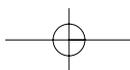


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also by Martin Lloyd

The Passport
The Trouble with France
The Chinese Transfer
The Trouble with Spain
Every Picture
Hunting the Golden Lion
Rue Amélie

writing as K.T. Yalta
No Harm in Looking

Neither
Civil nor
Servant

Twenty-four years in the
Immigration Service.

Martin Lloyd.



Queen Anne's Fan

First published in 2014 by **Queen Anne's Fan**
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Queen Anne's Fan

Preface

If there is one thing that really annoys me it is a book which opens with an author's declaration that he only wrote the work for his own amusement, this followed by a false apology for inflicting the modest tome upon the public and concluding with a justification of the crime by divulging that his friends had read the manuscript and persuaded him against his better judgment to get it published.

You will not find that here.

The stimulus for my writing *Neither Civil nor Servant* was to record for my children what their father had been doing all the time that he had been absent from their lives. It is neither an autobiography nor a work of fiction. It all happened. It is a record without reverence built along an autobiographical thread and it certainly displays the prejudices and inaccuracies that such works always contain but rarely admit to. Official records exist but they will not tell you what it was like to work in the Immigration Service of the late twentieth century. My book will.

One can always challenge the interpretation of events and I warn you now that this is how I saw them.

THE ILLUSTRATIONS

Wherever I went I carried my drawing pen or pencil and I often found myself sketching what I could see from my desk. Occasionally I used my camera. The chapter numbers are taken from the date line of an immigration officer's embarkation stamp. The odd pieces of ephemera illustrated are those contemporary witnesses that I picked up at random to use as bookmarks and which, years later, still surprise me by leaping out of books in my library.

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I stare at the name in the book on my desk and then check again in the red passport that the young Swiss man has given me. It is the same name. Involuntarily I glance at the passenger standing before me. He has blue eyes and frizzy untidy hair. My mouth goes dry. ‘Stay calm’, they had said on the training course, ‘stay calm and follow the instruction against the name in the book.’

It was my second day ‘on the desk’ at London Heathrow Terminal Three and I had caught somebody in the suspect index – the book of naughty names that was issued to all immigration officers. My second day! Some officers served five years before catching anybody.

‘Richard Auf der Mauer, born 10.8.52. Swiss. Unlikely to qualify for leave to enter.’

Panic.

All that I had learned so far on the first three weeks of my training course had just left for some distant destination like the thundering jet behind me. Help! I need help. My mentor is tantalisingly out of reach, leaning on an unoccupied desk between us two trainees. Perry Humber, his name is. Been in the Service twenty years. A senior IO. (immigration officer). He is puzzling over the *Telegraph* crossword with the other trainee’s mentor.

‘H... how long are you staying?’ I manage to stutter through the gluten on my glottis, praying that Perry will turn around and take some interest in his ward.

Richard Auf der Mauer, Swiss and only a few years younger than me rubs his nose. ‘About two weeks.’

I try to look confident as I flick over the pages of his passport. He had been landed at Luton airport three times in the last year. Straightforward visitor. No restrictions. He was Swiss for Heaven’s sake. Who the devil bothers to look up Swiss passengers in the book? Trainees do. Trainees have to look up every passenger they deal with for the first two years – the time required for them to pass their probation and become ‘proper’ immigration officers. I swallow hard, trying to get my vocal cords to work.

‘And er... what are you going to do here?’

I was falling back on the training template. ‘How long are you staying? What will you do here? How much money have you got? Have you got a return ticket?’

Perry’s grey sports jacket juts out behind him as he pores over the newspaper on the desk top. I still cannot catch his attention.

‘I will visit a friend.’

Whilst the passenger adjusts the strap of his backpack, I scrawl, *‘he’s in the book’* on a landing card and flip it onto Perry’s newspaper.

‘How much money have you got?’ I ask.

I glance across at the two crossword addicts. Perry reads the card, grins at me and turns back to the newspaper. He doesn’t believe me.

‘About fifty pounds.’

‘Perry!’ I hiss.

‘Repeat please,’ the Swiss says.

‘I was talking to... er him.’ Oh God what do I do now? I’ve only got one question left before I start asking real questions. ‘Do you have a return ticket? May I see it please?’ He swings his backpack to the floor and disappears below the front of my desk as he rummages in it. I leap from my stool and poke my mentor in the ribs with my Stationery Office ball point pen. ‘He’s in the bloody book!’

