

Gladys Garlick joined the railways in 1940 as a lad porter. In 1943 she became one of the two first female guards appointed by the LNER. She was on duty as a guard when a V2 rocket hit the tracks before her train in October 1944.

Extract 1: Gladys recounts her first role as a lad porter at Bowes Park station between 1940 and 1942 (4m 30s)

Source of extract: File NAROH2003-23-01_AO_Garlick Gladys, from 00:20:40 to 00:26:10, with edits

Gladys: My dad said "Oh well, I think they want a lad porter down at the station." So he had a - - Bowes Park station, that came under Wood Green [note: now known as Alexandra Palace station, in North London], which my father was at. And the station master did the two lots, so he said "Oh, I'll have a word with the station master." So the station master, who was a Mr Constable, said "Oh well, send her along and I'll have a look at her." And, you know - - so he said "Oh, she looks a strong enough lass." So I started as a lad porter. There was two other lads there beside me. And we did shift work, you know, on the platform. Gradually it ended up that the other two - - I can't remember - - must have been called up, cos they went. And I stayed there until I was 20 and then they said "Oh, we're very sorry, but you're 20. You've got to be a senior porter now." And they moved me to Grange Park.

Interviewer: Well, let's stick with Bowes Park first of all. What do you recall of Bowes Park Station in those days?

G: Well, it's an island platform there. And coming from Wood Green, all the other stations, the platforms are at either side. So when they get to Bowes Park, people used to get out the wrong side of the - - in the dark. And they had a lot of these enamel hoardings. And people used to get out -- it's a bit funny now. But they used to get out the wrong side of the train. [Laughs] So we had quite a lot of problems with that, you know, cos we had to call out "This side out, Bowes Park, this side out" sort of thing. Because they used to see the reflection - - I mean the carriages were all dimmed, weren't they. And they used to see the reflection on this hoardings and get out - -

I: The wrong side.

G: - - side. And then of course we had to sort of rescue them. [Laughs]. With a ladder, to get them - - cos they'd be on the bank, as it were, you see.

I: What do you recall of the train service?

G: It was normal. We never had - - you know, when I read about these places being hours late, and that - - it was normal. We never used to have a lot of bother. And admittedly I suppose it was on the line to Hertford North. It was a side - - It wasn't on the main line, was it... No, it was normal, really. I used to do the - - whitewash the edges and trim the lamps, and things like that, you know.

I: And what do you recall of Mr Constable? The station master. What sort of a person was he?

G: He was a - - jolly. Fat, jolly man. Very nice. Fatherly, you know? He used to sort of come round and...you know, he was a very nice man, very fatherly he was. Very nice.

I: And so there was him - -

G: Yes.

I: And the three, the three lads...(Inaudible)

G: Lads. And the - - Yeah. That's right. And then there was Vic. He was, what, 30-ish I suppose. About 30-ish, something like that. And then there was -- the old chap. He was a nice old boy, he lived at Hatfield. He always reminded me of Grumpy, of the seven - well, he had the biggest nose, like that. But he was a dear old soul. And they were very good then. And funnily enough, in the booking office, my friend, she got the job in the booking office there. With Bill, yeah, the other - - she worked with the other one. So she was quite near as well.

I: So you were at Bowes Park from 1940 to 1942, when you were 20.

G: Yeah.

I: And then you had to move.

G: That's right.

I: So, during those two years, what impact was there of the war on Bowes Park?

G: Well, not a lot really. I suppose we were lucky, really. There wasn't a lot, you know. We had the blackout, and that. It wasn't really - - it didn't seem to - -

I: But the railway line in that area didn't suffer any damage.

G: No. The nearest was, they had one up at Wood Green. Cos it was a junction, Wood Green. In a place they called the Khyber Pass, for some reason. And I think that was bombed. And I think they bombed near the tunnel. There was a big tunnel there, on the mainline. I think they bombed it there. But there wasn't a lot up our way at all, not really. Until, you know, later on.

I: So your duties consisted of, as you say, getting people in and out of the trains.

G: That's right.

I: Watching the edges of the platforms.

G: That's right.

I: And attending to the lamps.

G: Yes. Cleaning the way - -

I: And what other things did you do?

G: Ticket collecting. Cos they had another footbridge over the end of the platform that went over. And when - - during the rush hour, you went over there and collected the tickets as the people came off the trains. And of course kept the waiting rooms tidy, that sort of - -

I: And tell me - - you said you worked shifts.

G: Yes.

I: So what sort of shifts did you have to work?

NAROH2003-23, Gladys Garlick

Selected extracts and transcripts for NAROH page on Railway Museum website

G: We had an early and a late shift. And then a middle shift, where you came home and did a split turn. You did the rush hour both ends. And then when the boys went, they just melted it down to a split shift. So that I'd - - you helped either side of the rush hour.

I: And were the two boys replaced, or not?

G: No, no, no.

I: So you had more work for [inaudible]?

G: Well, yeah. Well, yes. It wasn't that arduous really. [Laughs]

Extract 2: Gladys' experience as a guard on LNER trains (3m 03s)

Source of extract: File NAROH2003-23-01_AO_Garlick Gladys, from 00:28:15 to 00:31:40, with edits

Interviewer: So how long were you then at Grange Park?

Gladys: I was there till 1943. And...one of the inspectors that used to live at Grange Park. And he came up one day cos he knew my father. And he said "Ooh," he said, "how would you like to be a guard?" So I said "Ooh, yeah," I said, "I really fancy that." So I went out then to be a guard. I was one of the first two on the LNER.

I: How did you have to prepare for that?

