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[045 A Postman's Knock by Albury postman Leslie Quantrell BEM](#)

Recollections of Albury postman Leslie Quantrell, 1959 – 1988.

There is a set of 51 slides for this talk.

Albury Village Hall, 17 October 1990.

53 minutes.

- ① I first came to Albury, not as a postman but as a bus conductor on the London Transport on what was then the 425 route, this was over 30 years ago, the fare then I can remember well from Guildford to Albury was 5d old money and even then I got to know some of the people in Albury village, helping them across
- ② the road etc., All this stood me in good stead for a few years later I became a bus driver and knowing where, or near where the passengers lived I used to stop the bus as near to their houses as possible. I really enjoyed this very much and always had a good laugh with the passengers.
- Some of the things which are very much in my mind from those happy days;
- ③ the last bus used to turn at Albury by Pratts Stores, what is now the lodge was then a chicken house and as we had to wait for about 10 minutes, we used to try and get the eggs from the nest boxes using a long stick with a net on the end of it, but I don't think that we ever got an egg. Also one day when it was pouring with rain I took a coach up Church Lane and dropped a young lady outside her house, then with
- ④ ⑤ a lot of trouble had to turn the coach in Sharp's gate. There were the Misses Fuller who then had the old post office by Weston Dene and every morning we would have the newspapers on the bus to deliver to them. They were always there and always gave us
- ⑥ our perks — a free paper. Then one day on our way from Dorking to Guildford we picked up a young lady at the Park Gates and directly she got on the bus she remembered that she had her working skirt on and as she was going to London for an interview it was most important that she was dressed right. She was going to get off the bus and was sure that she would not get to London in time so we asked if we could help, where did
- ⑦ she live? Her reply was the big house in Albury Park, that was no bother at all, Ha! I turned the bus round and went, to the great amusement of the passengers who had a free tour of the park, to the big house. After a few moments the young lady came out all smiles with the proper skirt on, I drove to Guildford faster than usual and she got her train all right — and it wasn't until my retirement presentation in the marquee on Albury Heath a now very mature lady came up to me and thanked me for that special trip to the park house that day she got the job — after all those years she remembered me.

⑧ One person who I will always remember was a Mr. Gosling, he lived in one of the houses along the Shere by-pass, now he was a police sergeant at Ripley and he had a hate for all bus and coach drivers speeding in his patch; he was very fair and he used to warn us all at the garage in Leapale Lane where he would be doing his duties. He was a wonderful sight with his long white gauntlets/ [&] his polished leather boots, he gave nothing away and it was a challenge with all us drivers from Guildford and Hertford to do our best to put poor old Bill in any ditch by pushing nearer and nearer to the edge of the road and the ditches. He did have a real rough time with us all, but he did get a lot of us and years later when I became a postman, I used to stop at his house and have a real good old natter and a laugh at the old days and the tricks we used to get up to.

So this was the only part of Albury I knew, then in 1958, about 20 of us at the London Transport Executive all joined the Post Office. After working at the main office for about 6 months a vacancy came up for a postman at Albury, as Johnny Puttock who was the postman at Albury had decided to take promotion and thus was transferred to Guildford. A notice was posted in the main office at Guildford that a postman was wanted at Albury and I was just that little bit interested. What made me put my name down was an old Inspector said to get into one of these sub-offices was the best thing for anybody willing to take a chance on getting used to the country life etc., away from the rat race of a main office and of course willing to lose 15/6d a week in wages and overtime. But he did say that I would never regret the move so I put my name down, and how right that Inspector was in his wisdom. So on that fateful day in October 1959, at 5.25 in the morning I started my duties as the new postman of Albury and now my story begins :-

