

A.T. GORTON 1916 – 1969

AN APPRECIATION

by David Millard

TfL Archives volunteer

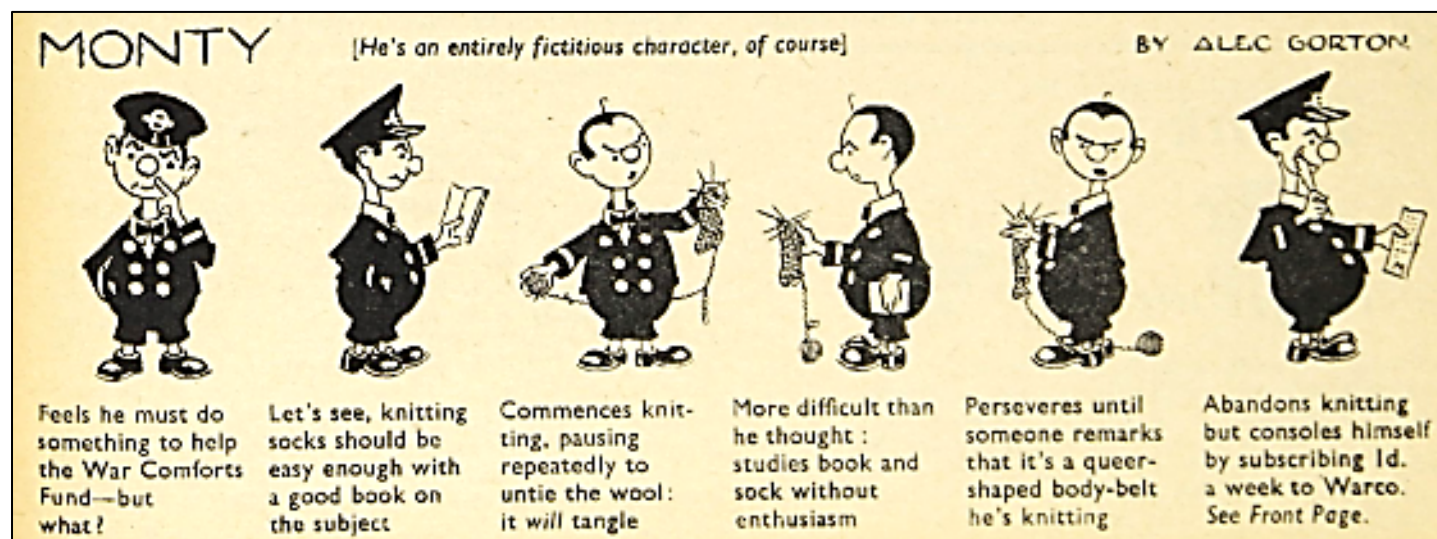
Alec Gorton joined London Electric Railway in 1932 and died in 1969. Unusually, his career can be seen through the lens of staff magazines – this is possible due to the large number of cartoons and drawings that he published. He authored no less than 55 between 1947 and 1952 alone. He was also promoted regularly throughout his career and found time as well to support sports and social clubs.

- 1932 Joined London Electric Railway aged 15½.
Worked as a clerk in the District Traffic Superintendent's office at Oxford Circus.
Worked in Wood Lane signal cabin.
- 1940 Guard at East Finchley.
- 1947 Motorman at East Finchley.
- 1948 Divisional Inspector.
- 1953 Chief Instructor at Lambeth North Railway Training Centre.
- 1955 Operations Assistant on Metropolitan and Bakerloo lines.
- 1959 Training Assistant at Lambeth North Railway Training Centre.
- 1962 Divisional Superintendent Central Line (Principal Executive Assistant).
- 1963 Divisional Superintendent District and Piccadilly lines (Officer).
- 1969 Died in November.

A selection of his cartoons and drawings are included below – a number relate to on-the-job incidents, and have a serious underlying purpose, to improve awareness, safety and job performance. His first publication was in December 1934.

