

Social History – Travel

Road

Very few could afford cars immediately after the war, even up to the end of the 1950s. Most used the buses or had a bicycle/tricycle to get to work – even travelling quite long distances. Those better off might have a moped or a low-powered motorcycle, perhaps with a sidecar (you needed strong nerves riding in those). Those that could afford a car could choose from a sit-up-and-beg Ford Prefect/Popular (any colour as long as it was black), a bubble car like the BMW Isetta or Messerschmitt, the ubiquitous Morris Minor, Austin A30/35 and A40 Devon/Dorset/Somerset and offerings from smaller companies like Standard. The well-heeled could choose a larger Rover, Wolseley, Vauxhall, Humber or Jaguar. All without power-steering of course, so a real workout when turning at low speed.



Isetta & Messerschmitt (1955)



Ford Popular (1953)



Austin A30 & A40 (1951)



Bond Minicar (1966)



Morris Oxford (1953)



Ford Zodiac (1961)



Vauxhall Velox (1954)



Austin Healey 3000 (1967)

There were no motorways before the M1 opened in stages from 1959 – just dual carriageway if you were lucky, otherwise just normal two-way roads. These were lethal when heavy traffic and impatient drivers combined – and there were no seat belts in those days. A journey from Woking to St. Ives in Cornwall could take nine hours. As against five and a half hours today.

London Transport was famous (and still is) for its double-deck red buses. These were the RT type on a A.E.C. or Leyland chassis, the RLH for low bridge routes (the upper deck had four seats abreast on the kerb side and a walkway at a lower level on the offside). This resulted in reduced headroom on the lower deck for those on the offside). The RTs were gradually replaced by the RM type, more widely known as the Routemaster, from 1959. Much to the relief of the drivers, these had power steering. When length restrictions on buses in London were eased a stretched version, the RML, was introduced. Both RTs and RMs also operated some country and Green Line express routes in green livery. Single deck A.E.C Regent IV RF buses were used on routes with lighter traffic in both red and green livery as well as on the Green Line routes. A fleet of 26 seat Guy GS single decker buses were used on country routes with restricted traffic and narrow roads. There were a

few pre-war AEC Regal 1 'T' series buses in use until 1952. RTs were withdrawn from general use in 1979 and RMs in 2005, except for on a couple of 'Heritage' routes.

London Transport also operated trolleybuses, non-polluting electric buses with connection to overhead power lines by a pantograph, until 1962.

Trams were used in other cities.

Taxis were not routinely used by people outside large towns and cities.



RT1 (the prototype) and standard RT AEC RTL/RTW (wide) were Leyland based Country and Green Line RTs were green



Standard RM Routemaster 27'6" long. RMLs were 30' with extra windows. Country and Green Line RCLs had doors.



Guy GS 26 seaters for country routes. RF single-deckers were used in London and on country routes and Green Line.

Long-distance coach routes operated from major centres such as London by companies including Royal Blue (West Country) and Midland Red (Birmingham). All then privately operated coach companies were nationalised in 1969. Midland Red operated coaches at 80mph on the M1 when it first opened from 1959, until the 70mph national speed limit came into effect. There was little traffic in those days.



Royal Blue Bedford OB (1949) Royal Blue Bristol L6G(1953) & Bristol MW6G (1963) Midland Red BMMO C1 (1948)

Rail

British Railways largely depended on steam engines until the late 1960's, the last being withdrawn from their fleet in 1968. Many of these dated back to the 'Big Four' pre-nationalisation companies of the 1930s – Great Western Railway (GWR), Southern Railway (SR), London Midland & Scottish (LMS) and London & North Eastern Railway (LNER). They were nationalised in 1948. The last steam engines built for BR were the Class 9F heavy freight locomotives, the last of which was completed in 1960, so only had about seven years in service before being retired.

Many a father will have taken their youngsters to view the magnificent beast that was gently panting at the head of the train that would be taking them on holiday. The Southern Region of BR was electrified in the late 1950's on routes south of London, with the lines further west to Bournemouth and the like following in 1967.

Underground trains were operating in London, of course, but lacked the air-conditioning that we have nowadays and you couldn't walk between carriages.



