

Great Western Railway employee hostels in London

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Introduction

In an earlier article I described how the Great Western Railway (GWR) helped provide estates of family houses for some of its employees in the London area.¹ To get a house on those estates, an employee had to be a married man. Single men could go on a waiting list, but, with rare exceptions, were not considered for accommodation until married.² This article describes how the GWR provided accommodation for single men in the London area during and after World War 2 (WW2) and, from a much earlier date, for single women refreshment room staff.

The background – railwaymen's hostels before WW2

From at least the 1870s several of the pre-grouping railway companies provided hostels at or near large main line engine sheds for footplate men on 'double home' turns, requiring a rest period before returning home. In 1941 the LMS London hostels were: Camden (90 beds), Willesden (79), Kentish Town (84), and Cricklewood (31).³ The LNER had a long-standing hostel at Stratford, but no beds are shown there for 1941. Of these, only Camden, a 1929 replacement, survives, converted into private flats, named Iron Bridge House (Figure 1).⁴

The LMS hostels were run by a resident Manager and Matron. Cooked meals were available there, or at a nearby shed canteen. There was no similar hostel at Kings Cross or at the GWR's Old Oak Common (OOC) shed. Men from other sheds booking off duty at these locations were expected to use a network of private lodgings. Lodgings tended to be with railway families (or widows) who were used to men arriving and departing at odd hours dictated by shifts. Single men living away from home found their own permanent lodgings, often in these 'digs'. The reader will notice that this relates mainly to footplate crew. Some passenger and freight train guards used the hostels mentioned, but there was a much greater requirement for them to make their own arrangements, and this article in the main does not deal with them.



Figure 1. Former LMS hostel at Camden, 1929, now flats and named Iron Bridge House, 3 Bridge Approach, NW1. Photographed 3 November 2017

During WW1 the GWR had just one 'double home' hostel – adapted sleeping coaches and a restaurant car – at Severn Tunnel Junction (STJ). Following a 1919 report a permanent hostel was built there. In passing, its author notes 'at the time the new engine sheds at OOC were opened [1906] plans were prepared for providing barracks at that place, but the scheme was not proceeded with.'⁵

GWR hostels in WW2

And so it remained on the GWR until WW2, when a heavy freight flow developed via Banbury, Oxford, Didcot and Newbury to Southampton and other south coast ports. Didcot's railway resources were stretched in manning extra trains and upgrading the infrastructure. Further demands came when a large American ordnance base was established there, needing shunting engines and railwaymen. Men were drafted in, but there was a limit to ability to provide lodgings. Again coaches were pressed into service as sleeping quarters. The GWR suggested that the Americans provide their own railway staff within the ordnance depot. The outcome was the Government agreed to fund a two storey brick hostel for over 200 railwaymen, which opened in May 1944 (now demolished).⁶ Another hostel was built at Oxford, plus a small temporary one at Newbury. They differed from existing hostels in being 'residential' for single men drafted in. The LMS, keeping existing hostels almost entirely for 'double home' men, put converted coaches as residences for 180 single men at several locations around London and the Home Counties. Some were still in use in 1952, by which time there was also a 121 bed residential hostel at Bletchley.⁷

Old Oak Common in WW2

London's importance increased as both a destination and a junction for freight trains passing through. Although most railway jobs were exempt, men still voluntarily joined the armed forces, and a severe labour shortage ensued. Women were substituted where deemed feasible, but railwaymen had to be drafted in from elsewhere to the GWR's main London shed at OOC, where there were over 1,000 jobs (and a further 1,000 or so associated with the carriage sheds and nearby wagon works).⁸ The pool of accommodation dried up. *GWR London Division Engine Sheds* says shed staff ended up finding odd corners to sleep.⁹ Most probably that was in carriages in sidings nearby, steam-heated for early morning service, so without any permanent 'personal space'. Here the evidence gets somewhat sparse and contradictory; it appears that in about 1942 the GWR moved a set of coaches, converted to sleeping accommodation, to the carriage sidings at OOC.¹⁰ More followed later that year or in 1943. They were under cover as 'a canopy, the "Paint Shop extension" was put up' (over them).¹¹

