4. (<i>Q re passengers</i>) Schoolchildren came from Berkeley area to Lydney Grammar School. They came in the morning and back in the afternoon. Well behaved – odd occasions of vandalism – on the Severn Bridge itself. The bridge was a single line. Used to pick up a token at Otter's Pool junction, and hand it over at Severn Bridge. Pick up another which was left at Sharpness and get another (token) either to Berkeley Road or a bit further along if going to Bristol.
27.00	<i>Q – Re. sea traffic at Sharpness?</i> Mainly timber. The docks had its own engine. Stan was the driver there. It was a little saddle tank. Stan was a railway enthusiast – would follow the train on his motorbike.
27.40	<i>Q – Re. who else used the push and pull?</i> Local people visiting relatives, and Forest people who worked at Sharpness Docks. Sometimes came across the Berkeley Hunt on the track with their dogs and horses. Had to slow down, and go by quietly.
28.20	<i>Q – Re. where the train stopped?</i> Only at stations. Quite a big staff at Sharpness (<i>photo</i>) – Mr Jock Anderson was stationmaster, a stickler for time. Wouldn't wait for passengers even if they were close to the train!
29.09	<i>Q – Re. how long on push and pull?</i> A few years, then moved to a better paid job, as had two small children. Wages when started was 57s per week. The war was on, giving a 25s bonus for an adult, or 12/6 for a person up to the age of 21.
29.55	<i>Q – When married?</i> 1948. Eldest son was born 1950. Applied for council house in Lydney when second child on the way. First one allocated was a dump, so turned it down and chose to wait. Got a brand new house on Allaston Way. Lived there around 20 years. Later, after children left home, wife wanted a bungalow. Not offered one, but got accommodation opposite Greyhound Pub, on top two floors. Found it too noisy due to the pub, and moved to present home.
31.37	<i>Q – Re. what was transported by rail during the war?</i> Moved ammunition for the American Army, who had a depot adjacent to Lydney Docks. The officers in particular got friendly with the locals. The ammunition was taken from Lydney Junction to Lydney Town, then to Tufts Junction, where a turn went onto the Oakwood Branch, which went to the Princess Royal Colliery, or could go right through Whitecroft, and Pillowell through tunnels at Moseley Green then another couple of miles to Acorn Patch where the Americans were based. Used to take high explosives and mustard gas which were stored in the woods between Speech House and the Dilke. Did this a lot. Didn't see it as dangerous.
34.07	One incident that happened – Saturday – set out from Lydney with two engines, but this was considered too dangerous – if they broke away the rear engine couldn't hold them. So had two engines at the rear and one in front. A semi-novice guard was on, with the regular guard. Used to wait to be signalled onto the mineral loop line. The novice guard was riding on the second engine and uncoupled. They started

