



Wakey Wakey Copyright Harold Philbin.

One of the jobs on night shift for engine cleaners was to stand in for the knocker up if he was ill, or perhaps on leave. Now here was a job to educate the unwary, and to terrify the ones of nervous disposition. To qualify for this job of national importance, a new man had to learn the ropes as it were. In the daytime, an experienced person who knew exactly where every driver, fireman and member of the shed staff lived, took us round the town in order to pass on his knowledge, this was so that any member of the staff could be contacted as soon as possible at all times. It is never easy to find a specific address during the hours of darkness, and there were no lights at all because of the war. It was not advisable to knock up the wrong person at three a.m., even in an emergency, and you needed to know where a certain driver lived. Also it was essential to know exactly how each driver required to be wakened. Very firm instructions would have been issued regarding the method to be used, and also which window of each house to knock on. Most of the other members of the household would strongly object to someone knocking on their bedroom window in the middle of the night. Very detailed messages would have been given by the master of the household, such as climb up onto a shed roof at the back of the house without making a noise, and then to tap very gently on his bedroom window. This sounds perfectly reasonable until you have tried to do it, and then when you did finally manage it, you would discover that it didn't really matter how much noise you made anyway. There was so much snoring coming from the direction of the master's bedroom, that the house was vibrating like a road drill. It would take more than a tap on a window to awaken anyone in that house at all. Another favourite and firm instruction was to go into the backyard and find the clothes prop and to tap on the window with that. Needless to say, it always took more than a few taps on a Saturday morning if the driver had been out for a few pints the night before.

The regular knocker up, was most competently showing a few of us the addresses of the men one morning about eleven a.m., and one of our top link passenger drivers Charlie Howard, had not been in bed very long after finishing duty during the night. "I think that this is where Charlie lives, but the houses look so much different in the daylight. We had better knock on the door and make sure that this is the right address," said George Lashwood our guide and tutor. He tapped

ever so gently on the door in order not waken the sleeping Charlie, but the door flew open almost at once. " Does Charlie live here," whispered George to the formidable lady who stood dwarfing the opening in the doorway. No reply was the answer, Charlie's wife just turned away from us and shouted up the staircase, " Char--lie you're wanted at the shed." Well, that had most certainly answered our question, but without waiting for conformation we just turned and ran. Mission accomplished, discretion exceeded valour, in this instance no contest.

Having mentioned valour, George the regular knocker up was in the wrong job, here he was working regular nights in the Black out, and he was terrified of the dark. The Bacup Police knew this very well and they used to have their bit of fun with him during the night, and so did we. Someone was always waiting for him to return out of the darkness, and they would frighten him out of his skin with loud noises. The Bacup Borough Police had caught on to this, and they were even worse than us, they would roll an empty dust bin down Lion Street or Venture Brow, and our gallant knocker up would be off like a shot back to base. He would arrive back at the shed and ask the foreman to send someone with him to finish the job. One of us would go with him and insist that he reported the matter to the nearest policeman; this was usually the same one who had frightened him in the first place, poor George, everyone was in on the act except him. As usual something always goes wrong and rebounds on the culprits, then no one believes the truth when it happens. George had only been gone a few minutes in the direction of New Line, and then he was very quickly back again. White as a sheet and he had seen, " A ghost! " " Loomed up out of the fog it did, enormous, dark Grey, making squelching noises and dragging chains, " he said. There were peals of laughter; the policeman has excelled himself tonight.

We gave George a cup of tea, sat him down at the long mess room table, and got him to give us the benefit of his experiences once more, in greater detail. It was most certainly good; too good, there were no volunteers to act as escort this time. "You can all go, " said Wilf Crossley the foreman. So away we all went into the foggy night that had suddenly gone very cold indeed. Six terrified teenagers, and George who had still managed to be the very last one out of the mess room. We were all only interested in finding the nearest policeman, and hoping that they were indeed the culprits. Gaining a little in courage, we decided to spit up into two groups and have a look around the area, there was still no sign of a policeman and away we went. My little group heard and saw nothing at all, the night was still very foggy, and an eerie silence reigned. The other little party had not gone very far, when they met a little old man. He was dark skinned, wearing a turban, and carrying a stick with a large hook on it. "Please Sir's, have you seen my elephants? " he said.



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