Apart from at STJ hostel and at Plymouth and Paddington stations, the GWR did not provide canteens for its wages grade workers. In larger centres, such as Brentford, Paddington Goods Depot and Smithfield, the men ran their own canteens. Office staff had luncheon clubs. Otherwise, mess rooms were provided to 'brew up' and have snacks, but nothing for proper meals. A canteen serving hot meals was opened at OOC in February 1942.¹² This was about the time the first 'sleeping coaches' arrived. Was this forward planning or just coincidence? In June 1943 Tersons, a building firm, had a contract for providing (unspecified) 'sleeping accommodation' at OOC, costing £1,675.¹³ There were further contracts, mentioned later.

Separately, in March 1944, £2,920 was spent on 'provision of accommodation for US Army personnel' at OOC.¹⁴ This must have been huts for office use, as they already had their own train in the carriage sheds, providing 'excellent food, supplied by Lyons, to General Lee's train, parked prior to D-day'.¹⁵

In March 1944 arrangements were made to utilise Italian POWs for routine manual railway work, with about £150 spent per location, at Cardiff, Pontypool Road and STJ, followed in 1945 by Swindon and Wolverhampton.¹⁶ They usually had separate accommodation. This is picked up later.

The railways' post-war labour shortage in London

The labour crisis did not disappear when the war ended. In reality, railway wages had not kept pace. At the time the school leaving age was still 14. It should have been raised to 15 in 1939, but that was deferred. It was now back 'on the agenda' for an early date, although not implemented until April 1947. Although some railway work was a protected occupation during the war, unlike coal mining and agriculture they were not exempted from the new 'national service'. Compulsory movement of labour had brought men to London to rebuild war damage, in preference to railway work.

The Railway Executive, encompassing the four main companies, asked the Government for 'something to be done' to ensure railways had manpower. Perhaps with Didcot in mind as an example, it wanted hostel accommodation, noting that there were lots of potentially available 'requisitioned' buildings, and deferment of railwaymen's 'national service' duty. The Government was between a rock and a hard place, with conflicting internal and external demands for money and resources it did not have. Potential hostel accommodation was already taken. The railways did not consider using their hotels at Paddington, Victoria, Charing Cross, St Pancras, Kings Cross and Liverpool Street, which would mean foregoing business, to accommodate hundreds of their own staff.

In October 1946 the main line railways pleaded that they had 2,253 London area vacancies in operating and civil engineering departments. This was translated into a need for additional accommodation for 2,045 men (mostly to be drafted in from elsewhere). London Transport, with a further 1,208 similar vacancies, competed in the same (non-existent) labour and accommodation pools.¹⁷ The Ministry of Labour suggested that it could spare 40 spaces in property in Onslow Gdns and 60 in Canning Town, but could not obtain properties, adding they had already failed to meet a similar request for BOAC. It offered sale of redundant wooden huts, which the railways deemed unacceptable – yet somehow, wooden huts did later appear at OOC – or railways could build their own hostels. However, both the Ministry of Transport and the GWR already had 'plans'.

On 25 July 1946 the GWR Board had agreed in principle to build residential hostels at OOC, Southall, Westbury and Banbury for men transferred from other areas, at an estimated cost of £250,000.¹⁸ But in 1945 there was already a resident Hostel Manager, Mr Pitt, at OOC and there was a 'recreation room for residents in the staff hostel', opened February 1946.¹⁹ A few months later there was further adaptation of sleeping coaches and provision of a (separate) canteen and recreation facilities, to be paid for by the Government.²⁰ This was followed by extending kitchen facilities in the 'American building' in November.²¹ There must have been an alarmingly growing 'hostel' of railway coaches and temporary buildings to cater for their occupants.

