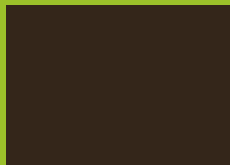


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L O N D O N I R I S H C E N T R E  
O U R S T O R I E S



MAYOR OF LONDON



# LONDON IRISH CENTRE OUR STORIES

## Tales of travelling and working in the Capital from the London Irish Centre

Whether it's exploring by bus or helping to build the Tube, everyone has a story to tell about their experiences of transport in London. In a series of workshops, members of the London Irish Centre Day Centre in Camden have worked with London Transport Museum to create a magazine to share their memories.

Taking objects, artwork and images from London Transport Museum collections as their inspiration, each individual has created a page to tell their own story. The result is a colourful mix of narratives revealing the hidden significance of Museum objects to different people. Stories of family, friendship, success and struggle emerge, highlighting individual experiences but also those that communities share.

What stories do you have to tell?

Our Stories is one of London Transport Museum's New Routes projects, a programme of community exhibitions and partnerships. New Routes forms part of the Revisiting Collections initiative that extends across all London Hub museums and is funded by MLA London.



## JOHN LEONARD'S STORY

**“I remember the work as very hard. At first you had 12 hour shifts, though there were breaks where you had to come up to the surface, and tea was sent down.”**



I was born on 1 December 1944 in County Monaghan and brought up in Donegal. In 1959 I came over to Scotland to work as a tunneller. In 1962 the Victoria line was starting so I travelled down from Scotland with lots of other Irishmen. I began working on the Blackwall Tunnel and moved onto the Victoria line in about 1964.

I was mining with a spade until they introduced the digger shields. When the shields came in, conditions improved. It was all conveyor belts and no digging, all you had to do was build the segments. You had a winch and wire band, which you'd fit around the segment. The man on the right of this photo (bottom left) is guiding a segment into place; they were fitted from the bottom up.

You worked in a five man gang. There was a leading miner, two miners and two miner's labourers. I was a labourer at first, for a year or so, and then a miner. I worked all over the Victoria line, not with the same men all the time. Each section of work would have a 'price' based on an estimate of how much work was required and how much time. If the price didn't suit the gang you might split up, move to another gang on some other part of the line.

I remember the work as very hard. At first you had 12 hour shifts, though there were breaks where you had to come up to the surface, and tea was sent down. When they brought in the shields it was three eight hour shifts; a day shift from 7 o'clock to 3 o'clock; an afternoon or 'back' shift from 3 o'clock to 11 o'clock; then the night shift from 11 o'clock to 7 o'clock.

There were a lot of injuries but usually nothing serious, and there was only one man killed on the Victoria line. The skips carrying the muck used to come off the tracks, and someone would break a leg or lose a finger. But I wouldn't call it really dangerous, and I never hurt myself.

You worked a five day week and had Saturday and Sunday off. If you were on the night shift Monday night you could be out until late on a Sunday night and then sleep all day on the Monday! The men would go out drinking and dancing together, and also to the Irish Centre in Camden for Mass. Some of the men were cousins, some I went to school with.

I lived in Green Lanes, Haringey, and then at the Brecknock, Camden Road. Usually a landlady would let out rooms for two or occasionally three with a bathroom and toilet to share – no en-suite!

You can tell this picture in the tunnel (top left) is staged because there are eight men, three more than a normal gang. The man top left is James O'Donnell. I think third and fourth along the top are Patrick Gallagher and Charlie Sweeney. They are wearing the typical white shirts, trousers, and a cap to keep off the sweat. You'd have to tie your trousers around the bottom with a piece of string to stop the mice or rats from crawling up!

## CLARE MCQUILLAN'S STORY

**“I liked London in the Sixties as it was the place to be. We’d get the bus to the dance hall two or three times a week and then walk home in the early hours of the morning.”**



I’m originally from County Monaghan but I moved to London with my mother on 9 September 1959. My aunt and uncle had moved over in the April of that year and already had a flat for us on Thornhill Crescent off Caledonian Road. We had two rooms that we rented for £3. I liked London in the Sixties as it was the place to be. We’d get the bus to the dance hall two or three times a week and then walk home in the early hours of the morning. Our favourite was the Buffalo in Camden. Camden and Kilburn used to be strong Irish centres but today the community has spread out further into London.