BR class 2MT (1954)



GWR 7800 Class 'Foxcote Manor' a



BR Class 4MT (1957)



LMS Class 4MT (1951)



Southern Class WC 'Braunton' (1946) b



GWR 4073 class 'Nunney Castle' (1934) c



BR Class 7MT 'Britannia' (1951)



LMS Class 5MT "Black Five" (1937)



LNER Class A4 'Bittern' (1937)

- Double-heading with a smaller GWR engine. GWR passenger locomotives had a brass band on the chimney.
- Rebuilt without streamlining in 1959. Double-heading with an un-rebuilt example.
- 1450, to its left, is a 1400 class built in 1935.

Those visiting the Isle of Wight could also experience the bonus of a trip on a BR operated paddle steamer, the [‘Ryde’](#), operating from Portsmouth. Because the paddles were amidships, so was the engine room and it was open to the air, so passengers could marvel at the machinery that was driving them forward. Her last voyage was as late as 1969. Sadly, she rotted away just outside Ryde (see link), as the then owner refused to sell her while she was still in a condition where restoration was possible. The last ocean-going paddle steamer operating in Britain is the ‘Waverley’. Built in 1946 for LNER and operated in Scotland, she is the only sea-going paddle steamer still in use and does tours of Britain each summer (check-out details online).

Local Deliveries

Not strictly travel, but worth including.

Deliveries of milk were still made by horse-drawn carts shortly after the war before being replaced by milk floats, battery powered and very slow moving as the batteries lost power during the journey back to the depot. These slowly declined as milk became available in supermarkets. One tale relating to horse-drawn deliveries was that one horse knew its round so well that it would automatically stop at each house that had deliveries. This worked fine until someone was on holiday, then the horse would still stop and refuse to move on until the milkman had pretended to make the delivery.....

While coal fires were the main way to heat your home, deliveries were made by horse and cart and later lorry. Coal was supplied in heavy sacks which the coalmen would deliver to your bunker. You needed to be very generous with the Christmas tip! With the advent of electric and gas heating this service slowly disappeared.

Less widespread were deliveries of Corona soft drinks and vegetables. The first ice cream vans, operated by ‘Mister Softee’ and ‘Mister Whippy’ appeared in 1959.

Air

Croydon, having been the main airport for London in the inter-war years continued to see some use into the 1950s, although it was limited by only having grass runways of limited length. Many pioneering record-breaking flights had begun or ended there. The last scheduled airline departure left the airport at 18:15 on 30th September 1959 and the last private departure followed at 19:45, after which the airport closed for good. Northolt and Blackbushe took over its role for short-haul flights.

Being closer to London, Northolt was the main civil airport for London in the immediate post-war period, being used, initially by B.O.A.C., for short-haul routes. This operation became British European Airways (BEA) when split off from BOAC in 1946. Northolt was its main base until 1954, when the airline finally transferred its operation to London Airport (LAP), later to be known as London – Heathrow. Northolt is still in use, mainly as a military airport, but with some civil movements.

Blackbushe, still a general aviation airport, alongside the A30 road in Hampshire was, from 1947, mainly used by the charter airlines that were rapidly expanding. One less than ideal

feature was that the maintenance area was on the other side of this main road to the terminal area, meaning it had to be shut while aircraft were moved between the two areas. There was also a small US Navy air detachment on the airport. B.O.A.C used the airport for some training flights. Blackbushe closed completely in May 1960 and the charter airlines mainly moved to Gatwick. The airport re-opened as a general aviation airfield, with reduced runway length, two years later. Hangars have been built on the same side of the A30 as the rest of the airfield, so no interruption to traffic is required.

B.O.A.C long-haul operations from the U.K. were spread around to an amazing degree. In the late 1940s they still operated flying boats from Poole Harbour and Southampton (Hythe) until the availability of hard runways in their destination countries allowed these to be retired and the routes transferred to operation by landplanes. These operations immediately post-war were split between Bournemouth (Hurn) and Bristol (Filton), the latter also being the maintenance base for their American built aircraft until 1954.

The fleet immediately post-war was very varied, including Avro Lancasters converted for passenger use as Lancastrians. A stop-gap derivative, the Avro York, used the Lancaster wing married to a new passenger carrying fuselage and ex R.A.F DC-3s covered other routes. Newly built British designs also appeared. The Handley Page Hermes suffered from poor engine reliability. The Avro Tudor was built for British South American Airways (BSAA) but suffered two losses due to poor design and even after modification to fix the issues never really made the grade. BSAA was absorbed into BOAC in 1949, and the Tudors were passed to independent airlines. BOAC also purchased a fleet of Canadair Argonauts, which were essentially American Douglas DC-4s built in Canada but powered by Rolls-Royce Merlin engines. This was all to avoid importing aircraft from the U.S.A. due to our severe balance of payments deficit with the US dollar. Eventually some American aircraft had to be imported as we had nothing suitable for trans-Atlantic operations. Lockheed Constellations were obtained second-hand and a fleet of Boeing 377 Stratocruisers was given the green light to enable competition with the American airlines. Douglas DC-7Cs were brought in 1956 to cover for late delivery of Britannias.