By early 1947 there were over 250 men sleeping in coaches at OOC, apparently not all under cover. Vaughan relates how one young fireman transferred from Swindon caught influenza in a damp sleeping compartment in a coach with a leaky roof and needed hospitalisation.²² Questions were asked in Parliament about the conditions. On 17 February 1947 Hansard shows the Minister of Transport responded with the names of new hostels, and said that the one at OOC 'is in hand' – not entirely true as he only gave the go ahead in April 1947, with the proviso that its capacity was scaled down from 276 to 209 men. Later that year, further debate is recorded in Hansard, 7/11/1947: '250 skilled railwaymen living like tramps and gypsies in railway coaches... many for periods of up to two years and more, living apart from their wives...'

Approval was given in February 1948 to build the hostel to its intended size and it opened six months later than planned in March 1949.^{23, 24}



Figure 2. Surface buildings above Stockwell tube station's 'deep shelters'. Part of the painting is in memory of Violette Szabo and others who died in WW2. Photographed 3 November 2017

Other options

The GWR, its OOC hostel plans bogged down, cast around for a 'quick fix' and in January 1947 an inspection team visited former deep air raid shelter tunnels at Belsize Park and Stockwell tube stations. The former, then just storage space, had accommodated 10,500. Stockwell, notionally able to take 8,500, was considered for conversion to 600 cubicles. Promisingly, it had 'been put to recent use to provide accommodation for men of the Forces who are on leave' (Figure 2). But although there was the space – 16 tunnels were noted – hot water was restricted to 'shaving purposes', kitchen facilities limited to snacks, drainage rudimentary and perhaps the final straw was the Elsan chemical toilets. They had to be emptied into a sump which was then cleared by 'periodic pumping'.²⁵ Deciding that shelters were unsuitable, the planned visit to another at Clapham was abandoned.

As early as January 1947 the Ministry of Transport was already in talks about a partial solution, namely the Great Central Hotel, Marylebone, which the Government had requisitioned, and was still used by them as a transit centre. Until requisitioning the hotel, of about 430 bedrooms, had been privately run by Messrs Frederick Hotels Ltd. They ran other ex-railway hotels and provided catering at some Southern Railway stations, restaurant cars and steamers. It had been purchased by the LNER in September 1945 to become offices for 1,250 staff, mainly displaced by bomb damage at Kings Cross and Liverpool Street stations.²⁶ The LNER was allowed to take possession of the building at the end of May 1947 provided that in the short term it was converted into a hostel for railwaymen.²⁷ An optimistic assessment suggested that 1,700 men could be accommodated, plus about 100 live-in staff (the transit centre had held 2,000). Swanky ground floor dining and function rooms would reopen to the public (Figure 3).

Proper inspection brought reality. There was only room for about 1,020 men if they were to have partitioned individual cubicles. Electrics and heating needed replacing. Labour to do the work was not easily available. Floors 1 and 2 had been allocated to officers, and were in the best condition. They were considered easiest to convert, so work started on them.²⁸ Bed space was allocated: the GWR and SR would each get 170 places; the LMS and LNER 340 places each. Alas, target dates soon fell by the wayside, with the hapless LNER urged to 'do everything possible' on 23 September 1947.²⁹



Figure 3. The former Great Central Hotel, now The Landmark.
222 Marylebone Rd, NW1. Photographed 3 November 2017

The formal railway nationalisation date, 1 January 1948, approached without the Railway Executive finding suitable HQ office space. On 24 September Sir James Milne, the about-to-retire GWR General Manager, wrote a memo suggesting using the first and second floors of the Hotel, which were most advanced in refurbishment. Floors 3–6 would still become a hostel, with a separate entrance. He had done his networking, and already had agreement for immediate use of the Southern Railway's Craven Hotel, close to Charing Cross station and now demolished, as a hostel for 150 men. The Minister of Transport accepted the idea, provided conversion work for the Great Central hostel 'would be pressed on with all speed.' A few railwaymen might have moved in, but if so their stay was a short one.³⁰

Beds stored waiting to go into the Great Central were shipped across to the Craven and placed in its 41 rooms, dormitory style. A total of 105 single men on the 1950 voters register, prepared in October 1949, indicates it did hold close to 150 men for a time, allowing for the register only showing those over age 21. However, a more realistic notional 111 bed capacity was quoted during 1950.³¹ 25 bed spaces were offered to GWR men.³² At least some of these were taken up; comparison of voters registers suggest about a dozen men did move on to OOC when the Craven ceased to be a hostel around the end of 1952.