I was told to report to the Albury Sub-Office, I did not know where it was or who was the Sub Postmaster - nothing, I knew that it was going to be one of those days. I had a new uniform, new shiny black shoes, a pure white shirt and of course a black tie. I found the office alright and reported O.K. to Mr. 'Tubby' Merritt, he was from now onwards my boss. He seemed so nice and pleased to see me, but all that was to change in about an hour later. Mr. Edward Knapp was the other postman, he was getting on a bit, very tall and as thin as a beanstick, the one thing that I always remember was the size of his boots, they were 15 and looking at him you would wonder how he could

have the energy to lift his feet, but Edward was so very nice, set in his ways and nothing would or could not rush Edward. After the mails were sorted, Edward was trying to tell me about the area but at that time it was like nobby land, after a while Edward asked me to get the van ready and to start it, easy - it was parked right outside the office, I dashed out to set a good impression. Now this old van was a 'bull nosed' Morris, no self starter - the starting handle was in the engine, I puts my hand in the cab, turns it on and gives it a mighty swing, Ha! It went alright, it was in gear, reverse, right into the side of Mr. Merritt's new Mini van which was his pride and joy. The air was black and blue and I thought that I had a mother and father, but not according to Mr. Merritt. So my first day I thought was going to be my last but we survived alright and from that day onwards the Mini was left across the road.

How things have changed, the van was garaged in a small shed up the road in what is now Mike Coopers film unit, and every day after our duties the van had to be cleaned inside and washed, every Friday an Inspector came out from Dorking for an inspection to see that our duties were done, and every other Friday we had to take the van into Dorking for a big inspection and if anything was not up to standard a report was made out and that was put on a charge sheet against us.

All those years ago, there was not the amount of houses or letters and after all the rushing about and the pressures in Guildford, already working at Albury was like a rest camp. Every other week was a busy week as we had the football coupons to deliver and you usually never missed a house, but this gave me a good chance to learn all the house tracks, which did take me a very long time.

There were two shifts we had to work, one was a straight turn starting at 5.25 using the van, starting at the old Albury School, across Albury Heath, Little London, Brook, all Farley Green to Winterfold and then all Farley Heath, this was a bit of cake, I used to dash about and was always finished by or well before the allotted time of 10.30, much to the utter disgust of Edward and Mr. Merritt, as they said I was carving the job up, but I did my job alright so that was that. The other shift was a split turn which started the same time, 5.25am, but you had the bike and sometimes this was a killer as you had all the village to do. Down to Bottings Mill, up the whole of White Lane to White Lane Farm, Water Lane, all the Estate Yard, then into the Albury Park right down to Gardeners Cottage, which was almost in Shere,

Back across to Grange Cottage, up toward then right down to the bottom of the sand pits, back and do all Sherbourne. When we left the office we had all the parcels tied on the bike and sometimes it was impossible to ride the bike for an hour until you got rid of the parcels, but again to me it was fun, I was young, we had to bike right to the top of Birmingham Lane, across to Postford but at the end of that bit there was a silver lining, just Church Lane, Weston Fields was not built then, just a field and at one of the cottages there was a Mrs, Saunders where we always had a hot cup of tea and a sit down for a while and in the winter time a hot cup of home made soup, this country life was smashing. The other house where we stopped was almost the last house, Mr. & Mrs Gosling's on the Shere By-pass, Mrs. Gosling made some of the best cakes I have ever tasted. Alas, all these wonderful people have now gone, to that big Albury in the sky. Anyrate, going back to the work, you could on this first bit on the bike finish about 10.00am and you had to return back at 1.30 on the dot to get to Gomshall Station where the mails would be sent from Guildford by train, back to Albury and do all the village on the bike, the parts of the first duty, all Albury Heath etc., empty the boxes and be back at the office by 4.30, wash the van inside and out and put it away in the garage.

By now I was getting the hang of it all, the only thing that I did not like was the doing of the duties every other day. At that time neither Edward or Mr. Merritt would do anything to have it changed, anyrate after about 6 or more weeks I was getting to know all the tracks and the short cuts and most important the dogs. All the time I was postman at Albury I only got bitten once and that was my own fault, I forgot to give the dog his biscuit and he bit me! This was the answer, over the years it must have cost me a small fortune but it worked, a bit sad for the postman that followed me.