London Airport (LAP) opened in 1946 in very basic form. Tents were used on the North Side for passenger handling and duckboards had to be used to keep passengers out of the mud in winter. BOAC started work on their maintenance base there in 1950 and permanent terminals were constructed in the centre of the airport, with access by tunnel, initially only from the North Side. The central terminal area opened in 1955, initially only for short-haul flights, with long-haul still on the North Side, albeit with much better terminal facilities. Terminal 3 opened in 1961 to enable the long-haul flights to also enjoy modern terminal facilities. BOAC moved their operation from their various bases to LAP from 1952.

With Gatwick and Stansted also being developed as major airports, LAP became London (Heathrow) in 1966, and later London – Heathrow today.

Gatwick has a long history as an airport, with a world-beating passenger terminal, later known as the 'Beehive', being built in 1936. This offered an under-cover link to a station on the Southern Railway's London-Brighton line. This fell into disuse as the airport expanded

further to the north in the 1950s but the airport still retains its rail link, but with a new station and terminal building. The 'Beehive' still exists, albeit as office accommodation. During the early 1960's Gatwick was a very sleepy place, with very few movements, these only starting to increase as more people could afford to fly away on holiday. It became London (Gatwick) in 1966 and now is London – Gatwick. After Blackbushe closed Gatwick was used largely by the independent airlines such as British United, Caledonian, Dan-air, Air Europe and a host of short-lived smaller airlines.

Stansted in Essex was, if anything, even sleepier. Taken over as a civil airport in 1949, it was used by a few charter airlines. The runway was extended by the USAAF for possible use by NATO, which never happened, and it continued as a civil airport. It now also has a terminal connected to the rail network and is a major base for low-cost carriers. Even British Airways now uses it for a few services. One of its claims to fame was as being the main base for training airport fire-fighters, with many old airliners being consumed in practice 'burns' during the 1960s, '70s and early 80's.

For the record, London now has six airports, the others being City, Luton and Southend.

Not many people could afford to fly away on holiday in the early post-war years, but business needed to use airlines to visit their customers overseas, or at the other end of the country.

Long-haul routes were operated by piston-engined aircraft such as the Lockheed Constellation, Douglas DC6/7 and Boeing Stratocruisers. These were replaced by turbo-props, such as the Bristol Britannia, and by jet equipment into the 1960s, with the first transatlantic jet service by a B.O.A.C de Havilland Comet 4 on 4th October 1958, soon to be joined by American built Boeing 707s and DC-8s. Concorde first flew in early 1969 from Toulouse, France and Filton in Bristol. Some 30% of each Concorde was built in Weybridge, at Brooklands. That is also where Vickers Vikings, Viscounts, Vanguards and the VC10 and Super VC10 were built. Concorde was probably the most tested aircraft ever, finally starting commercial service in January 1976, initially to Bahrain (British Airways) and Rio (Air France). Transatlantic flights started in 1977 after the U.S.A. lifted the noise restrictions. They were retired in 2003.

There was much more variety in the aircraft used on short haul routes with Britain's Vikings, Viscounts and Vanguards joining Convair 240/340/440s, Douglas DC-3s/4s/6s, Lockheed Electras and Ilyushin Il14s and the later turboprop Il18. Jet-powered Comets, BAC 1-11s, Douglas DC-9s, Tupolev Tu104s, Sud-aviation Caravelles, Boeing 727s and 737s joined them later in the 1960s and 1970s.

It should be noted that Britain had a severe balance of payments deficit with the U.S.A. as we paid for all the military equipment built for us during the war. There was therefore great pressure put on our airlines to 'Buy British'. There were also foreign exchange restrictions for private owners wishing to buy American light aircraft, so these didn't really start to appear before about 1960 when restrictions were eased.

Those few who could afford to fly away on holiday would usually travel in state-carrier hand-me-downs, as holiday airlines could not afford new equipment when they were only flying during the warmer months. The introduction of the £50 (about £1200 today) restriction on foreign currency purchases in 1966 also encouraged people to holiday at home. It wasn't lifted until 1979.