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	<p>running backwards. The signalman at Tufts Junction pulled the points, which diverted it off onto a sand drag, on last bend before Whitecroft, rather than it rolling back down into Lydney. There were two whistles on the engine – the normal one and the brake one, which made a deeper sound which indicated all was not well. Piled on top of one another in the woods, with the brake van on the top. The sheeting covering the canisters tore off due to the weight and water went over everything. The guard emerged shouting ‘gas’ but it was ordinary rain water that had filled the sheets! The Americans arrived to clear it all out, as secret. They were black labourers who cleared it out.</p>
37.55	<p><i>Q – How were the black Americans treated – did they do worse jobs?</i> Imagine so. Second class citizens, not allowed into town. <i>(Were the wagons damaged?)</i> Not aware (of them having been damaged). All disappeared - wouldn’t know it had happened. <i>(Q - Age at the time?)</i> 17.</p>
38.44	<p><i>Q – Re. prisoners of war?</i> Saw a lot of them. Number 1 Salvage Depot - traces still visible. A lot of locals squatted there after the war. <i>(Q - Were there prisoners there too?)</i> They came from Broadwell – mainly Italian. Nissan huts still there – where the Italians used to carry out repairs to the American’s boots and to uniforms, for reissue.</p>
40.00	<p><i>Q – People lived there after the war - why?</i> Lack of accommodation. Worked for Watts Tyre for many years after. When on nights a fitter lived there. No light there. Not many people lived there, but a few did. Vic Morris was one early resident there.</p>
40.59	<p><i>Q – Re working for Watts – was this due to family – how long for?</i> Until retirement.</p>
41.19	<p><i>Q – Re. collapse of the Severn Bridge?</i> (Long pause) no distinct recollection. Living at Harrison Way then. Lost Gas supply due to the bridge being damaged (pipe came adjacent to the track). People were supplied with storage heaters. <i>(Q - Did you know people working on railway at the time?)</i> Yes. <i>(Q - Impact on their jobs?)</i> (Pause) Couldn’t cross to work. Affected the painting gangs who painted the bridge end to end to maintain it.</p>
42.30	<p><i>Checking BB ok to continue.</i> Yes – haven’t got instant recall. Only went to Watts to get more money. Liked the railway – it was needs must. £7 15s per week was the top money, and an engine driver’s top money was £9 per week. At Watt’s the wage was less, but lots of overtime opportunities. Those that wanted money included ex miners from Princess Royal and Cannop collieries. Would work 7 p.m. to 8 a.m. Monday to Friday, on Saturdays would go 7 at night – 8 in the morning, then another five hours on Sundays. Could earn £9 per week. A lot of hours.</p>
44.24	<p><i>Q – re work role at Watts?</i> Buffing – removing old tread from the tyres with a rasp on a drum. Solution – this was initially by hand with a brush and a pot. Then would spray – another saga – a fire burnt out a lot of the factory. There was a drying tunnel: steam was generated that would blow the carcass of the tyre up, so once tyres were buffed they went on a track, which went the length of the factory with fans above, blowing hot air to dry. The operator at the other end would take them off the track, and spray them with a gun. Then they went to a section where the tread rubber was applied. This was initially brought in from outside contractors, like Firestone but later produced own. Employed a chemist who compounded own mix.</p>
46.32	<p>Owen James was in charge, then Mark Creed from Lydbrook came. He left to work in the Outer Hebrides. A clever man. <i>(Q – Why did he go to Outer Hebrides?)</i> Don’t know. Clive Rickards worked there as well. He used to go to Bradford on Avon, and Melksham. I did stint at Melksham learning compounding, drug weighing and assembly work. Finished up working on a Farrel Bridge mill extruder – fed raw strip in one end, which came out the other end as a fishtail. I made all the dies for donkey’s years, in sizes for different tyres. Had a rack with three (dies) for each size</p>