But I had when Mr. Merritt was in charge at Albury a very secret weapon, when I first went to the office they had a lovely sheep dog, it died not long after I went there and they got another animal called Fella, now this was the most ugly dog that I have ever seen, it was part rat, bulldog, collie, it had black and brown patches all over it, the good thing about Fella was that he hated any other dog, so on the rounds if I had any real problems with a dog I would take Fella with me and in a flash the problem was sorted out. And when the offending animal heard the van, or saw me, it was off.

Fella was a real good guard dog and a good fighter. Now it was getting near to the busy time - Christmas.

(17) During the normal sorting of letters we did this in the Sub Office which has now been modernized and called Ansouse (after Mr. & Mrs Merritt's daughter Ann). We did the sorting either on the floor or on a small area of counter and a folding table. As I said we did not get a lot of mails and we could manage alright, but as the pressure (18) built up for Christmas we had a part of the Village Hall as our sorting place. This sounds fine, but our place was right under the stage and right under the Hall in the bowels of the Hall. It was cold, dark and the mice and rats did not like us at all in their patch, we fixed up one good light but it was the cold that beat us. The one good thing was that we had the use of the kitchen stove and we did have lots of good hot tea and soup because we found that the meter for the heating of the stove took a two shilling piece. We also soon found out that if you gave the meter a good bang the collecting unit would fall off, so all our cooking was free. This went on for a number of years until they changed the box and that was that!

(19) Both Edward and myself worked very hard during this busy time, but we did have 4 lads to help us. Apart from one of the lads they did not know anywhere further than two doors from their own houses, so we had to 'run' the letters in the right order so that the lads would not get lost. But after about an hour they were totally lost, anyway they did a good job and we all had some good laughs. One of the 'casuals' we had from Farley Green, a David Clark, he used to turn up in a track suit, sort out his own section - all the middle bit of Farley Green, then he was off. He used to run and run all the time and more times than I can remember he came back to the Hall, having done his delivery before we left on our round. Poor old Edward as I said he was set in his ways and when at Christmas we did have a lot of small parcels, he used to lay them all out in the right order all over the floor of the van, wonderful, but after the first bump everything was in a heap! But in later years when Bob was with me we really had it all under control, we had everything in bags.

Albury was then a Knapp stronghold and at Christmas after a few calls Edward had the taste of the home made wines from his relations. By the time we got to Farley Green Edward was happily glassy eyed and more often than not, flat out in the back of the van. To which I must add we had an old gent, a Mr. Anderson who liked

his little tippie. He used to ride his bike all over the place from pub to pub and the number of times we have found him in a ditch very much the worse for wear. We used to put him in the van and bung his bike in as well and then take him home to a very worried Mrs. Anderson. All the time that I was at Albury we had a happy time at Christmas,

20 only once did we get reported and that was when we delivered the letters to the front door instead of the side door. This was entered on a special charge sheet and that kept with me right until I left the service. At each house we called at it was the happy time of the year, everybody called you into their house to have a drink or a smoke and a mince pie; not like one house we went to, the gent gave us a nice mince pie, all smiles, do enjoy it - Ha! He had just taken it straight from the freezer.

21 We usually ended our Christmas Day delivery about 7pm., loaded with pies, a chicken and a pheasant, home made jams and lots of vegetables, home made wine and most important, a home made Christmas Pudding. What very happy days they were.

During the pressure working days the second delivery usually started about 2pm., and after the village had its delivery we all went in the van and starting at Albury Heath we went up to Winterfold and Farley Heath. We always had a cup and a bite

22 to eat at Edwards, he lived at Warren Cottages, Mrs. Knapp made the best Mince Pies I
23 ever ate. Anyrate it was dark but we did get about alright, at Farley Green Edward took the van and the two lads with him, the other lad did not go past his house - Overbrook.