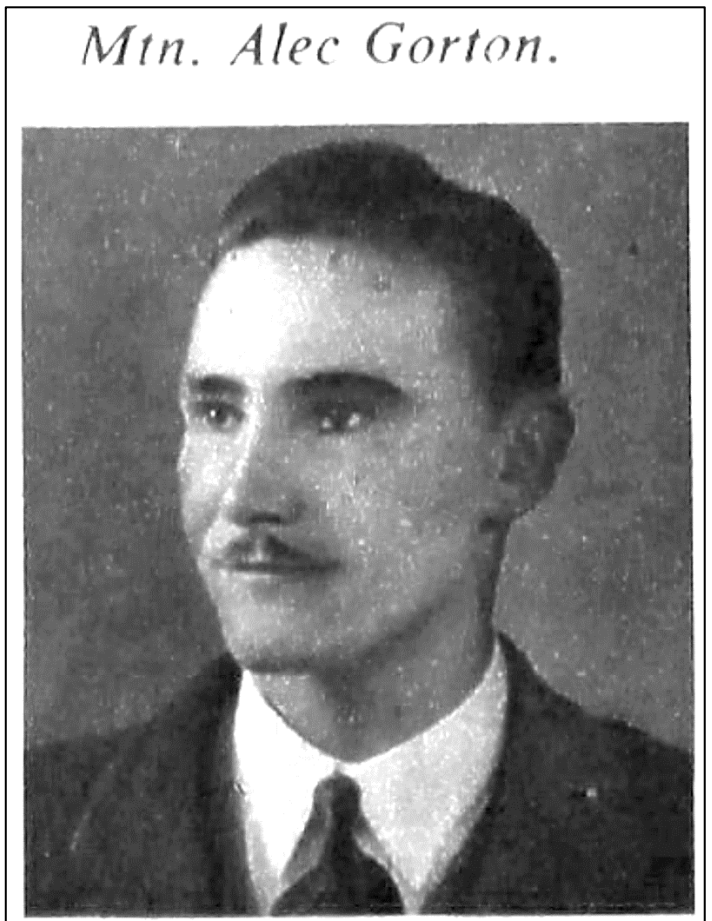
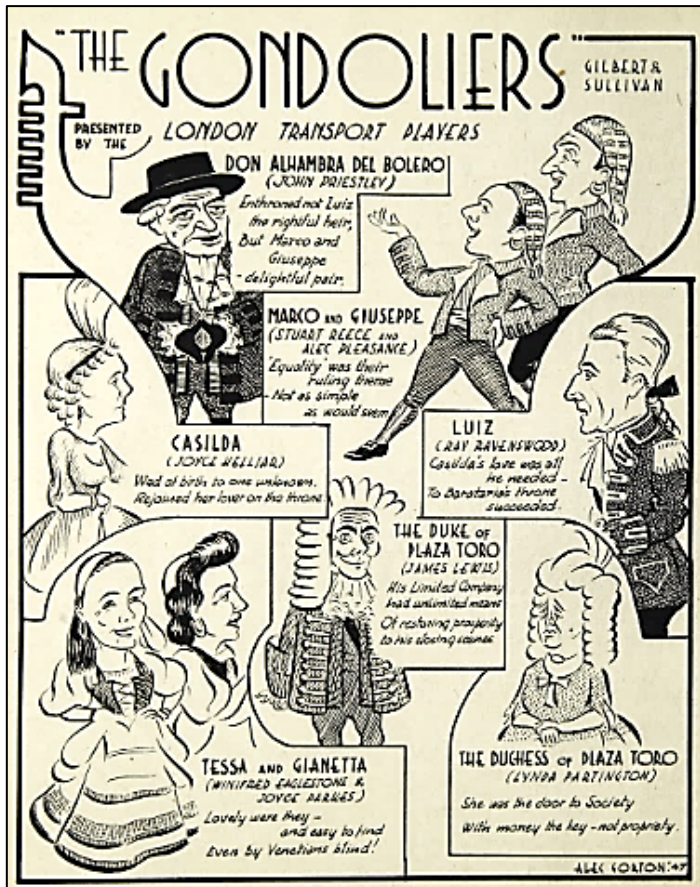