My first job was working at the PYE radio factory on Parkhurst Road in Holloway. I used to get the number 14 bus (bottom left) there in the morning. It was very busy but not as packed as the buses today as the conductors were strict and would only allow five standing. This bus meant a lot to me as I knew many people that drove it. My cousin started as a conductor and became a driver. Matt Monro the singer also used to drive this bus.

I like this ticket as it reminds me of the trolleybuses. I remember getting them in the first three years that I was in London. The booms often used to fall off the wires and we’d have to stop and wait for the conductor to reconnect them. It was irritating but as passengers we couldn’t do anything about it.

The Routemaster was always my favourite bus. It was reliable and the conductors with their Gibson ticket machines (top left) made sure it was always in order. I often used to go to different attractions on the bus with my mother. We’d go to the West End, to the Zoo at Regent’s Park, to the cinema and the museums.

When my aunt moved over to East Ham we used to visit her. We’d have to get a bus to Kings Cross then change and get the Circle line to Aldgate East and change onto the District line to get to East Ham. Transport was important to us as a family to keep in touch. A number of my family were also employed by London Underground. My uncle and my cousin both worked on the Metropolitan line.



## JOHN LYDON'S STORY

**“You got very used to the buses when you were cleaning. I could even tell which bus driver had been driving from the position of the seat!”**

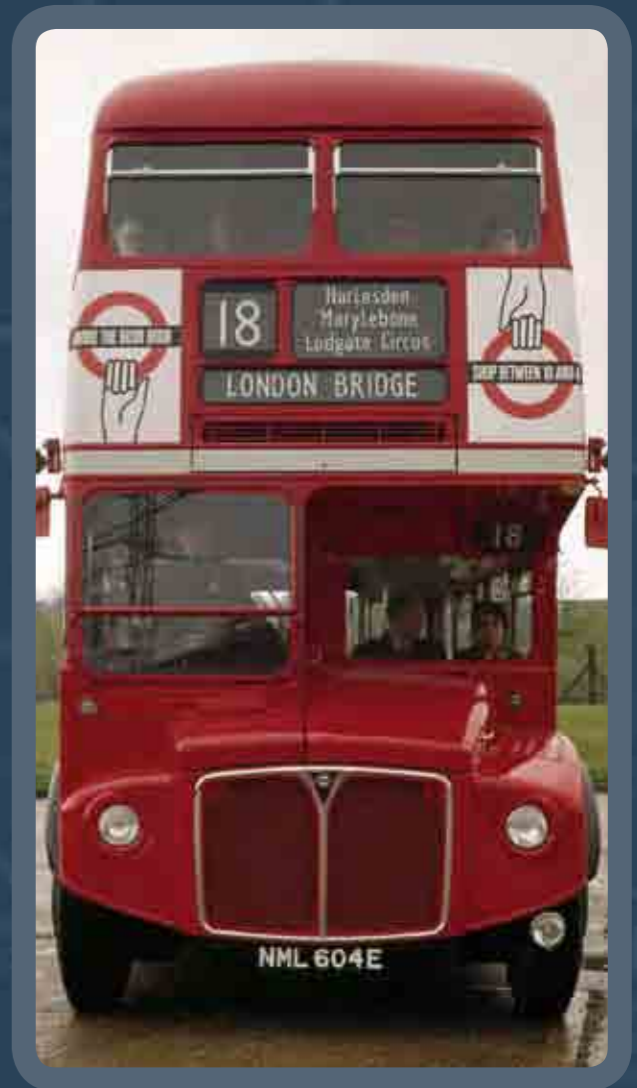


I was born in 1940 in Galway. When I moved to London I arrived in Euston after getting the train from Crewe. To get to know my way around London I followed the number 24 bus which went from Hampstead Heath to Pimlico. This is one of the longest running bus routes and is still in service today.

