

Just The Ticket

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AN INSPECTOR CALLS

‘What exactly are you trying to do with that?’

The managing director, no less, was actually speaking to me: garage hand stroke trainee driver, as I grappled with a rusty bent screwdriver and a five gallon tin of silver chassis paint.

I was trying to get the lid off, of course. It was obvious. What was less obvious to me at the time, was that I was exactly well on the way to gaining my first P45; if that’s what they were called then, back in the swinging sixties.

As the inevitable cascade of shimmering silver chassis paint streaked the pristine pin stripes of an otherwise immaculate suit, I couldn’t help gawping at the decorative pink carnation button hole. He was only going to a wedding. Me, I was soon to be on my way from that brief sojourn with Mascot Coaches, surprisingly, to join the hallowed ranks of the Eastern Counties Omnibus Company.

It was nineteen sixty eight: still six years before Mascot Coaches, whom I was working for, were to be swallowed up by Eastern Counties in their new NBC mantel. They didn’t wait that long to buy me out. People in management play golf with one another, or so it seems. That was always my theory, and the reason why some short while after the paint incident (trying to forget the squashed spray gun and exploding battery episodes) a surprise visitor called at my house dressed in the militaristic uniform of an Eastern Counties bus inspector. Did I want to work for them? Apparently an acute driver shortage was leading to difficulties in covering shifts at Holt Outstation; one of the far flung Norwich satellite garages which I happened to live near.

Most kids, at some time or other, toy with the idea of driving trains. Mr Beeching had long since dampened any ambitions in that direction. The strawberry season was over and Messrs Drury no longer required someone to rope and sheet their old Albion flatbed. If Mascot were making it clear that they had no vested