The run-down gentlemen's Hampden (Residential) Club, Phoenix Road, near St Pancras, became available. It was snapped up by the Midland Region to become, after refurbishment and division of rooms, its own hostel with 328 beds, of which, in 1952, 268 were occupied by 'permanent residents', leaving 60 for 'double home' men.³³ About 50 moved here from the Craven. The Eastern Region made limited use of the Hampden Club as a 'double home' hostel, but by 1954 it had built its own (largely residential) Aldersbrook hostel at Ilford.

The Great Central Hotel never became a hostel. In October 1948 permission was sought to continue conversion solely to offices. The Railway Executive got floors 1 to 3, with the Road Transport Executive and Hotels Executive sharing the rest.³⁴ Not one square inch of office space went to the unfortunate Eastern Region. It is now the Landmark Hotel.

Old Oak Common hostel

On 16 March 1949, after delays awaiting specialist hot water equipment, and somewhat over budget, the new brick built, centrally heated, hostel was opened by the Minister of Transport. Mr Grand, in effect the 'Managing Director' of the Western Region, living in a £5,000 house in Hampstead Garden Suburb, spoke of appreciating the 'restraint and loyalty' of the men who had lived in coaches 'without complaint'.³⁵

The entrance was into a single storey area between two blocks of two floors. Here were the reception, offices and communal areas. Included was the porters' office, open 24/7, which noted when men needed to be called for shift work. A corridor led eastward to four accommodation wings of three floors, two each side of the corridor. All blocks had red tiled roofs. It was full from day one with 260 men moved from the coaches, being 'almost entirely transferred train crew'.³⁶ Given the GWR tradition of 'double home' men using private lodgings, they had only 16 cubicles allocated. There was also a sick bay of 9 cubicles, not counted as available.

Fittingly for men with leisure time at a 'home from home', the communal area had a billiards and table tennis room, darts boards, table games, reading, writing and work rooms, a radio, a small library (200 books) and 'cricket and football equipment'.³⁷ A TV room came later. There was sufficient permanence of residence for 'clubs' to form, including chess and other interests. A former resident mentioned doing weight lifting. The hostel cricket team used a ground at Headstone Lane, rather than the GWR's own, notionally office workers only, Castle Bar Park centre. The hostel canteen served men working on site, so had both 'dirty' and 'clean' counters and eating rooms, respectively for those in working and in 'civvy' clothes. There was a bar, similarly divided. Only one other hostel, Westbury, had a bar, though sometimes licenced 'institutes' were close by. There was a new boiler house for heating and the laundry. A married couple were appointed as Manager and Matron, on a joint salary of £700, plus their own apartment with free board. Whilst a committee of railway employees had run the 1942 canteen, which now closed, a novel joint management/men one was agreed. There was also a large hall and a piano, so of course the opening was celebrated with a concert. The Western Region staff magazine is peppered with reports of social events there, such as reunion dinners of OOC men and their wives, followed by a concert for 350 people, as well as first aid proficiency competitions and the like.

By 1952, returns show the hostel had beds for 555 permanent residents.³⁸ Its opening had merely provided a short 'breathing space'. An aerial photograph of 1949 shows the completed hostel with cleared land to its north and east.³⁹ The 1955 issue Ordnance Survey map shows the hostel has what appear to be corridor connections to three 'extensions' on the cleared land. One long building to the east and parallel to the accommodation blocks, and two shorter buildings to the north. Two former residents have confirmed that as new arrivals in 1954 and 1964 they initially had beds in one of three large wooden huts with rooms each holding two or three men, linked by corridor to the main hostel, until a cubicle there became available. There were a further two smaller huts in 1952, holding 28 men in total, but their location is not



Figure 4. Old Oak Common. Western end of hostel, long disused and boarded up, photographed just before demolition started. Old Oak Common Lane, NW10.

clear from the map. It is possible that the latter were what Tersons provided in 1943, or maybe had been used as offices for the Americans; but there is no evidence. All huts had gone by about 1970.