I began cleaning bus chassis at the age of 36 at Hanwell garage. The chassis had to be a bright silver colour before they could be tested. In order to reach the underneath we'd use a device called a table-tilter which tilted the bus sideways. I washed about six a day on my own and cleaned coaches too. When we were cleaning if ever we had drunk people who had stayed on to the depot we'd hose them down to get them off the buses! Some of the coaches were in a terrible mess inside. But it could be a profitable business cleaning the coaches especially as you often got tips from the coach companies. You got very used to the buses when you were cleaning. I could even tell which bus driver had been driving from the position of the seat!

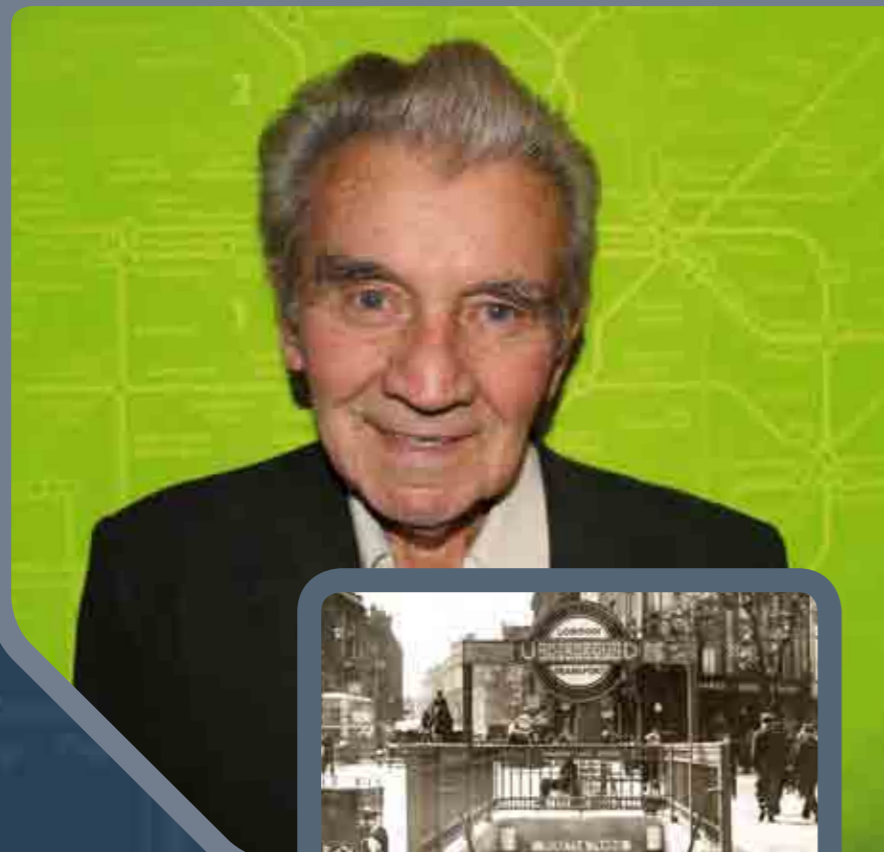
After this I drove number 18 buses from Wembley to Euston. I was a driver for six years until I had a heart attack and couldn't carry on. To begin with I hadn't been able to drive buses because of my height but I learnt while I was cleaning and then they agreed to let me drive. I can remember driving up to twelve buses a day. It was difficult being a driver as you didn't get much respect from the passengers; there was no screen and sometimes people spat.

In total I spent about 30 years working on the buses. After that I took a job sweeping streets and was nicknamed 'super-sweeper'. These days I work with handicapped children, help at St Gabriel's church and chair meetings at the London Irish Centre. I still get the bus. One of my favourite sights is the driver of the number 17 bus who dresses up as Elvis. He wears the green, white and gold tie and even uses boot polish to blacken his hair!



## DAN BYRNE'S STORY

“...with the other thruppence change left from sixpence we'd buy the cheapest ticket on the Tube and ride up and down the Northern line to stay warm.”



