



# Chair Travels

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## East Coast & North

I wanted to visit our front-line staff *in situ* and to meet railway staff and managers to see for myself the interactions that our chaplains have with them – to note first-hand the service that we provide. And I was not disappointed.

I embarked on a round Britain tour to reach the far-flung parts of our jurisdiction. This week saw me cover over 1300 miles by rail.

## Wednesday 22 March

An 8am departure from King's Cross on the ECML (East Coast Main Line) took me to York in under 2 hours and then to Newcastle in under 3. Here I met with jovial Helen Bartlett, our chaplain who covers the northeast. We visited the offices of Trans Pennine Express and Lumo as well as meeting various Network Rail staff including the Station Manger covering



Railway Mission Chair Alex Volossevich

Newcastle, Durham, Darlington, and York. A short ride to Darlington to meet staff there, and then Helen returned north, and I carried on to York for an overnight stop next to the old North Eastern Railway offices.

## Thursday 23 March

I arrived early at the National Railway Museum which was hosting the National Rail Memorial Day. Our chaplains, Angela and



Steve, were working to set up the venue as was our Executive Director, Liam Johnston. Also attending was our Business Manager, Claire, and four Railway Mission Trustees: David, Tom, Iain and me. I also came across Dudley, a former Trustee of the Railway Mission in the 1970s, now a railway archivist at the NRM.

Liam organised the event and acted as master of ceremonies, providing a seamless experience for all those attending. There were hymns,



prayers led by our local chaplain, Angela Levitt-Harwood (*pictured below, left*), music from the Blue Light Symphony Orchestra [drawn from all the emergency services] and vocals from the London Transport Choir.

Various reflections were led by rail staff and personal stories were offered from BTP (British Transport Police) officers and from serving LNER staff. Lucy D'Orsi, Chief Constable of the BTP, gave some touching closing remarks and the whole event finished with the Chairman of Network Rail, Lord [Peter] Hendy (*pictured above*) unveiling a commemorative plaque.

It was a highly polished and professional event that brought together people from across the railway fraternity.

2.50 saw me on the LNER service north to overnight in Dun Deagh, known more commonly as Dundee.

## Friday 24 March

In Dundee, I met with our local chaplain, Dereck Grant (*pictured right*), and we hopped on a ScotRail service to Aberdeen. On arrival, we were invited to a management 'listening' exercise with local staff, to improve customer service in that part of Scotland.

It was a well-run meeting with many good points being made which were promised to be acted upon by Joanne Maguire, COO ScotRail and Alex Hynes (*pictured with Alex on next page*), MD ScotRail. After a quick bite we took the next train to Edinburgh.

In Edinburgh we met with various local staff before heading back to Dundee, our heads buzzing with the conversations that we had enjoyed today – a round trip of some 250 miles!

## Saturday 25 March

I got the 9.33 service south towards London, I assumed the train was heading for Kings Cross, so imagine my surprise when the train displayed '09.33 to Penzance'. This was the 0820 from Aberdeen arriving in Penzance at 2140! Quite a journey!



Dereck Grant, chaplain for East Scotland

I changed trains in Durham and ended up safely at Kings Cross later that afternoon to be home long before my train from Dundee reached its final stabling point in Cornwall!

## West Coast and Scotland

Having sampled the delights of the main line on the East Coast last week, this time my journey is up the West Coast – different sights, other people, new accents...

## Wednesday 29 March

An 8:45 departure from Euston and at just past 11 my train was gliding into Liverpool Lime Street, where our newest recruit, Karen Schofield (*pictured next page, below*), met me and we had a cup of tea that enabled me to recover from the bumpy ride on the WCML (West Coast Main Line).



Alex meets with Alex Hynes, DM for ScotRail

Refreshed, we visited Hannah Tabassum, Customer Experience Manager at Merseyrail.

Part of her role is to focus on engaging staff in health awareness initiatives and mental health programmes and she showed us marketing material co-branded Merseyrail and Railway Mission and described how the two organisations had worked together on several programmes.

We then went underground to the Merseyrail network and got the train to Birkenhead where we picked up the journey southwards.



We got as far as Chester to have lunch, say hello to gateline staff and then headed east to Warrington where I left Karen to carry on to Manchester for a main line train to Glasgow.

### Thursday 30 March

Today I met Graham Whitehead, our chaplain covering Glasgow and the west of Scotland. We had a meeting with Gill Murray, Chief Superintendent of BTP based in Divisional HQ. Like Hannah at Merseyrail yesterday, Supt Murray expressed appreciation for the work of the Railway Mission which she considered an indispensable part of the railway infrastructure.



After lunch with Graham, I reflected on the events of the last two days: two quite different people from dissimilar organisations but both right behind the work of the Railway Mission and prepared to say so. We must be 'doing something right' I thought and made my way by Transpennine Express to Manchester.

### Friday 31 March

I met our chaplain covering this part of the northwest, Mike Roberts, on the concourse at Piccadilly where we chatted with the gateline



Mike Roberts, chaplain for North West & Wales

staff, train crews and Toby, one of four station managers.

We headed to the Management Office and met various staff including Margaret Edge the deputy station manager. I was impressed by how our chaplains must interface not just with so many staff but also all the organisations for which the staff work: I counted 6 TOCs in this station, plus cleaning companies, etc.

A short trip out and we were in Ashbury, the location of the regional Rail Operations Centre. Security was high, with airlock-type double security doors and a staff escort, as the building houses Rail Management, Signalling and Policing.

We had meetings with Martin Beal from Management, Michelle Wedderburn (BTP Inspector i/c Disruption Team) and Darren from Signalling (Liverpool Area Shift Signalling Manager).

What impressed me most was the integrated nature of the ROC as these teams cooperated and worked together: an intention of the design of the place.

As with everywhere else we were welcomed, and the work of the Railway Mission appreciated.

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Helen Bartlett, chaplain for the Newcastle area pictured in Darlington



We caught a Northern service to Preston during which we learnt from a friendly staff member that one is allowed to take 3 dogs on the train free of charge, but the fourth one you must pay for. Amazing what you learn...!

At Preston we chatted with various Avanti staff and visited the Driver Manager & Conductor Manager Centre where the staff had positive things to say about the contribution of Railway Mission to staff welfare.

Lastly, we visited the BTP operations room covering Preston and a significant section of the WCML and saw the change of shift in progress.

## *Retrospective*

This week I had met 3 chaplains (Karen, Graham, and Mike), been to three areas of the UK (Liverpool,

Glasgow and Manchester and met three distinct groups of railway people (customer facing staff, police, and railway management).

Though their roles are varied, what united them was both the spirit of working for something much bigger than themselves or their area – the railway – and the positive esteem in which they all held the Railway Mission and its contribution.

I pondered that ‘we must be doing something right’ and wondered how we can continue to ensure we deliver a consistent service which is beneficial to rail operations and share the support we give at all the points of need – that must be the challenge that we face as we go into the future.

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Alex with Pauline Fenwick of Network Rail, and chaplain Steve Rowe, at York





**They were there  
when I needed  
some support**

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