Cubicles in the main hostel were adequate but not luxurious – bed, table, chair and fitted cupboard, but no power points; one resident recalled running ‘appliances’ via adaptors in the (single) electric light socket. Toilets, showers and baths were at the end of the corridor. But it was cheap, friendly and next door to the canteen and bar. Although the majority of residents only intended to be there ‘in transit’ to other jobs or accommodation, some stayed in the hostel for ten or more years.

In 1952 there were 86 staff employed – 27 male, 59 female. Although not on day one, soon about 15 cubicles, either part of the hostel or an addition, were allocated to some of the single female canteen and bar staff, who at the time worked 8 hour shifts on an 11 day fortnight pattern – a 44 hour week. Others, including cleaning ladies, lived at home. Inevitably there was romance within the hostel/canteen and, as one former resident recalled, ‘girls from the Walls sausage factory were a source of entertainment too’. Its cleared site is close by, in Atlas Road.

Some of the men were lads seeking promotion from engine cleaner to firemen, who knew it would take a long time if they remained at their home shed. OOC had opportunity for fast promotion. Two men who talked to the author had voluntarily made that move aged 16, one from Devon, one from Cardiff, although compulsory transfers were also made. New arrivals also included older men, seeking further promotion (fireman to driver) or made redundant and thus transferred, some leaving families behind. For a short time in the 1960s two Southern Region firemen, working from Nine Elms shed, stayed here, and later some London Midland ‘double home’ men after their own hostel at Willesden closed. Most residents were engine cleaners, firemen or drivers, plus others who worked within the loco shed and carriage depot. There was a sprinkling of other grades, but very few guards – and definitely no office staff. If or where they had any hostel facilities is perhaps something for future research.

Transition from steam to diesel motive power did not initially reduce the need for the hostel. The last active steam locos moved to Southall for a few more months’ use early in 1965. About a dozen men transferred in from Southall hostel when that closed in about 1966, but thereafter occupancy gradually declined. In early 1978 there were only 150 residents, and closure of the hostel (but not canteen) was scheduled for the end of October. The local Railway Welfare Officer, knowing that many of the residents were on the Great Western (London) Garden Village tenancy waiting list, asked the Association if any



Figure 5. Southall hostel, now Martin Court flats, off Southbridge Way. Photographed 3 November 2017

could be taken as lodgers.⁴⁰ His concerns were lifted when the hostel was taken over by the Paddington Churches Housing Association Ltd, who renamed it Oaklands House.⁴¹ They soon created small flats of several bedrooms and a small kitchen. Railwaymen were welcome to stay on and choose who to share with, rubbing shoulders with non-railway residents in the canteen and bar. The hostel's position, close to the road and detached from the shed, meant this mix was not a problem. By then owned by the Genesis Housing Association, it closed in about 2005, becoming derelict over the following decade (Figure 4).

There is a nice twist to the tale. In 1907 the Queens Park Rangers (QPR) Football Club ground was at Park Royal, on land owned by the GWR. The GWR laid out the ground, provided the turf and grandstand, and then charged rent.⁴² This arrangement had ceased by 1919. Fast forward to 2017, and a consortium of Genesis and QPR is funding a £175m redevelopment of the hostel site to provide commercial space, 605 flats and a new arena for QPR.⁴³ Demolition of the hostel began in September 2017 and by 3 November only rubble was left behind the hoarding proclaiming development to come.