This time Perry reacts. His eyes start out like golf balls in blancmange. He sweeps me aside and grabs my book. I put my finger on the name and he agrees with me. He writes on a self-duplicating form, tears off the top sheet and gives it to the passenger.

‘Sit down over there,’ he says and then turns to me. ‘Grab your stuff.’ I snatch up my book and stamps from the desk and follow Perry through the solid door into the general office. One wall of the office accommodation is glass and gives glimpses of airliners on stands and, further away, the hairline streak of Runway 28 Right. Suddenly Perry stops and *click, click, click*, deploys a telescope which he trains on a craft which is taxiing on the other side of the field. ‘Hmm. 707. Woolly Tops,’ he mutters and then collapses the telescope back into his pocket.

‘Woolly Tops?’

‘Nigeria Airways. Their flight prefix is ‘WT’

‘So why do you call them Woolly Tops?’

He pulls a face and tries to decide whether or not I am stupid. ‘Work it out for yourself,’ he says. ‘Quick, bag that empty table. I’ll go and get the suspect circular on this pax. You’ve got your first refusal.’

I sit down and spread out my stuff. ‘This will jolly well show them.’

I think to myself. I had been struggling through the training course with difficulty. We were a mixed bunch of recruit IOs. At twenty-four I seemed to be senior to most of them. Some had already been working at a port, under supervision of course, for several months. I envied them their familiarity with the different rubber stamps and their ease with the jargon. Others had come straight from university with the study ethos still in their blood. I envied them their facility to comprehend the most complex instructions at the first explanation. Pete and I had only been at our port for a couple of weeks before being sent on this course and we knew nothing. He had come from five years living in the Netherlands; I had come from three years in Paris. I didn't even know what song was top of the hit parade in the UK.

At my recruitment interview I had asked to work at Heathrow. I had been posted to Dover. I had quickly realised that Dover East, where I was to toil, was not the same as Dover West. The East was characterised by modern glass-and-steel buildings, lifts, escalators, a multi-storey staff car park and subsidised canteen. As the Harbour Board expanded the terminal facilities by building further out into the harbour, the IOs found themselves working so far from the ships that they might just as well have been at an airport. Across the bay, at Dover West, the immigration office was a shack perched on top of the Dover Marine station, the sea crashed over the quay on stormy days, the trains rumbled below and alongside the office and if you wanted something to eat you went to the porters' canteen, known affectionately as 'Snotgobblers'. Dover West was a man's port. Dover East was for pansies.

For three weeks we had attended classes in Lunar House. Yes, I am afraid that was its name. It was a twelve storey office block in Croydon which had just been taken over by the Home Office, of which the Immigration Service was an arm. There, we listened to explanations on how to land students or businessmen and some of the more esoteric categories of passenger such as Japanese chicken-sexers and quail attendants. We followed the illustrations on the overhead projector. Then we tried it ourselves in role-play exercises where one trainee had to interview an instructor whilst everybody else watched and dreaded the moment when their turn would come.

We were shown a black and white film about security and told that homosexuals were a risk because they were vulnerable to seduction and blackmail. One was allowed to say things like that in those days. I was upset at the discrimination. Did this mean that, as a heterosexual, I was debarred by my proclivities from the opportunity of being seduced by a

voluptuous Russian temptress? It did not seem fair.

Occasionally a representative of another department or organisation would come and talk to us. It made a change. Special Branch made it clear to us that the enemy was Ireland and the Soviet Bloc. Everybody was looking forward to Thelma. She was from MI5, or 'Box 500' as it was known to the initiated, and she was going to tell us all about spies and secrecy and how we could help the Security Service by keeping our eyes and ears open. Thelma was a horsey-looking woman of advanced years who spoke about 'gels' and 'fellers' and for fifty minutes was able to entertain us with anecdotes and opinions so circumstantial as to be utterly useless.

With the Home Office Immigration and Nationality Department situated within the building, opportunities were grasped for us to see how other sections functioned. The Traffic Index was mind-boggling. This was the bin into which all the landing cards from the ports around the United Kingdom were chucked. It was an airy room of a geometrical shape but I was unable to count the sides. In it were row upon row of card index filing cabinets and squadron upon squadron of white-haired ladies to service them. Here, we learned that some nationalities customarily used far fewer names than others but retained their width of choice by varying their spellings. This obliged the ladies to index them down to the last letter of the last name.

