

A tale of two journeys by Ray Pearce with apologies to Mr. C. Dickens.

It was the worst of journeys, it was the best of journeys, it was the age of train travel.

I had the sad occasion last week to attend a funeral in Eastbourne, it would have been too much of a rush to travel the same day, Friday at 1:00 pm so, instead I went on Thursday morning. I reserved a seat on the 10:00 am from Birmingham International arriving in Euston at 11:15 pm. I travelled First class to London so I could have a breakfast on the train and have a bottle of still water. I sat in my seat only to learn that there were no catering facilities available. I could wait for the following train in 20 minutes but I wanted to be on my way. At Rugby we were told that a buffet was open in Coach C towards the end of the train. I was in the first coach but I undertook the long trek down the train for refreshments. Came back with two bottles of Wenlock still water and some shortbread. Not too worry as I was going to have a cooked brunch when I arrived at the hotel in Eastbourne.

The train arrived on time for me to get the 11:54 train from London Victoria to Eastbourne. I got the underground to Victoria but at Oxford Circus came the announcement, "This train does not stop at Victoria." It should have done so I alighted at Green Park to find my way to Victoria main line station. By this time it was quite warm in London and I was wearing my dark suit with a tie in my holdall. There were no taxis so I joined a bus queue and a Victoria bound bus arrived. It was already full but everyone at the stop got on. I was standing when a kind lady said to a very young child sitting on a seat "sit on your mother's knee and let this gentleman sit down". He did and I did. For any bus anoraks it was a No.38 bus.

On arrival at Victoria my train had long gone so I had an M&S sandwich and waited for the 12:54 train. I arrived in Eastbourne a little



after 2 pm and took a taxi straight to the hotel. It was where the after funeral function was to be held the following day. I booked in and after freshening up proceeded to the bar for brunch. Sorry Sir the lady said, no cooked food until dinner due to a malfunction in the kitchen but we can do you some soup and a bread roll. Any port in a storm so I had that. Back to my room, too hot for a stroll so booked myself in for dinner at 7:00 pm. The dinner was good but I felt a little sad as this was the hotel my wife and I used when we went to Eastbourne.



A good night's rest then the day of the funeral. A car picked me up at 12:30 for the 1:00 celebration then back to the hotel for the family gathering. Some of them I had not seen since before lockdown so instead of getting the 3:06

pm to Victoria I caught the 3:35 arriving at 5:00pm. I had a seat reserved on the 5:25 to Birmingham International but that had gone so caught the 5:43 to Preston calling at Milton Keynes, Coventry then my stop. I had an open ticket so sat in the air conditioned carriage and within a minute the steward was there, Can I get you anything Sir. Some water please. Two bottles of Wenlock still water appeared. I used to work in Much Wenlock many years ago. I am from Glasgow he said. Who do you support I asked. Rangers was the reply. He then asked if I would like anything else. A cup of tea please. It was there in no time. I'll bring the food menu along shortly. I had ham and cheese toasties. His name was Graham and as the train left Coventry I thanked him for being so helpful and offered him a tip. No Sir he said I am only doing my job. What a wonderful attitude. At 7:00 pm we arrived at Birmingham International, I was home by 7:30 at the end of a very busy but rewarding two days.

Ray Pearce 19.7.22