Italian POWs were mentioned earlier. In 1952 OOC had no less than 72 Italians as 'permanent' residents living in converted coaches 'next to American Building in paint shop in OOC Depot'.⁴⁴ Facilities listed included a billiard table, reading and writing room and ... a piano. They were looked after by their own Manager/cook and four male staff, and, instead of the standard meals available in canteens throughout British Railways, had their own 'special menu and prices' and were charged 3/6d per week compared to 7/- in the hostel. There are no 'Italian' names on the 1953 voters register, suggesting these were not British citizens at the time. A similar arrangement applied at Neath, South Wales, where a hostel for 11 Italians was a converted house, but not at other locations mentioned earlier. Whence they came and where they went has not been found.⁴⁵

Southall hostel

In July 1946 the GWR Board decided to build a hostel at Southall.⁴⁶ It was smaller than the one at OOC and presumably costs were less closely scrutinised. The two floor brick structure was built alongside the railway south west of the station on the site of stables. With 51 beds for permanent residents, it opened during autumn 1947, in time for some residents' names appear in the 1948 voters register. There was no provision for any 'double home' men lodging. Again the hostel had some amenities, as well as its own canteen: billiards, darts, table games, a reading/writing room, small library and, of course, a wireless.⁴⁷



Figure 6. 163/9 Westbourne Terrace, W2. The top two floors were a hostel for Refreshment Room staff. Main façade. Photographed 3 November 2017

Southall shed had 71 locomotives allocated in 1950.⁴⁸ Its men also changed, as needed, with ones from elsewhere on freight train locos which were working through. In 1963 the voters register gives 60 men living at the hostel. Allowing for others under age 21, this suggests perhaps 70, 20 over capacity, although there were only 42 a year later. Cubicles could not have been shared. Rate books for 1961 and 1962 have entries for two hostel buildings, with rateable values of £430 pa and £164 pa, but without an explicit address for the smaller one.⁴⁹ It would be interesting to know what was going on! Southall did have an Italian ex-POW contingent in the 1950s, with their own mess room, but there is no record of a separate hostel for them.⁵⁰ Apart from the Manager and Matron, whose joint salary of £450 included free accommodation, the other 12 hostel staff did not live in. Cover was provided from OOC if needed.

Southall hostel shut soon after the shed closed to steam engines in the autumn of 1965, some men moving to live at OOC. It still stands, off Southbridge Way, converted to 18 private flats, and named Martin Court. Lintels over blocked-up external doorways and differences in cement colour show where alterations have been made. Trees almost screen it from passing trains (Figure 5).

While no hostels remain in railway use in the UK, some still stand (in 2015 Crewe's Gresty Road hostel was a YMCA), and there are limited examples of 'lodging turns'. Sleeping car attendants who work through lodge in a hotel, and ad-hoc arrangements are made for freight train drivers. The concept of railway workers' hostels has not completely gone, however, as some preservation lines have sleeping accommodation for volunteers. For example, the Severn Valley Railway plans one 'in a GWR 1939 style....53 beds, mess rooms and shower facilities ... [to] ... replace current hostel carriages'.⁵¹

Hostel for Paddington Refreshment Room staff

GWR refreshment rooms at main stations that were not franchised were profitable. In the 1930s they returned 7–8% on gross receipts.⁵² Although elsewhere it was at the time 'men only', staffing of refreshment rooms was traditionally mostly by female (often single) employees. From at least 1904 the GWR leased houses for them to use as mini-hostels at locations throughout its system.⁵³



Figure 7. 163/9 Westbourne Terrace, W2. Rear, overlooking railway line. Photographed 3 November 2017

It appears that such a hostel existed near Paddington by 1905, when it was noted that purchase of 31 Eastbourne Terrace would allow an 'additional 7 rooms' for hostel purposes.⁵⁴ This was acquired, leasehold, in 1906, as was the adjacent No 32. A doorway was knocked through between them, both buildings being largely office accommodation with a hostel upstairs. The 1911 census has a Housekeeper in charge, with husband and young daughter, a Bar Manageress, 13 (female) Bar Attendants (youngest aged 21) and a house servant. A large scale map shows Nos 31/2 extended into the Mews behind, but the lack of useful voters register information on women over age 21 has thwarted 'tracking' numbers here and, from 1923, additionally in nearby 1 & 3 James Street.⁵⁵ This had become 'mainly in houses in Eastbourne Terrace and James Street' by 1935, suggesting additional properties were used.⁵⁶