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	as rubber could react differently so had to choose right one on the day. From head of extruder rubber went through a solution bath – called Solvent 10. This was made from a petrol store underground. Then cellophane from British Cellophane at Bridgwater was used – it came by bulk in various widths. We did veneers. The extruders were 18 inches wide, so we produced rubber up to 16 ½ inches. Tractor main tyres were 11x36 – that was the big ones. The front tyres 3.15x19, that sort of size.
49.49	<i>Q – Were you doing that at retirement?</i> No, was in charge of mixing, extrusion, the whole caboodle. Enjoyed it immensely.
50.23	<i>Q – Re. railway – you missed that?</i> Yes, every day was different, saw different people, and did different activities.
50.38	<i>Q – To explain what a footplate man did on an average day?</i> A driver and fireman would arrive, according to the roster sheet. At Gloucester our first shift was at half past midnight! At Lydney the first one was Lydney Town shunt, Lydney Yard, Lydney Town, and Princess Royal Colliery. Job number 2 was Cannop Colliery. Number 3, was Coleford and Whitecliff Branch, then right through to Serridge. From there a branch went down to Lydbrook Junction, for a connection with the Hereford train. All interconnected.
52.19	<i>The board would tell you where you were working?</i> Yes. A call boy was used, one of the cleaners, would work nights from 8 p.m. Lydney was in complete darkness so used to go by sound as much as anything. Once the crew got out, thinking it was Lydney but it was Awre Junction! Sometimes would try to hop off moving train and run. (Mentioned incident involving Donald Powell).
54.28	<i>Reminder - Prompt re duties of work role?</i> Checked water levels in the gate. Then pulled the bottom lever to see the level of water in boiler – did it go down or stay where it was. Also checked contents of pannier tanks with the taps. There were injector controls – the left hand one caused water to flow by gravity from the saddle tank into the injector. There was a blower valve which kept the fire going, it would suck all the flames away. (<i>query</i>) There was a pricker, which was a long handle with a right angle on the bottom. Also a sword pricker, curved, which went over the base of the fire. Usually two dampers on a firebox, a front and back one – the number depends on the engine. You want air to flow in, to keep fire going. Had to use shovel to look inside firebox, and take out shield and smoke plate. Used a paraffin lamp, and got into the firebox backwards, not good for claustrophobia as sometimes someone might shut the doors behind you. Used a wire brush and cleaner to clear out the smoke tubes at the top, and the smoke plate which was at the front. The smoke box was opened to clean through with a long rod. Also did the spindle glands - had to clean and then tighten up nuts in these – the glands opened when regulator was open. Could travel 2 ¼ inches up and back again. Had to be locked in position to prevent blow back of steam.
1.00.00	Once outside would climb via roof onto the handrail, on top of the tank, to insert the water column bag into one side, with other side open to allow observation of the level rising. Tried to avoid it flowing over. Once fell and broke head at Gloucester on a 14 class engine. In the dark with a flare lamp, threw lid back and fell, onto head. Once left a locomotive outside the shed, after filling the tank, Handbrake not on firmly enough, ended up in bottom yard. On occasion one would run right through and out the end of the shed.
1.02.10	<i>Q – Re. time on the footplate – role once journey started?</i> Checked steam pressure was 165 pounds to square inch – different for larger engines. Not allowed to blow off through safety valve until out onto the track. Backed onto the train, checked dampers and gauges. Once moving off, needed to check rear of the train – brake

