

CUSTOMS ON THE MOVE

THE DOVER TRAIN APO

I became aware of the Dover Train APO when I was a 'hairy' APO stationed in London Port and Victoria Railway Station/Baggage Warehouse so knew of their existence and had a vague idea of their duties.

Passengers on the Golden Arrow overnight service would board the train, I think, in Brussels and/or maybe Paris. Those who 'had it' would settle down in a cabin on the train where they could sleep undisturbed right through to Victoria Station while 'economy' passengers would just have seats and alight the train on the ferry, clear Customs in the 'bullring', Ferry Dock, Dover and re-board the train once it had disgorged either the Twickenham or Shepperton Ferry which had brought them over from Dunkirk. The ferries berthed in a 'locked' dock so they could be raised or lowered, dependant on the tide, enabling the train on board to have a level link-span to join up with the English railway line - clever!

The Dover Train APO. would join and, with a lead plomb, seal the intersecting doors between the awake cleared passengers and the slumbering un-cleared passengers still blissfully unaware of all the activity that's been going on. The APO would station himself in this section with the guard. I seem to remember cups of tea and lots of putting the world straight even then! Deep down you'd be praying for no unscheduled stops en route (you try controlling passengers at East Croydon Station!) while keeping a revenue eye out for packages being lobbed out of the train.

At Victoria the APO would ensure the un-cleared passengers would be directed through the baggage hall, check the train was empty of passengers and packages etc. and maybe assist the Victoria Station Officers with the passenger clearance. All over, the APO would return to Dover on a scheduled rail service. The same was done in reverse when another Dover APO would come up to Victoria to join the evening Golden Arrow service to Brussels/Paris when Exchange Controls were exercised.

I was fortunate (?) enough to be the Dover Train APO a couple of times in the summer of 1965 when I was on detached duty in Dover. The bonus for me was seeing my parents who lived near London!