In 1929 thought was given to a new Stationery Department building. By 1933 this became a recommendation to go ahead, at 163–169 Westbourne Terrace. The new building, costing £49,797, would include a new Hostel for Refreshment Room staff.⁵⁷ The February 1934 GWR magazine showed a model of the building, whilst the March 1935 issue included a description and photographs, albeit mainly concerning the Stationery Department. It is a striking structure with a reinforced concrete frame, the main façade of Portland stone having metal window frames stretching over several floors (Figure 6). The rear, next to the railway, is more utilitarian (Figure 7). Roughly triangular, it was designed by the GWR architect, P E Culverhouse. A basement/storage area had direct access from Paddington station's parcels platform. The Stationery Office, including printing machines, occupied the ground floor and the three above.

On top was the two floor hostel, accessed by separate stairs and lift. There was a suite for the Housekeeper and husband, what appears to be a bedroom for a maid, a few larger bed-sit rooms for manageresses and some 64 bedrooms for other residents. All bedrooms included a sink with hot and cold water. Each floor had four baths and four toilets. Some bedroom windows looked only into a central triangular light well, surfaced with glazed white brick. There was a reading and writing room, sitting room, recreation room, scullery, kitchen and coal store, but, it appears, no canteen. The roof had lift motor rooms, water tanks and heating equipment.⁵⁸

The 1938 voters register has names of 66 people living there, a 'full house', all age 21 or over. At the outbreak of war, there were understandably fewer names on the September 1939 Government Register, but it does show job occupation. The 56 residents included some 30 Bar Attendants, 14 Kiosk Attendants



Figure 8. 10 Florence Rd, Ealing, W5. Used for about 15 years as a hostel for railway policemen. Photographed 3 November 2017

and one (male) Chef. GWR Chefs were always men at that time. As in OOC, the rule was single residents only. Paddington station in 1936 had two public dining rooms, a tea room and eight kiosks, some open continuously. Refreshment room staff covered these and kiosks at East Acton, West Acton, Ealing Broadway, Southall and Hayes stations, so there must have been others who did not live in the hostel.⁵⁹

There was no significant war damage, whereas bombing meant that what remained of 31/2 Eastbourne Terrace had to be demolished. The hostel continued until the 1970s, when numbers of residents fell away. The 1977 voters register has only 27 names and it closed a few years later, although overnight stays might have continued for a few years. In November 2017 the office block, including the former hostel section, was still in railway ownership. This was the largest of several hostels built by the GWR for its refreshment room staff in the 1930s.⁶⁰

Other hostels

In December 1947 the GWR purchased the large detached 10 Florence Road, Ealing, from Homes for Motherless Children, for £4,750, to use it as a residential hostel for railway policemen.⁶¹ The main railway companies employed their own police force, today part of British Transport Police. Three large bedrooms held a maximum of 16 residents; there were no individual cubicles. A live-in Matron and four other male staff (non-resident) provided full board. By 1963 there were only three men on the voters register. The hostel closed and the house was sold. Mrs Runicles, the Matron, moved to Southall hostel, and, when that closed, on again to OOC. Number 10 remains (Figure 8).

In passing, the Great Western Royal Hotel, run directly by the GWR from 1896, provided live-in, effectively hostel, accommodation for many of its staff. The 1911 census shows 20 males and 33 females,

giving a total of 53. There were over 30 live-in staff at the hotel shown in the voters' register until the early 1980s.

Although hardly a hostel, 200 bunk beds were provided by the GWR for its staff in air raid shelters at Paddington station during WW2. Many were occupied by 'regulars' rather than as a refuge for staff on duty at the time of air raid warnings. The Church Army provided evening tea and cake.⁶²

Finally, a hostel which the author has yet to locate. In 1963 the British Railways (Western Region) Magazine had an article about the Gloucester trainmen's hostel. The final sentence says there was another one run by a woman, Mrs H. Davis, at St John's Wood – but with no further information.