People who wished to take their car to Europe immediately after the war could not just drive it onto a ferry, it had to be loaded by crane. Roll on - roll off (Ro-Ro) ferries didn't start to operate effectively until the Dover-Calais route opened in 1953. These soon became very popular and still are today.

For those well-heeled, an alternative way to get your car to Europe was by air. In 1948 Silver City Airways offered this service from Lympne Airport near Margate. The Bristol 170 used could carry two cars, with their passengers accommodated at the rear of the aircraft. Later versions could carry three cars, and a dedicated terminal was set up from an airport at Lydd, known as Ferryfield. Freddy Laker's Channel Airways soon offered a similar service from Southend. The two companies later merged under the name British Air Ferries. There was some demand from drivers wishing to take their car further into Europe, so Freddy Laker's Aviation Traders developed a larger aircraft developed from the Douglas DC-4. This entailed replacing the original nose-section with a bulbous one with nose-opening door. The crew were situated in a cockpit above. The resulting aircraft was known as the Aviation Traders ATL 98 Carvair and first flew in early 1961. It could carry five cars and their passenger deep into Europe to places such as Basle in Switzerland. Loading was by a scissor lift platform. This became quite popular as it saved about a day's driving. Twenty-one Carvairs were built at Southend and Stansted in Essex, the last being completed in 1968. With the development of modern car ferries, demand for flying cars to Europe declined and the service was discontinued in January 1977, the Carvairs were then used for regular cargo work.

Freddie Laker started his Laker Airways in 1966, initially doing charter work with Bristol Britannias. He is perhaps best known for his transatlantic 'Skytrain' operation with DC-10s which introduced low fare transatlantic walk-on services, but that was not until 1977.

Some of the airliners you might have travelled in up to 1970:



DH 89A Dragon Rapide 6 (1944) Used by BEA on routes to the Scilly Isles and in the Channel Islands.



Vickers 657 Viking (1946) BEA 'Admiral' class. Used by them on routes to Europe and later by independent charter airlines.



Douglas C-47 Dakota (DC3) (1943) Note the Lockheed Super Constellation and Douglas DC-7C behind. DC-3s were used in large numbers by BEA as their 'Pionair' class and by many independent airlines.



Vickers V806 Viscount (1957) Used by BEA/British Airways, British United Airways and British Eagle. Britain's best-selling airliner with over 430 sold.



Airspeed AS.57 Ambassador. BEA 'Elizabethan' class (1950) Used by Dan-Air for many years as the mainstay of their fleet.



de Havilland Comet 4 formerly with BOAC (1958) Dan-Air were also a major operator of Comets of various marks. A British United Airways BAC 1-11 is behind.



Vickers V.953 Vanguard (1957) Used on busy short-haul routes and, briefly, on 'shuttle' services to major U.K. cities.



Douglas DC-6B (1948) operated by British Eagle and B.U.A.



Bristol 175 Britannia 312s (1957)



Boeing 707-436 (1959)



Vickers VC-10 1101 (1963)



DH/HS 121 Trident 1 (1961)



Bristol 170 Freighter Mk 32 (1951)



Aviation Traders ATL 98 Carvair (1963)

Getting to the airport:

Both BOAC and BEA had terminals in London where passengers could check-in for their flight. They would then be taken to the airport in the company's dedicated coaches. The BOAC terminal was opened in 1939 by its predecessor, Imperial Airways. It had a direct link to Platform 17 at Southern Railway's Victoria Station from where passengers enjoyed a First-Class Pullman train journey to Southampton to board the flying boats. Those travelling to Europe were coached to Croydon. The BOAC terminal closed to passengers in 1980, while the West London Air Terminal closed to passengers earlier, in 1974. British United Airways, later British Caledonian Airways, also had a terminal inside Victoria Station from 1962 for many years.



AEC Regal IV BEA Coach 4RF4 (1953)



Leyland Atlantean PDR1/1 (1966)

Light touring aircraft that you may have seen at your local airfield in 1960:



Auster 5J1 Autocrat (1946)



Mies M38 Messenger (1946)



Percival P.28 Proctor 1 (1941) Ex.R.A.F.



Miles M.65 Gemini 1A (1947)

Once American-built light aircraft were allowed to be imported from the early 1960s the British light aviation scene was dominated by them, to the detriment of British built designs.