In January 1940, a character called Monty emerged –

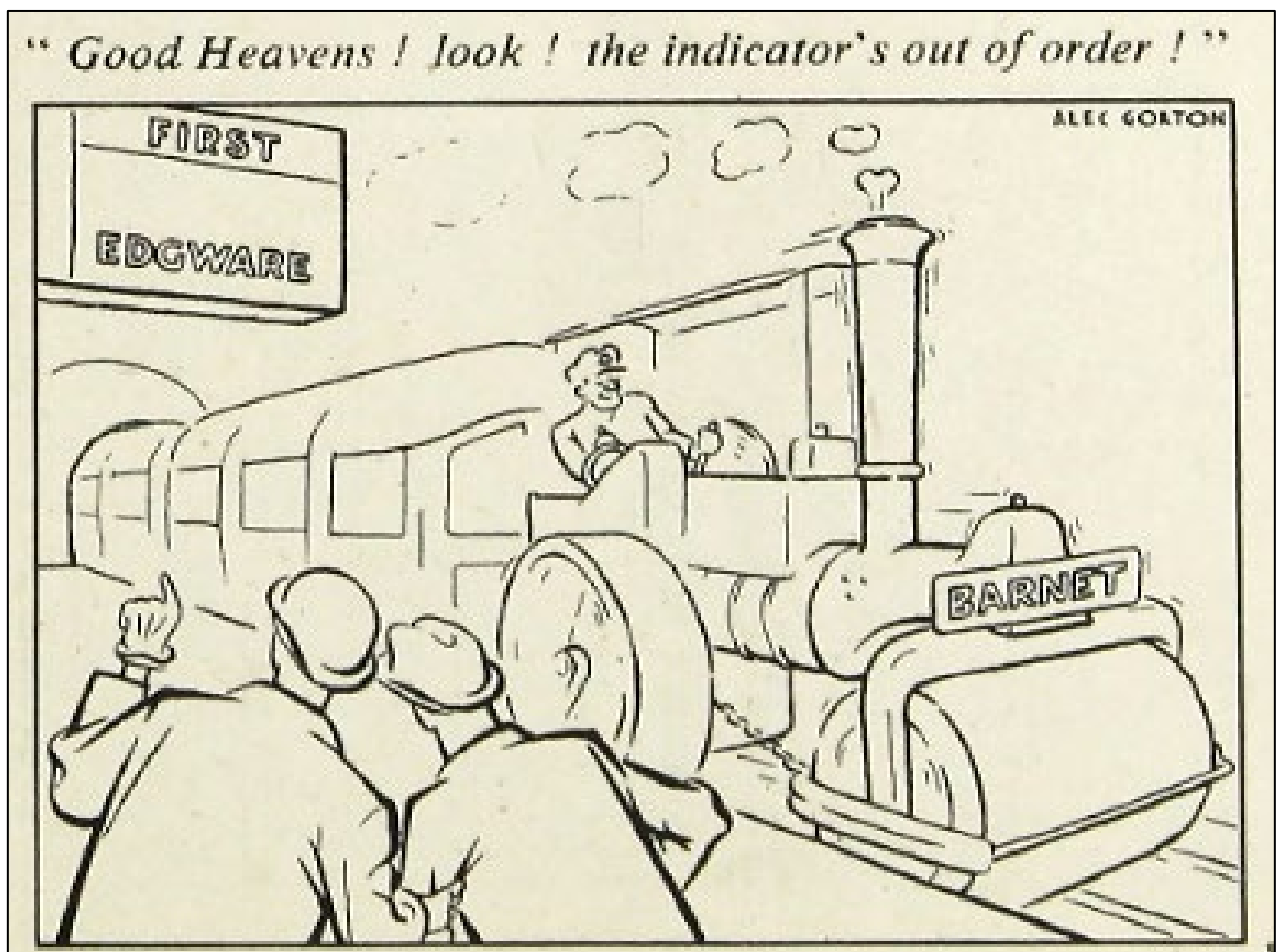


In April 1947 he published sketches of a production of the London Transport Players