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- 26 TNA. RAIL 390/1249. 222 Marylebone Rd - adaptation as Executive office, 1945–1948
- 27 TNA. RAIL 1172/2073 op. cit.
- 28 TNA. RAIL 390/1249 op. cit.
- 29 TNA. RAIL 1172/2073 op. cit.
- 30 Vaughan, A, op. cit. says some men did move in and then had to leave. If so, their stay was too short to become included on the voters register and is not mentioned in papers seen by the author
- 31 TNA. RAIL 1172/2427 op. cit.
- 32 Vaughan, A, op. cit.
- 33 TNA. RAIL 1172/2073 op. cit.
- 34 TNA. RAIL 390/1249 op. cit.
- 35 *British Railways (Western Region) Magazine*, 5/1949 op. cit.
- 36 TNA. AN 13/168 op. cit.
- 37 TNA. RAIL 1172/2073 op. cit.
- 38 TNA. RAIL 1172/2073 op. cit.
- 39 Aerofilms Ltd, 22/4/1949. Image ref: EAW022470
- 40 LMA. Acc 2853/37. GW (London) Garden Village Association mins, 23/6/1978
- 41 Internet site for Paddington Ho Assocn, accessed in October 2015; *Kelly's Street Directory*, 1981
- 42 TNA. RAIL 250/347. Traffic Cttee mins, 1909–1911
- 43 *Evening Standard*. Articles 14/7/2016, 1/11/2016, 14/6/2017 and 5/10/2017
- 44 Hawkins, C & Reeve, G, op. cit.
- 45 If anyone can explain more about the railways' use, and the status, of these Italian ex-POWs, please contact the author via GLIAS
- 46 TNA. RAIL 250/62 op cit.
- 47 TNA. RAIL 1172/2073 op. cit.
- 48 'The Great Western Archive' web site, 2017
- 49 LMA. 'Southall Misc 6' rate books for years ending 31/3/1961 and 31/3/1962, held in 'commercial storage'. Seen by arrangement via Ealing Local History Centre
- 50 Hawkins, C & Reeve, G, op. cit., point out the Italian POWs' mess room in a photo caption
- 51 *Railway Magazine*, Oct 2017
- 52 TNA. RAIL 250/705. Manager's Reports of Hotels, Refreshment Rooms & Restaurant Cars Dept, 1934–1938
- 53 TNA. RAIL 250/256. Law & Parliamentary Cttee mins, 1901–1905, 23/3/1904, agree renewal of a lease at Exeter. Over the years others are mentioned, including ones at Dudley, Wellington (Salop), Shrewsbury, Carmarthen, Oxford, Westbury, Taunton, Truro, Carmarthen, Neath, Newport and Barry
- 54 TNA. RAIL 250/302. Refreshment Rooms Cttee mins 1904–1910, 19/7/1905 and dates following
- 55 TNA. RAIL 250/304. Refreshment Rooms Cttee mins 1911–1923, 11/1/1923
- 56 *GWR Magazine*, 3/1935
- 57 TNA. RAIL 250/357. Traffic Cttee mins 1932–1937, 29/6/1933
- 58 Wiltshire. 2515/403/0450 and 0452: Paddington hostel plans, dated 1933; *GWR Magazine* March 1935
- 59 TNA. RAIL 250/705 op. cit., year ending 31/12/1936
- 60 Wiltshire. Plans for hostels at Newton Abbot, Cardiff and Swansea. Also TNA: RAIL 788/262, Newton Abbot; RAIL 786/446, Reading, 1937; RAIL 250/306, Refr Rooms Cttee mins, 28/7/1938: Birmingham, but work might have been deferred/altered because of war
- 61 TNA. 250/62 op. cit., 19/12/1947
- 62 *GWR Magazine*, December 1940