I was born in Cork on New Years Day in 1920. I moved to London in 1942. One of my school friends wanted to be in the Merchant Navy but I was more interested in coming over for the football. I was recruited by the English agents that appeared in Ireland to recruit people for war work. We couldn't go straight to London but had to make our way down from Birmingham using my friend's contact in the Navy.

There was plenty of work in London at that time due to all the destruction caused by the doodlebugs. I fixed houses and put up blackout material. I first lived in Abbey Wood but one day I returned from work to find the whole road had been destroyed by a bomb. I had to move to a school in Kent instead but that got damaged by another air raid. As the soot rained down from the ceiling we decided to move to another place in Woolwich.

After the War I moved to Shoreditch as I had started working as a tailor off City Road. I had learnt to use an electric sewing machine back in Ireland as my Dad had one. As I'd lived in Cork it wasn't that much of a change moving to Central London. We had buses and trams and I wasn't like some Irish people who had moved from the country and never seen a bus before.

I've lived in London longer than I have in Ireland now. I've always stayed around Hoxton. There weren't many Irish people in London when I arrived but more came over in the Fifties and Sixties. I always used to go to the dance halls that were dotted around. They were very cheap and the bands played a good mix of Irish and

modern songs. We'd often go up the dance hall called the Nags Head on Holloway Road as it had the best buses and trams to reach it.

I used to go to the football every Saturday. One weekend we'd go to Upton Park to see West Ham play and the next weekend they'd be away and we'd go to Highbury to see Arsenal play. We'd go to Chelsea too so there was always a match to watch. We could walk to Highbury but would get a tram to West Ham. I liked the trams especially when I got a seat downstairs as it was too cold on the top deck. From Old Street to Upton Park was only four pence and ha'penny even though it took in four or five boroughs.

One particular memory of travelling I have is of the winter of 1947. It was the coldest winter of the century and we had no central heating. They had enough coal up north but they couldn't get it down to London because of the snow and ice. In the evenings we used to buy three newspapers – the Star, the News and the Standard – for thruppence then with the other thruppence change left from sixpence we'd buy the cheapest ticket on the Tube and ride up and down the Northern line to stay warm. It was comfortable and you nearly always got a seat. Some trains would also run until one o'clock in the morning.

The roundel in this picture (bottom left) in Chancery Lane is familiar to me as it looks like many of the Tube station entrances at that time. The pub in the background is also one of the places I used to drink. We'd go here because it was the only place in London that served Guinness on draught!

## MARY FAHY'S STORY

**“My memories of the trolleybuses are pulling the ‘frog’...at the Nags Head and Ponders End. I would step off the bus and pull it down so that we could turn left down the Cale’ Road.”**



I was born in 1940 in Galway and moved to London in 1959. I took the ferry from Dublin to Holyhead. My first job was in an MK Electric factory for a year. I joined London Transport in September 1961, as a conductress on the buses.

I started at Edmonton depot where there were lots of other Irish people. I worked at Edmonton for about three years on routes 149, 259 and 279. As well as the buses I also worked on the trolleybuses for about a year and a half in the early Sixties. My memories of the trolleybuses are pulling the ‘frog’ (bottom left) – an overhead point that allowed the trolleybus to change direction – at the Nags Head and Ponders End. I would step off the bus and pull it down so that we could turn left down the Cale’ Road.

I like this pamphlet because it is from my time as a conductress. It was printed to help people when the trolleybuses were switched over to buses. It’s got one of the routes that I remember well - the 649 that became the 149. It also reminds me of the collection of fare charts I had at the time. When I was working it only cost one and thruppence to go from Waltham Cross to Smithfield, Holborn or Liverpool Street.

After Edmonton I moved to Highgate where I worked on many different buses including routes 17, 19, 104 and 253, but mainly on the number 27. I enjoyed working for London Transport. I preferred it to the factory because it was an open-air job and I was my own boss. The passengers were also polite. I didn’t mind spending a lot of time on my feet as it wasn’t

too tiring. I sometimes worked a split shift where I’d work both rush hours from 7 o’clock to 11 o’clock in the morning and from 4 o’clock to 7 o’clock in the evening. It meant that I could go home in between and do shopping and cooking, and still get paid for these hours. Some of my days were long. On route 196 I started at 5 o’clock in the morning and didn’t finish until quarter to twelve at night.