And nearby on a ground floor was the Public Enquiry Office. Foreigners who had already been admitted came to this office to ask to be allowed to stay longer. 'Applying for an extension' it was called. At eight thirty each morning when we arrived for our lessons the queue of applicants already stretched around the block like a multicoloured scarf. We sat in the cubicles with the clerical officers who took in the passports and forms and processed them. Mindful of the fact that as an immigration officer, albeit a probationer, I was a grade above a clerical officer, I picked out a passport and leafed through it with a professional air.

'Libya? He's probably an arms dealer,' I declared in a portentous voice.

'Oh has he been to Libya?' the girl asked.

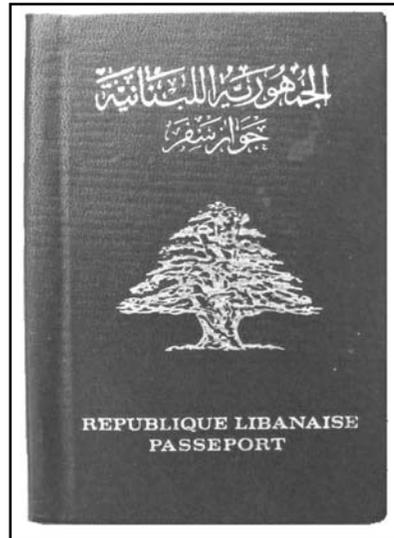
'Well he comes from Libya,' I explained, closing the passport to show her the black cover with a golden tree printed on it. '*Passeport du Liban.*' I read.

'Oh, I thought that was the Lebanon. On account of the tree. It always looks like a Lebanese cedar to me.'

'Yes, confusing isn't it?' I tried to smile away my crass ignorance. Of course he was Lebanese. How would I ever become an immigration officer if I could make such an elementary mistake as that? I wondered

LEBANESE PASSPORT

Any fool can see
that the tree is
a cedar of
Lebanon.



whether I really wanted to become a civil servant, that most despised of parasite, rather than stay in the supposedly vibrant and efficient private sector. Could I make myself sufficiently petty-minded to fulfil the stereotype of the job?

I took my first pay check into the Croydon branch of Lloyds Bank and handed it to the cashier, indicating that I wished to withdraw five pounds.

‘I shall have to phone your branch to see whether you have sufficient funds.’

‘That’s a cheque for one hundred and twenty-nine pounds. That will cover it.’

‘But the cheque will not be cleared for five working days.’

‘But it will be alright.’

‘We cannot know that.’

‘Don’t be daft. It’s signed by HM Treasury. Are you saying that you think their cheques will bounce?’

He telephoned my bank and debited my account the telephone charge of fifty pence because I refused to pay for the call on the basis that it was their call not mine. I knew I had enough money in my account. Several years later when they thought up the great idea of charging customers one pound every time they used the ATM I transferred my account to another enterprise, making sure that I withdrew fifty pence more money than I possessed. Yes, not only could I become sufficiently petty to become a

servant, I was probably there already.

After the three weeks of cramming instructions, laws, regulations and

rules, into our heads we were then sent out to ports for three weeks to try it all out. As I was to be posted to a seaport, I was mentored at an airport. It made sense. It gave me an insight into traffic that I would never see crossing the Channel.

Perry returns with the relevant volume of bound circulars from the safe. This tells us that Mr. Auf der Mauer had been previously found in possession of forty mandrax tablets at Heathrow and sent back to Switzerland. I have no idea what the tablets are but Perry says that they are a sort of stimulant and as such, are a controlled drug. Apparently you could do interesting things with them if you knew what to mix them with. I nod sagely and wonder where his knowledge comes from. He guides me through the unfamiliar forms, dictating what I should write.

'You have asked for leave to enter the United Kingdom for two weeks as a visitor but I am not satisfied that no more than a visit is intended. Furthermore, on a previous visit to the United Kingdom you were found in possession of a controlled drug, in the light of which I consider your exclusion to be conducive to the public good.' Perry looks at his watch. 'I think that ties him up nicely. Let's see if we can get him back on the same flight.' A quick turnaround. The 'bum's rush' as it is called. 'Sign that.' He throws a form across to me. 'Put your stamp there,' I crash my stamp down on the form. 'And there,' *Crash*. 'And there.' *Crash*. He grabs the phone. 'I'll get Security to pick him up.'

'I haven't refused him yet,' I observe. 'I haven't served the forms.'

'We'll do that when Security arrive. It's quicker.'