24 I always did Farley Heath and across to Mayor House which was our meeting point. By this
25 time it was pitch dark and the pleasure I used to get walking over the Heath, the sounds of the animals, owls and the fright you got when you trod on a twig that snapped, the wonderful sight of the moon, the smell of the woods. And all the time that I walked the Heath I never got lost or fell down a hole. But sadly all this was to end, I think

26 in 1964 we had on New Years Day a terrible snow storm which made things so hard and only once did I arrive really late for work and that was when I walked all the way from

27 Guildford to Albury in that deep snow. The old 'Bull Nosed Morris' that we had was fitted with chains and all the time that the snow was on the ground we never got stuck. It was then that I really got involved with the helping of what I called my flock. Milk, papers, any provisions, coal, anything. And on the round any coal skuttle that

wanted filling up - that was that. Wood chopped, I loved every moment of it, I even took some dogs with me for a walk on Farley Heath and it was then that it was a pleasure to be accepted as one of the big family of Albury. As the snow got worse most of Farley Green and the Heath had to be done on foot, Edward did Farley Green in the van as far as he could, then he walked. Our meeting was always at Mayor House, Miss French's. I did all Farley Heath and this worked very well as we always had a hot soup and some medicine always at hand. But one day poor Edward was very late, he was well over an hour overdue so I tracked his foot marks and found him collapsed against a tree. After a good strong whisky he was alright, but he was never the same after that and a while afterwards he retired. Poor Edward, his pride and joy, his garden went to pot and he and Mrs. Knapp moved to Tuppens Court, where they both passed away. This was a very sad time as Edward was a good and very kind man.

After Edward left we had several postmen but each decided that this village lark was not what it was boosted up to be, not the easy job they thought it was going to be, so they left after a few weeks. Then about 15 years ago one bloke that did stick it was Bob and everything changed, the job once again became a happy job. Whilst waiting for a postman to come out to Albury I was working 12 hours a day, then Mr. Merritt was taken ill and got worse and died. Mrs. Merritt carried on for a while but it got her down with all the extra things the Post Office were introducing and after a while she decided to pack it in. This was a terrible blow as I wondered where the post office was going. Anyway Mr. Brian Robinson applied for it and got the post office moved to his Stores. It was an ideal place for us, we had our own sorting room upstairs with good lights and heating, plugs for tea making, it was heaven. As I said Bob decided to leave Guildford and the rat race and join the peace of Albury. We both worked as a good team and had so much fun that I used to wonder where it was going to end. Bob and I did get on very well, we had our differences but all the time we were together never had a bad word with one and other.

There are things and people that stick in my mind, I do not wish to offend or upset anybody but if I do then my apologies;

At the top of Birmingham Lane a Mr. and Mrs. Tanner lived at Fir Tree Cottage, their only water supply was from the well that was near the road and the bucket they

got the water with was spotless, like a mirror. Mrs. Tanner was always sitting on a sofa by a good old wood fire and I don't think all the time I went there I ever saw her move.

A Mr. Hedges at Church Lane and Miss Brown

34 Then at the school on Albury Heath, how the Headmaster Mr. Chitty used to hang any snakes that were caught near the school, and ther^ewere a lot, he used to hang them on a tree so that the pupils could see the dangers in the woods.

Then Mr. Ellis of the Ellis Labs., he always wore a bow tie, his grey hair always neat and tidy, but he always had a hole in his socks.

35 There was a lady at Weston Dene, she had a dog that she loved so much and during the very hard winter that we had the dog died. She did not want to part with it and had it in front of the fire for over 3 weeks and it was only the terrible smell that gave her away. Of course someone had to take it away and bury it. Mr. Merritt and I had this task, scooping the bits of the dog up and putting it into a bag and then to try and bury it was no easy task as the ground was frozen really hard, but after a while we got rid of it alright.

Then one day I passed a house and I knew that something was wrong as the curtains were still drawn, so on my way back I called at the house to find that the lady was very distressed, her husband had just died. She asked me if I could help her to lay him out. I have never got over that but a sad time is always covered with a happy event and there was the time that I went to the door of a house where a son had just been born, so I was whisked upstairs to see him - all red with black hair.

36 Tom Knapp, the brother of Edward, he lived on Farley Heath and often told me that the day he got married, he and his wife walked right across the fields from Albury Church to the house they lived in. He and Edward were great rivals with the vegetables for the Albury Show.