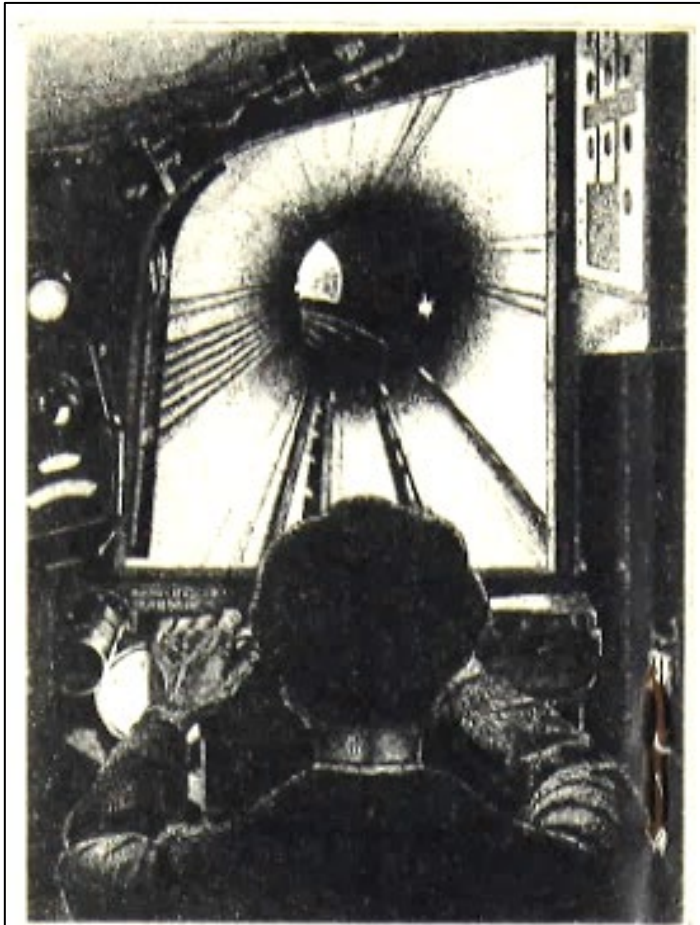
His first photograph emerged the following month.



Wrongly indicated trains north of Camden Town (July 1947) foresaw their being a topical subject for decades into the future.

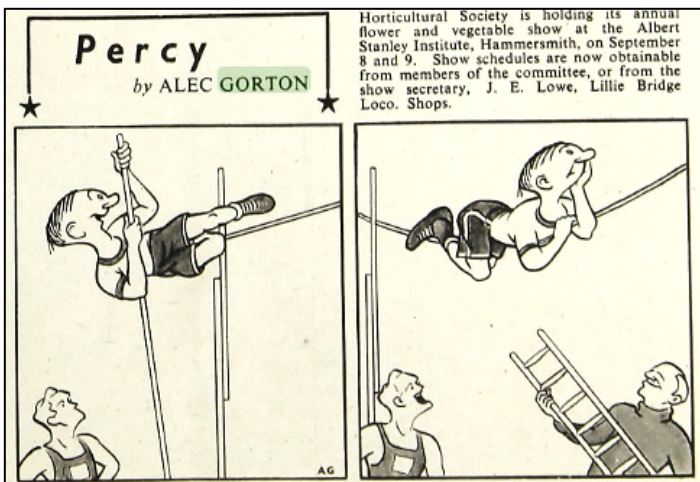


In December 1947, an exhibition was held at 55 Broadway of paintings by staff. Alec's portrait of himself at the controls of a train was described as the 'outstanding picture of the exhibition'.



CABIN VIEW
Motorman Alec Gorton, East Finchley.

His most common character was Percy, who often suffered all types of misfortune. July 1948.



Horticultural Society is holding its annual flower and vegetable show at the Albert Stanley Institute, Hammersmith, on September 8 and 9. Show schedules are now obtainable from members of the committee, or from the show secretary, J. E. Lowe, Lillie Bridge Loco. Shops.

His talent was not confined to the driving of trains: in March 1948, he did the drawings for a double page spread on bus driving, contrasting the habits of 'Driver Rough' and 'Driver Smooth'.

We've got to make life easy for our Buses and Coaches

If we treat our buses and coaches more gently and carefully they will need fewer repairs and be out of service less often, so that there will be more buses available and then we won't have gaps in the services. A little thoughtlessness causes a bad bus for the next driver or even a lot of searching for spare parts and hours of work by the staff at a garage or at Chiswick.



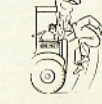
There's no more hand-cranking these days: the electric starter has taken over the hard work which sometimes used to strain tempers or stomach muscles or break arms and thumbs. Now life is easier, and the starter has to do all the work—and take all the kicks. You just press the button. But be careful with it, and do make sure the whirring has stopped before you have another go.



You may be on a bus which isn't thirsty—but how do you know if you haven't checked the water level? It's far too late when things get smelly or expensive noises start down below.



IF things do get smelly and hot, but not more noisy than usual, remember all you know about the heat and power of steam before opening the cap . . . A little care saves your face and hands from possible injury.



NEVER put cold water straight into an overheated engine. Let it cool off first otherwise a cylinder will be cracked and another bus will be up against the wall; then there will be another gap in the service—more hard work, more frustration for someone . . . may be YOU!

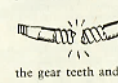


DRIVER ROUGH

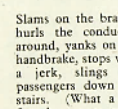
Likes jerky starts: "revs" his engine, slams in his clutch or gear-engaging pedal, nearly breaks the body of the chassis.