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	van and wagons. On the Coleford Branch had 18 wagons, 36 for Cannop, fewer for Serridge. Used to call at Milkwall, Fred Watkins at Sling, Coleford Old Station, Coleford New Station and Whitecliff Quarries. Also went to Drybrook, through a tunnel which had been used for munitions during the war. Took munition to a quarry through Drybrook. Stopped at Steam Mills, where Wiggins had bitumen tanks for roads, then down to Bilson Junction,
1.04.41	<i>Q – What did you do at Fred Watkins?</i> Delivered boilers mainly. Constructing railways in India at the time – took track from Fred Watkins in Sling up to Gloucester, from where it was taken to the docks, for India. One of the Watkins worked at Clifford Hughes chemist shop (Lydney).
1.05.37	<i>Q – Refocussing on role?</i> Leaving Lydney guard raised flag to confirm all connected. If going to Princess Royal or Acorn Patch would stop at Tufts Junction, and await signal. For Scorn Patch went right past Dilke Hospital, coming out at Bilson Yard,
1.06.30	<i>Q – re going to Princess Royal?</i> Went in with 36 empties. 18 at a time went in a siding. The others were taken under the scree where the coal was loaded. Needed to use the brakes once loaded, sometimes with a brake van front and rear for 36 empties, but just one van for 18.
1.07.21	<i>Q – Re gradients in the Forest?</i> There it was 1 in 30, some were a lot steeper. The steepest was between Fetter Hill and the top before dropping down into Coleford.
1.08.00	<i>Q – Re stationmasters e.g. at Soudley?</i> Mr and Mrs Roebottom lived at the crossing gates – he used to come out with hat on as if drunk. Used to act the fool! There was a siding there where the wagons were backed in.
1.08.57	<i>Q – Re meals while working?</i> Very little during the war. Bread and fish paste sandwich – have done a 16 hour shift on this and a piece of cake. Full board and lodging then was 7/6 – 13 s for 7 days full board and lodgings.
1.09.59	<i>Q – Any black market for food?</i> There was but people weren't generally aware of it. Someone at work made ice cream, so odd bit could be got there. Had fixed allowances of tea and sugar and soap - to wash. <i>(So generally had sandwiches at work?)</i> Some drivers would share their home killed bacon, and eggs. Some cooked chips on the shovel. They were long handled and some had ends for chiselling out (in the firebox). Shape meant you could cook egg and chips on it. Phil Davis, (my) driver used to get shovel clean and cook and ate his breakfast – not many would share. Fred Weller did share. Can't recall feeling hungry.
1.12.32	Longest ever shift was 16 hours and 50 minutes. By law had to have a 12 hour rest between shifts. The call boy would knock on your door, an hour or so before the shift started. <i>(At your home?)</i> Yes. That was a call boy's duty – also had to make a list to know who to call up - Joe Plumb and Frank Butler, Fred Butler, Arthur Butler, who lived above Lydney chapel, Jack Nichols. The only ones who didn't get a call out were those living on Aylburton Common. Might get a message if needed urgently e.g. the boiler washer might get called in from Viney Hill.
1.14.41	<i>Q – Was there a union?</i> Yes, ASLEF – Associative Society for Locomotive Enginemen and Firemen. A few 'black sheep' were in NUR (National Union of Railwaymen). <i>(Q- Was ASLEF a good Union)</i> Yes. Had representatives – looked after us, put our points of view. <i>(Did they get you better conditions?)</i> . Started on low wage, with small increments. By 10 years were on the top rate of £7 15s or £9 for a top engine driver. Apart from overtime that was the limit.
1.16.01	<i>Q – Going back, did you hear any bombing raids in the war?</i> Used to go up by Lydney Hospital from home in Springmeadow Drive, could see the flak in the sky, and could hear the drone of bombers but not see them. Would watch flashes over Filton and Bristol. <i>(They were heavily bombed)</i> There were the odd one or two when working in Gloucester. The nearest – visible until a few years ago, one in (?) Purley

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	on way out of Lydney, right hand side, used to be a search light battery at a farm, where there were craters in the field, where bombs were dropped to get rid of them, and the same thing at Whitecroft. Quite interesting times.
1.17.37	<i>Q – When on railway, what were happiest memories?</i> On Gloucester – Cinderford railcar. Was courting at the time and would catch railcar back from Cinderford, jumping on at Staple Edge and out at Lydney Junction. Broke a lot of rules! They would stop at Staple Edge knowing I would be there. By Eastern United Colliery. Went to the local pub (<i>Glovers?</i>) Yes, used to court a girl – eldest daughter of G A Chas Hicks, the local photographer, who was station master at Ruspidge. That died a natural death.
1.19.50	<i>Q - Sounds as though they were happy days.</i> There was a general shortage of females – had ‘free range’!
1.20.04	<i>Thanks and close.</i>

Glossary

Railway Links:

This is a level of ability, into which railway staff are classed, with promotion as described from goods upwards.

Brabazon Aircraft:

Manufactured at Filton. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bristol_Filton_Airport

‘The three-bay Brabazon Hangar was built in the late 1940s under the direction of T. P. O’Sullivan. The hangar doors and the railway level crossing for the aircraft were the largest in the world at the time.’

Farrel Bridge

Company now part of Pelmar, specialist in manufacture of machinery used in processing rubber products. <http://www.pelmar.com/about-pelmar/about-us/>

British Cellophane https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Cellophane

‘In 1937 **British Cellophane** set up production on a site in Bridgwater, when unemployment levels in the town were high. The new buildings covered 59 acres (24 ha) of the former Sydenham Manor fields, and had direct railway access.

After the war the Bridgwater factory returned to producing cellophane, with its products exported worldwide.’