37 There was a Mr. Jack Blunden he worked as the gardener for Mr. Mackindoe at Haredene and he could grow the biggest and fattest cucumbers that I have ever seen, like all these people the secret of growing these things went with them.

Cecil Monk at Mayor House with the Shetland Ponies, brushed coats, shiny brasses spotless - what a sight.

Bert Newman at Farley Heath, he lived on his own and was dirty, when he got excited he used to stutter and swear like anything and get so mad with himself.

(38) Then there was Mrs. Fry of Golden Acres, the times that I have sat with her and the tales she has told me about the things that went on when she was the District Nurse, particularly with the gipsies at Winterfold.

(39) Bill Chennel, I think he knew everything that moved on the Common at Winterfold - and his sister, she lived at Rose Cottage and used to come to the road when the van got near for her letters. She had a bad leg and used a crutch made by Bill from part of a tree limb.

(40) But the daddy of them all was a chap called Monty Fox, he was a woodman for the Estate and lived at Mustard Copse. He lived alone for a while, if he liked you that was alright, but if he didn't that was your lot. He used to keep goats and nothing got in the way of his goats. They were in the house and when they had their young Monty would be with them all the time, the mess from them all over his trousers was terrible and the smell, his trousers could stand up on their own. I don't think he ever changed them, I used to take the food for the goats from Bottings so I was his best mate, but he was banned from several post offices in the area because of his smell. (41) He was a master at wood carving, he put miniature windmills all over his garden for the purpose of catching the prevailing wind from whatever direction it blew. He used to sell his goats milk and seeing how he did it it's a wonder to me that nobody got poisoned. He did get married, but it did not last long as his wife just could not stand the life of old Monty. Despite all his smelly clothes he used to get young ladies come from miles to have a chat with him, but sadly Monty died and his beloved goats all went. And so did much history, not I am sure of Albury, but of things about the woods.

Getting involved in village life started right back in the days when we did the sorting at the Village Hall, it was about that time that they used to have their Christmas Dinner and a party. The kitchen was the nerve centre with Ted Russell and his wife, Connie Howick, Kath Goddard, Jill Mills and of course Margaret Woods. As I have said Bob was with me then and we knew that more hands made light work, so we did the post round very quick - that day only one delivery. We usually got back

from the first delivery about 12, just as all the meals were being taken to the old people in the Hall and Bob and I would be at the sink ready to do battle with the washing-up. Of course we had a smashing meal with all the helpers, plus any wine that was left over. 42 by the time we had finished we were all merry, we had so much fun. Now I knew that there were a lot of folks that just could not get to the Hall to have their treat, so I got the girls to make up the dinners, sweets and a small gift, put it all in the van and took their treat to them - it was a joy to see their eyes light up to know that they had not been forgotten. All the time that they had the dinner at the Village Hall I did this service, then one day Dr. Burton had words with me about taking the hard up and lonely people of Albury a Christmas gift, I submitted the names as I was really the only one that knew the people and about 20 gifts were done; 10 good small hampers and 10 pot plants, Gladys and I used to get out on the 23rd. December and go and get the stuff for the hampers and Gladys made them up in our home. Then on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day we would deliver them that special 'Postman's Knock' I know brought them a lot of joy, but again sadly it all seemed to fizzle out.

I could go on and on with the things that have happened, tea every morning with Mary Quant, sitting down with Mr. Osborne at Albury Park House doing the football coupon with him, Mr. Gilbert the head gardener at the Park House how he used to sell the vegetables at the end of the Lane, Mr. Barber, how he laid the water pipes from the bottom of the hill at August Field to Blythwood at the top of Farley Heath all by himself, moving the long pipes on a home made wheel barrow. On the funny side, Hubert Harrison of Little London who worked for the Albury Estate knew I liked my fishing and was always in need of lead weights, so if Hubert was working on any roof as I passed by he would try and hit the van with lead, I still have some lead from those days.