He is right. I officially refuse entry to the UK to Mr. Auf der Mauer whose response is one of disbelief and outrage.

'But I come for holiday. I have medicine for me.'

'Come along now. Get yer bag,' the security guard orders.

'But I...'

'When I say, "Come along" you move, sunshine. Now move.'

I am searching through the bundle of self-duplicated copies; forms that previously I have only handled in training exercises. 'I can't find the IS 87 to give to him,' I say to Perry. This is the form which notifies him of his right to take my decision to a court of appeal and tells him how to do it.

Perry ignores me. 'OK mate, take him away,' he says to the guard. I follow Perry back into the general office. He turns at the door and looks at me. 'You've got a lot to learn,' he says, and crumples up the appeal form and drops it into the nearest bin.

Obviously I had.

Now, whenever I smell aviation gasoline, I think of Terminal Three, Heathrow. Those three weeks of rainbow humanity telling me fantastic stories usually just when I wanted to go for a pee or eat my lunch. The IOs here knew so much about so many countries and peoples and religions. I, indeed, had a lot to learn. And one important maxim was that if you did not give a refused passenger his appeal form, then he did not appeal. It was wrong and I knew it but it was difficult not to collude. I was learning; this chap was supposed to be teaching me how to do the job. Well, if this was the way the job was done, I suppose that was how I should do it.

Perry made me write a report to ISHQ, pointing out that the passenger whom I had recognised on the suspect index had been landed at Luton airport several months earlier. I importantly showed it to another trainee who was on duty with me.

'You shitbag!' was her response. 'The Luton IO will get a file back from Estabs. for that. They'll give him a bollocking.'

'Well,' I said in justification, 'he should have looked him up in the book like I did.'

'Pompous git.' She scowled at me pityingly. 'Are you never going to make a mistake? You wait till you get a file back. You won't thank the bastard who reported you.'

Her reaction made me quite miserable. I sat at a spare table and immersed myself in the general noting file – a hotchpotch of informations and announcements, some of an official nature, others of parochial social importance only. I imagined that everybody around me was muttering about me but I cherished a childish conceit of my impact on the office; in truth, nobody knew who I was and even fewer cared.

The next day is an early start. In the northside carpark I crouch into the back of the bus shelter trying to evade the cutting wind and sousing rain. The shuttle bus looms up out of the dark and drives straight past me. I swear and edge out into the maelstrom so that the bus drivers can see me. The next bus does not even slow down. Why am I the only person waiting at this bus stop? I had driven down to this end of the car park because it had lots of empty spaces. I now realise why. In the mornings the buses pick up from the other end; in the evenings they pick up from my end. I gather my coat around me and trudge into the weather. Another crowded bus rattles past me before I get to a valid bus stop. I thought of the IOs who did this every day. Having to leave their car a mile from work in acres of

car park and then take another twenty minutes to get into the office. Apparently, after fourteen years at Terminal Three you could expect to qualify for a 'centre pass' which would authorise you to park just opposite the office.

The transatlantic flights start coming in from 6 o'clock onwards. The night shift are bleary-eyed from bed or poker or takeaway curry as they straggle out to the desks. The early shift is expected to take over any casework from them. If the night shift stop a suspect passenger they issue them with a detention form and hand the case over to a colleague so that they can go home to bed. Some of the headhunter IOs will stay on to keep their figures up. The more passengers you refuse, the higher you rise in esteem.

As I wander diffidently amongst the office furniture, trying to look as if I know what I am doing, an IO with his nose buried in the general noting file asks nobody in particular, 'Have you seen this?'

'What?'

'A Home Office directive about presents from the public and business contacts. We have to declare them and submit them for assessment and then we will be told whether we can accept them or not.'

'Oh.'

'That means the inspector will have to declare the pineapple that the station manager of Ghana Airways gave him last week. Ha!' He looks up at me to gauge my response. 'Oh, you're a trainee aren't you? Never mind.' I am dismissed.

Out on the desk, Perry is a little more solicitous of me and less of his crossword. 'No more excitement,' he warns. 'After this flight we can go for breakfast.' He runs a practised eye over the last few passengers in the queue. 'I'll see you in the general office.'

He wanders away. This is his way of giving me the confidence to work on my own. I stamp the passport of the blue rinse American, flick the landing card onto the pile and nod at the queue marshal. He points a man over to me. I watch him as he approaches. He is about thirty-five years old, wearing jeans and a blue denim jacket. His face is weatherbeaten and a red neckerchief is tied at his collar. His clothes look as if he has slept in them for more than just the time of the flight. When I take his Norwegian passport I notice that he has not shaved for several days. Quite frankly, he looks scruffy. I open his passport.