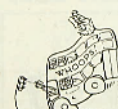
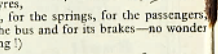
(Pity the poor timing chain, the conductor trying to keep upright in the gangway, the clutch plates, the passenger on the stairs, those shafts in the rear axle.)



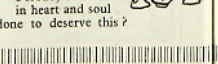
Likes banging his gears in ("what's it matter, anyway?") and riding the clutch pedal; chews bits off the gear teeth and burns out the clutch linings.



Slams on the brakes, hurls the conductor around, yanks on the handbrake, stops with a jerk, slings the passengers down the stairs. (What a life for those poor tyres, for the conductor, for the springs, for the passengers for the whole of the bus and for its brakes—no wonder they need adjusting!)

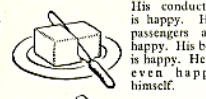


Driver Rough hands over to the next driver a tired bus, minus several teeth and lots of rubber and Ferodo, battered in heart and soul—what has it done to deserve this?

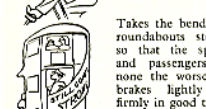


DRIVER SMOOTH

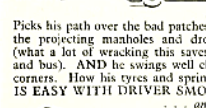
Pulls easily and quietly away, doesn't race his engine, changes gear like a knife through butter; you never feel his brakes go on or come off.



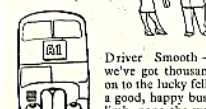
His conductor is happy. His passengers are happy. His bus is happy. He is even happy himself.



Coaxes the old-timer along so that it runs almost as smoothly as the latest and best. It is surprising how well the old ones go.



Takes the bends and roundabouts steadily so that the springs and passengers feel none the worse; he brakes lightly and firmly in good time.

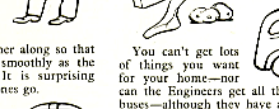


Changes down in good time on hills and saves his engine from labouring.

Have a glance at those tyres, especially the back ones, before you start on another journey. If you feel the bus waddling a little, stop and make sure that a puncture hasn't developed.

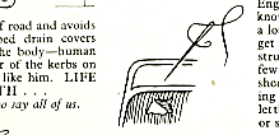


Cigarettes, potatoes and nylons are all in short supply (and aren't they expensive?). So are new buses.



You can't get lots of things you want for your home—nor can the fitters get all the bits they want for the buses—although they have a good try, till the export drive beats them (they even make a lot themselves).

So we've all got to make do with what we've got, and be glad we've got it, AND WE'VE GOT TO TREAT IT LIGHTLY.



Just a further thought—always remember to fill in the driver's report sheet, won't you? You help the inside staff to find the trouble before it gets expensive, and you make sure that a pal of yours doesn't get taken all un-awares by an unreported fault. And if it's O.K.—well, let the Engineers know . . . it hearkens them a lot, you know! They don't get much praise. They have struggled very hard these last few years, what with the shortage of parts and an ageing fleet, but they have never let the standard of performance or safety drop.

"A STITCH IN TIME SAVES NINE" gives the next fellow a much better chance and helps to keep still another bus on the road.



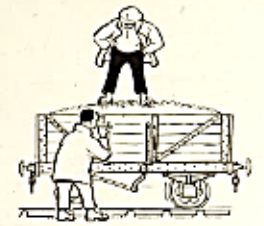
Text by J. G. Shaw
Scott; drawings by Alec Gorton.

May 1950 saw a significant cartoon on Safety on the Track (Opposite, Top).

SAFETY on the TRACK



MEN who work on or about the permanent way must always be on the alert. Each year there are accidents, a few are fatal, some result in permanent injury, and others mean days, weeks or maybe months in hospital. The Chief Engineer's department has produced a booklet entitled *Safety on the Track*, which is being distributed to members of the permanent way staff. It has been written by R. J. Macleod, a divisional assistant to the Permanent Way Engineer, and illustrated by divisional inspector Alec Gorton, who is a ready well known to readers of *London Transport Magazine* for his Percy cartoon which appears in our sports section each month. In these two pages we reproduce a few of the don'ts in a permanent way man's life. However, we feel sure, well agree that life is somewhat less complicated when you use the kind of "juice" that comes out of a drum.



The danger of standing near a wagon door.



Always take precautions to protect your hands.



Never step into the next track for safety.



Never drag a bar sideways by your side when crossing a "live" track.