The wonderful trust that was put in me, people leaving the house keys for me to feed the fish, cats, rabbits and the budgies, in one house I had to feed a snake and if a person was away and their lawns wanted cutting I was the bloke. I enjoyed doing all this especially if the person was ill or in hospital since they would worry about the grass being cut. I always had a mower in the van in the afternoons, so that was that. Cutting hedges was another thing that I liked doing and I still do a lot of

hedges all over the place - straight and true is my trade mark. I could go on and on, but I must finish this Postmans Knock. I have been honoured several times by the Albury people asking me to play Father Christmas and I have also had the honour of opening the Flower Show. Then a couple of years ago Bob and I were the attraction in the magazine 'In Britain', a crew came out with us sorting and delivering the mails during the Christmas rush - and that went all over the world and Bob and I had several letters from far and wide.

Then sadly Gladys got a little worse with this Multiple-Sclerosis that she has, although she has never grumbled I felt that it was the right time for me to call it a day and spend more time with her, as for about a year I used to get her out of bed about 4.30 when I got up, get everything that I thought she would need, her breakfast and something for about 11am - a flask of tea, put her into her chair and if she had to go to the toilet just hope that she would not fall down, happily this never happened. As you all know, when I was on the afternoon delivery Gladys would be with me, I have to thank Brian at the Post Office for shutting his eyes to this practice, anyrate for a special birthday present to her on my birthday I retired.

Then things started to happen, the wonderful presentation and send off I got from you all, so many of you turned up that it was something that I will never forget.

The kindness you all showed, all the time that I have been at Albury I have never known anything like this to happen - I am still so grateful for all the kind things that were said about me.

Then in November 1988 I got what I thought was an Income Tax demand, but it was a letter from Mrs. Thatcher telling me that I had been awarded the B.E.M., such a great honour and I have so many people to thank for this award - I am so grateful!

Then the visit to Buckingham Palace for the Garden Party, yet another honour, Gladys has never got over the thrill of being pushed all over the gardens by a 6ft. Gaurdsman, and then to cap it all to have a chat with Princess Di.

What I have done all the time I have been your postman at Albury I have enjoyed, the pleasure and fun I have had it's not been a job but one long holiday.

Without the blessing of Gladys on what I did, the encouragement she has given me all

the time even when she had great pain and walking difficulties, the late nights the times that I left her to go to the hospital to visit folks that I know I could cheer up, it was all possible because of her support. Also my thanks to Mr. Robinson at the Post Office, he closed his eyes to a lot that I did and made life for Gladys a lot better by getting a seat put in the postal van. The help he has given to us both whilst Gladys has got that little bit worse - without which I could not have carried on as long as I did. And of course the wonderful people of Albury who have and did from the start make my 29 years with you just one big holiday, it has been a great honour to work with you all and to know you all. Thank you.

Slide Titles

Key Words

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- 9 Albion Post Office (Merith)
- 10 Edward Knapp
- 11 "Beul moad" Morris
- 12 Mike Cooper's film unit
- 13 Post-bike
- 14 Botting's Mill
- 15 + Mrs Saunders' Cottage 139 II / 141 CM's Box
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- 17 "Anson's"
- 18 Village Hall
- 19 Letter box
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- 21 Christmas gifts
- 22 ✓ Warren Cottage 29 I/39 CM's Box.
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- 28 Barn bleck in snow
- 29 Teepee bowt.
- 30 Bob (postman)
- 31 ✓ Pratts' Stone 9/293 II/101 CM's Box
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- 33 ✓ Fri Lee Cottage 240 III/150 CM's Box
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- 37 - Hawdene 24 I/30 CM's Box
- 38 ✓ Golden Acres 152 I/160 CM's Box
- 39 Bill Bennett's Cottage
- 40 Montard Copse
- 41 Windmills
- 42 Mail van
- 43 Father's Christmas
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- (45) Bob & Leslie
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- (47) " " "
- (48) Queen's letters - B.E.M.
- (49) Presentation of medal
- (50) Medal
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"In Britain"
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