I wore a black uniform with a blue stripe when I started and after about five years it was replaced by a new grey uniform with a hostess style hat rather than a peaked cap. I always used a Gibson ticket machine throughout my time at London Transport.

In total I was on the buses for 26 years. I finished in 1986 when I was made redundant. After about a year I got a job at the Home Office but I missed the buses for a while. My conductress badge number was 80670 (top left) and I still have it today.



## JULIE MUNDAY'S STORY

**“I liked going round London on the buses and Tubes. I didn't find it scary travelling on my own as I found it easy to navigate the city once I'd got used to it.”**



I was born in St Pancras Hospital and have lived in London all my life. My grandfather came to London from Ireland when he was younger and settled here. I have many memories related to travelling around. I used the transport network to explore the city, often visiting interesting places like markets and shops.

One of my earliest memories is of the trams being taken off and replaced by the buses. I liked the trams because I used them often. One day I was at Archway with my mother and my sister Kathy and I started crying because they were taking the trams away and I didn't want them to go. This picture of the Last Tram Week is great (below). The people in the photo could easily have been me, my mother and my sister.



After the trams were gone I had to get the bus or the Tube from Kentish Town to Archway. It was always a very busy place with the hustle and bustle of shoppers. When I was younger I used to be travel sick when I got buses. I'd often get the bus by the Camden Gardens. As I was a regular passenger the young conductor,

whose name was Michael, used to keep a bag of sawdust behind the step for me in case I felt ill. It was awfully kind of him.

I liked going round London on the buses and Tubes. I didn't find it scary travelling on my own as I found it easy to navigate the city once I'd got used to it. I often went to the West End on Thursdays to go window shopping at C&A's at Marble Arch. I also liked visiting the markets on City Road and at Wood Green. There were lots of different shops and stalls to look at and it was exciting, if a bit noisy. As a family we also used to take the train to Richmond. It was lovely to walk around and look at the boats and nice shops.

I like London but also like the countryside. I often take my dogs walking in Regent's Park, on Parliament Hill Fields and on Hampstead Heath as these are three of my favourite places. I also took my youngest daughter to the Zoo at Regent's Park as it is somewhere my mother took me when I was younger. Family is important to me; I was the second eldest of eight children and have three grandchildren and five great grandchildren.



## TIM CORBETT'S STORY

**“The number 68 is significant to me. It is the number of the first bus I saw when I arrived in Euston and the year I moved to London.”**



I was born in Tipperary in 1949. I started working at the age of fourteen and moved to London at the age of eighteen in search of a job. I came to the London Irish Centre to meet people, settle down and to get to know my way around.

The number 68 is significant to me. It is the number of the first bus I saw when I arrived in Euston and the year I moved to London. I used to get the number 68 bus from the stop near All Saints Church on Church Road. The route then went from Euston to South Croydon, but now it just goes to West Norwood.

I used the bus most days to go to work. Lots of my workmates travelled in by bus, though a few had cars and drove in, and in later years many got the train. I did a variety of jobs then like working on the roads and on construction sites, and later on working as a foreman at Pinner. Construction projects included working for Tearsons on a building site and car park at South Croydon station, and for Lawsons on an old people's home in West Norwood. Sometimes I went back to Ireland when there was work there. Using the buses was a cheap way to travel



about, back then you bought a daily rather than a weekly ticket. Every Sunday morning I'd go to the market at East Street off the Walworth Road with my uncle on the number 68 bus. We'd buy the weekly shopping. I worked on Saturdays but Sunday was a day off.



This photograph reminds me of this period of my life, and the route the bus took (above). The streets were less congested back then and the buses didn't have to queue so long. Journeys were quick as the traffic on the roads moved faster. There were less passengers and less queues, and in general people were more polite. If there was an older person or someone with an injury then people would immediately offer their seat, they don't always do that now. The staff seemed more polite too, these days the driver has more to do and has less time to be courteous.