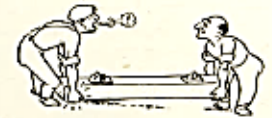
It is dangerous to ride on the front of a trolley with your legs hanging free.



BEFORE and AFTER stepping on a live rail.



Never NOT to cross the track.



Arrange beforehand which end is to be raised first. Lack of co-operation means crushed fingers.

IT WAS A HOLIDAY JOB



An ornamental map of a Cornish fishing village, drawn by chief instructor Alec Gorton (left), of Lambeth North railway training centre, was one of the exhibits at the art group show held last month at Charing Cross booking hall. Buildings he sketched on holiday form the border.

In April 1954 he published a map of a Cornish fishing village where he had been on holiday.

In January 1959, we are introduced to Motorman Percy (*Overleaf*), based no doubt on his own experience. The challenge was how to get staff to remember how to get a train moving in the event of an electrical fault, when the likelihood of it happening to any one motorman was very low. Such was its impact that training handouts included Motorman Percy into the 1980s, when the author received one at the Railway Training Centre, White City.



Bringi MOTOR

LAATEST addition to the "instructional staff" at our railway training centre at Lambeth is motorman Percy. He is the creation of Mr. Alec Gorton, the railway operating department training assistant, who is a cartoonist in his spare time.

Percy is the star performer in a series of cartoons illustrating how to deal with problems that can arise when driving tube trains. These are projected as still pictures in colour on a screen to classes of motormen under training.

A rare occurrence

First example of the proposed series of these cartoons deals with tracing a particular fault in rolling-stock equipment—a defective control line.

"This failure is a comparatively rare occurrence," says Mr. Gorton. "But because it occurs so infrequently it is more likely to stump a motorman who meets with the situation—his train at a halt in the tunnel during the rush-hour, perhaps, and a thousand passengers behind him."

In the first part of the cartoon Percy can be relied upon to do the wrong thing—and his actions raise plenty of laughs from the trainees. Quick-fire questions are put to the class as the problem unfolds in order to ensure that they are thinking out the answers for themselves.

He keeps his head

In the second part of the story Percy becomes a model motorman. Faced with the identical emergency, he keeps his head, and, remembering his training, acts quickly to get his train on the move to a station.

"We do not look on the cartoon as a substitute for the normal classroom training with diagrams and equipment," says Mr. Gorton. "But we hope that it will help to keep fresh in the mind of the beginner the action to be taken in one kind of emergency that he may never meet for many years."

8

Mr. GORTON



In his leadership role, he is seen doing a couple of staff retirements, in 1966 and 1967.

Alec's qualities as a leader have been related to me by a colleague who was a Railway Operating Apprentice in the 1960s. He recalled being invited, as a young apprentice, to accompany him to the prestigious South Kensington Dining Club, reserved for senior officials and their guests. He also remembered Alec arranging for him to have footplate rides on steam engines leaving Lillie Bridge depot. In the days of social hierarchy, these were rare privileges which made a great impression on him.

I recall a memorandum written by Alec Gorton to the Superintendent (Development) Railways about the

operation of trains at Lillie Bridge Depot dated 11 September 1967. He backs up his divisional inspector's observations and makes the case for improvements with balance and clarity. The memo concludes with a characteristic copper plate signature.

His early death, aged 53, was reported in December 1969. The article is repeated below in full.

Death of Mr. Alec Gorton

We regret to report the sudden death last month of Mr. Alec Gorton, divisional superintendent of the District and Piccadilly lines. Here is an appreciation by a colleague.

“Alec Gorton possessed qualities which are seldom found in one man and which made him such a delightful companion, a wise and respected colleague and a man who inspired trust and affection.

“Alec was a thoughtful man, courteous, kind and considerate. He had a natural unforced dignity and with it a capacity for humour and a sense of the ridiculous which were wholly free from malice. To these qualities he allied firmness of purpose which, buttressed by his knowledge and experience of railway matters, made him a natural leader of men.

“His career, from signal box boy to divisional superintendent, speaks for itself. Many will know of the work he performed on behalf of the sports and benevolent organisations and for the Railway Convalescent Homes. He had also a strong social conscience which motivated him all his life and which he quietly pursued both at work and at home.

“To his wife, whose loss is so much greater than ours, goes the deep and genuine sympathy of us all.

Information for this article is based on London Transport Magazines, which are now available on line via the following link.

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