

Brief Encounters by Ray Pearce

I like travelling by train and often meet interesting people and this was true on my last trip to Birmingham New St. Station from Birmingham International Station. I did not have long to wait when a lady asked me if I was going to Birmingham. It transpired that she was French and had never been to the city and wondered where should she go? She said it was her 51st birthday and her husband was here on business. She passed me a note book and asked me to write down for her places to visit. I wrote about the Frankfurt German Market which had opened last week. She said she liked shops so I said she leave the station by the side of the mechanical bull, cross the road and go to the Bull Ring. I then mentioned the stained glass windows in Birmingham Cathedral designed by Edward Burne-Jones. Also the canals system where there are lots of places to eat. Told her we had more canals, over 30 miles, than in Venice but they might not be as pretty. Finally the train arrived in New St and it seems that most of the carriage was listening to our conversation as they said how interesting we had been. My fractured French was used although the lady spoke better English than me. Au revoir madam, bon voyage as we went our separate way, me to Wetherspoons and she to the Bull and the Bull Ring.

I met my friend in Wetherspoons and we had a light brunch when I noticed four ladies from the Orient sitting at a nearby table. Good morning ladies, I said, would you mind if I asked you where you are from, Indonesia was the answer. Now from my Army service in the East in 1954/5 I knew that one of the languages spoken in Indonesia was Malay. Selamat Pagi ladies. (Malay for good day) and we exchanged pleasantries in Malay. I told them that 69 years ago I learnt Malay when posted to Kuala Lumpur. Even I was surprised I could remember some of the language. When they left the restaurant they came to our table and we all said good by in English and Selamat tinggal.



A gentleman of about my age had watched all this and asked me what it was about. We got talking, as you do, and he was in the RAF at RAF Stranraer. He was in maintenance with Sunderland flying boats patrolling the Atlantic and North Sea looking out for suspicious fishing vessels carrying more conical gear than usual. I bid him a fond farewell and got the next train to Birmingham International and the X12 bus to Arden Hall and home. A most interesting morning.

Ray Pearce

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