I've used many other buses over the years such as the number 2 and the number 49, but the number 68 is special to me as the bus I used the most for my first two years in London.

## MARY TALBOT'S STORY

**“I can recall seeing the trolleybuses and thinking they were very strange looking. Coming from Ireland where a bus was a bus and you had to go to a city to see one.”**



**EAST FINCHLEY**



I came over from Ballinasloe in Galway in 1938 to work as a trainee nurse in a TB hospital in Margate. When war broke out we treated the wounded, including the burns victims from Dunkirk. I had to get up early in the mornings to be on the wards at eight o'clock, and sometimes work nights. When we had a day off I would occasionally travel up to London to visit a friend who worked as a dispenser in Muswell Hill. I'd get a train up to Victoria and then a bus into the city. Although I'd lived in a rural area of Ireland I don't remember being daunted by travelling in England. You just got on with it!

I was then sent to Ware in Hertfordshire to work in a hospital treating a mixture of soldiers and elderly patients. When the War ended one of my friends moved to East Finchley in London and said there was a vacancy there if I wanted it. I stayed in East Finchley for a long while. When I first arrived I can remember the trams were still going; I often ran to catch one along the Holloway Road. You used to ring the bell and the tram would stop wherever you wanted, right in the middle of the road.

I can recall seeing the trolleybuses and thinking they were very strange looking. Coming from Ireland where a bus was a bus and you had to go to a city to see one. Then in London were these strange things with wires on top! I did some private cases in the evenings so had to travel about for those, I didn't mind for one job in Edgware because the sons of the patient were very nice and used to drive me to the station.

I used the Tube as well in those days to go with friends to the West End for shopping or an evening out. I can remember the forest of trees at East Finchley, it was terribly scary at night time. I'd also go out to the Irish dance halls at Tottenham Court Road and Cricklewood, and I met my husband at a dance. We went out for two years and then got married at Beales in Holloway Road.

After East Finchley I lived in Archway, which was convenient for St Pancras hospital where I worked. You would be on call so if they needed extra staff you could quickly get to the hospital. We used to go out and about so they couldn't get hold of us! I used the buses at this time. I did an evening job at the Middlesex Hospital and I remember vividly trying to get home through the smog. The conductor would get off the bus and light a wax flare (top left), and walk in front so that the driver could see where he was going. It could sometimes take two hours to get home!



## WHAT DO THESE OBJECTS MEAN TO YOU?

If you have a story about any of these objects or any others from London Transport Museum's collections, why not log on to our Facebook group or check out our Flickr site [www.flickr.com/photos/ltmuseum](http://www.flickr.com/photos/ltmuseum) and tell us about it.

## FIND OUT MORE

### About London Transport Museum

Would you like discover more fascinating objects or intriguing stories about transport past and present? Why not visit the newly refurbished galleries of the London Transport Museum at Covent Garden, or the Museum Depot at Acton where the majority of our vast collections are stored. To find out more about visiting please call us on +44 (0)20 7565 7298 or go to [www.ltmuseum.co.uk](http://www.ltmuseum.co.uk)

London Transport Museum runs a series of community events and projects throughout the year at our sites and out and about in London. If you or your group would like to get involved then give us a call on + 44 (0)207 565 7423 or email [communities@ltmuseum.co.uk](mailto:communities@ltmuseum.co.uk). You can also find out about current and upcoming activities at [www.ltmuseum.co.uk/learning](http://www.ltmuseum.co.uk/learning)

### About the Day Centre

The Day Centre at the London Irish Centre provides a programme of social, cultural, educational and healthy living activities for its members in the boroughs of Camden and Islington. Activities include art and crafts, computer classes, bridge lessons and gentle exercise. It meets three times a week offering good company and home-cooked lunches. Members are proud of the Centre's community spirit.

Images: London Transport Museum © Transport for London



## THANK YOU

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