G: We did a fortnight up at Hatfield, at a school. They taught us about signals and rules and things like that. And then we learnt the road with another guard, you know. There was a bit of a bad feeling by some of the guards cos they thought it made their job look cheap. Well, I suppose in a way it's like my husband working to be a driver. You don't get - - don't jump straight into it, do you? You have to work your way up to get to be a guard. And they were - - some of them were a bit resentful of that. But on the whole they were all very good.

I: So what roads did you have to learn?

G: Well, up to Hertford North, and then up to Hatfield. And Welwyn Garden City on the mainline.

I: From Kings Cross.

G: From Kings Cross, yes. And I was actually stationed at Gordon Hill. There was four of us at Gordon Hill.

I: How long was your training before you were able to take charge of a train?

G: So, we had two weeks...

I: At Hatfield.

G: At Hatfield. And I think it wasn't long. About a month I think, not long, on the road.

I: So you became a guard. And tell me about some of the trains that you had to work.

G: Well, the morning trains. We used to do the busy trains in the morning actually from Kings Cross, had all the goods on them, you know? They used to be fish, boxes of fish. And, say, things for the Enfield - - for the small arms factory. In fact you had things on from nearly every station, all the way down the line. It was quite hard work actually. And there - -

I: Tell me a bit more about it. About the sort of composition of the trains, where all this material was stacked, and - -

G: Well, as I say, if you didn't get round to your train before, you know, in good time, they used to come - - the porters on Kings Cross used to come round with their trolleys and chuck everything in. Which meant you couldn't get it out, you know, very easily. So you had to be round there so that you could position it in the guard's brake how you wanted it to come out. Because it was no good having things for Hertford in the front, you know? So you had to be there to position everything.

I: So that the things to be unloaded first were the most accessible?

NAROH2003-23, Gladys Garlick

Selected extracts and transcripts for NAROH page on Railway Museum website

G: Exactly. Exactly. Cos you - - you more or less had to unload everything yourself. I mean, they never used - - very rarely come up and unload f - - You know, you had to do it on your own. And you'd get - - just got a knack with the fish boxes. Used to wiggle them forward and then just tip, and over they used to go. Only once did I - - one burst open. And all the fish and ice was all over the platform. [Laughs]

Extract 3: On 26 October 1944, Gladys was on duty as guard when a V2 rocket hit the tracks at the front of the train (3m 58s)

Source of extract: File NAROH2003-23-01_AO_Garlick Gladys, from 00:43:16 to 00:49:10, with edits

Gladys: It happened around teatime. I'd been up to C&A's in London with my mother. And I came back to go onto duty. And we were a bit late getting to Palmer's Green, we - - cos with the connection from Kings Cross, we started at Finsbury Park and you wait for the connection. And we were a couple of minutes late. And as we draw into Palmer's Green station, the train went (microphone disturbed by violent physical gesture) - - you know, like this. So I put on the handbrake. And I don't suppose that made any difference. But I automatically put the handbrake on. Anyway, we came to a stop. And I got out of the train and the first thing I saw was the two porter - - there was two sisters that were porters at Palmer's Green station. And their porter's room was - - there was a bridge across the platforms, and their porter's room was under the bridge. So it was where the guard's brake was. And they came up covered in soot, because the soot from the chimneys had come down and they were absolutely black. [Laughs] So we didn't really know what had happened. And as I walked along, there was paving stones on the roofs of the train. And glass, and all sorts of things all over the place, you know. Cos it was dark, dark-ish, so, it was bit of a muddle, as it were. And I'm gradually walking along. It took me about an hour, I think, to get down to the engine. And the only person that I remember was badly injured was a girl. And she had a, a nasty cut on her head. And there was nobody about. So I went up onto the road and there was an ambulance. And I've never really - - another thing I've never really understood, that I said "Oh, well I've got a badly injured person, can you come and pick her up?" And they said "Oh, we can't come onto the railway, it's private property." So they gave me a stretcher. One of those with two poles and material in between. They gave me that to take down to the station. They wouldn't come. So I took that down. We got her onto the platform, onto the stretcher, and got - - I got two passengers to take her up to the ambulance. So I never really saw the going of her, cos I stayed downstairs. But I never know why they refused to come really. But they said they couldn't come down, it was private property. And as I say, I made my way along, helping people out, and various things. Got down to the driver and fireman. He - - I can't remember his name, but he looked very shocked. He was very white. And the hole was huge at the bottom, - - front of the train. You could have got a bus in it quite easily, a double-decker bus quite easily in it. It was huge. I -- I don't remember going home. I must - they must have put buses on. But I can't remember that. I suppose I was in a bit of a shock myself. Can't remember that at all. But the next thing I remember, we were the first train over the hole. They'd filled it up in a day, and we were the first train over the next day.

Interviewer: So it took a day to fill it up.

G: Took a day to fill it up. And...there were crossings and that, what were blown up into the road and that.

I: And this was a V2 rocket.

G: That was a V2. And I think it was one of the first.

I: Yes, it was - - this was in 1944.

G: Yeah.

I: In the autumn or the winter.

NAROH2003-23, Gladys Garlick

Selected extracts and transcripts for NAROH page on Railway Museum website

G: Yeah. It must have been. Yes.

I: And the impact, the point of impact, was sort of in front of the engine.

G: In front of the engine. If we'd have been on time, we would have been leaving and I probably wouldn't be here today. Because it would have hit the train completely.

I: But the driver and the guard were - -

G: They were okay.

I: The driver and the fireman were - -

G: Yeah, they were okay. You would say they were shocked, obviously. Cos it must have been worse for them. Cos they must have [laughs] seen the blast, mustn't they?