'How long are you staying?'

'I go to Holland.'

'Where have you come from?'

‘Canada. Montreal.’

‘What were you doing in Canada?’ I am already suspicious for his passport bears only a Canadian embarkation stamp. So how did he get into Canada and how long has he been there?

‘I do nothing in Canada. I am seaman. I lose ship. I come home.’

‘You are Norwegian. Do you live in Holland?’

‘No. I get ship there.’

‘To Norway?’

He shrugs his shoulders. ‘Norway, maybe. China, maybe.’

So what have I got here? An out of work Norwegian seaman coming to the UK to go to the Netherlands to look for another ship. How could I be sure that he would not take a ship from the UK? Would it matter if he did? All the role-play exercises concerning contract seamen to join ship’s articles ran through my mind in ragged confusion. I start to sort out all the special seaman stamps from the box before me. It is then that I notice that his passport was issued in Canada. This explains why there is only an embarkation stamp but it also means that I have no way of knowing how long he had been there and whether he was in breach of his landing permission whilst there. But if he is a seaman, why isn’t he travelling on his seaman’s book?

‘Where is your seaman’s book?’

‘Lost in the ship.’

‘Why have you a passport issued in Canada? What happened to your previous passport?’

‘Lost in the ship. All lost in the ship.’

I look around. Perry is nowhere to be seen. I fall back on the old favourites. ‘Show me your ticket.’ He burrows in a plastic carrier bag which, I now begin to suspect, had recently contained a quantity of in-flight duty free alcohol, and gives me a ticket. It was issued in Montreal and will take him to Amsterdam. So he will have to go across to Terminal Two for the KLM flight. I am stuck. ‘Have you any baggage?’ I ask. Perhaps a delve into his luggage will give me a clue.

In reply, he holds up the plastic bag. ‘All my baggage.’

This was preposterous. You don’t fly across the Atlantic with a bag of duty free booze and no clothes, even if you are a seaman.

‘Where are your clothes?’ He tugs at his shirt collar with his fingers. ‘No, your other clothes?’

‘All in ship.’

He left his clothes in the ship? He was not making sense. I have a sudden flash of inspiration. ‘How much money have you got?’

‘Money? Dollars?’

‘Yes dollars, pounds or whatever.’

I notice that Perry is standing outside the office door and tapping his watch at me. The seaman lifts his plastic bag and upends it over my desk. A mass of screwed up paper balls rolls out. The seaman hiccoughs. I gaze at the variously coloured rubbish. I pick one at random and tentatively smooth it out on the desk. It is a Canadian five-dollar note. I take another. Ten US dollars.

‘What are you doing?’ Perry is at my elbow.

‘Counting his money.’ I straighten out another currency note. ‘He’s got no baggage, no clothes or anything. He’s got a single ticket and he ‘lost’ his passport in the ship. Anything I ask for he says he lost in the ship.’ Perry watches me in silence for a few seconds, then he takes the passport. ‘He’s a seaman,’ I add.

‘A seaman?’ he repeats. ‘Where is his seaman’s book?’

‘He says that he lost it in the ship.’

‘A seaman?’ he addresses the passenger. The man nods. ‘Where is your ship?’

The man makes a plunging motion with his hand. ‘Lost ship,’ he says.

‘Where are you going?’

‘Amsterdam.’

‘Roll him,’ Perry instructs me. This means treat him like a tourist. The expression arises because to achieve the endorsement the IO has to roll his stamp forwards so that the tourist wording engraved on the flange above the main body of the stamp is also printed on the page.

‘But he’s got nothing—’

‘Neither would you have if you had just been shipwrecked like him. Just send him on his way. He’s had enough trouble this week.’

‘Shipwrecked?’ I blather. Passport ‘lost in the ship.’ The balls of screwed up paper suddenly make sense. They had been in the ocean. So had he, probably. And I was worried because he had not shaved.

By the end of my first week I was becoming hardened to some of the procedures. Taking passengers downstairs to have their baggage searched, we always let Customs do this so that they get blown up by the bombs or pricked by the syringes instead of us. If Customs find nothing of interest to us, then we take the passengers back upstairs and do their baggage again. I learn to count the baggage checks stapled to their tickets because crafty passengers, if they know that they have incriminating documents in one particular suitcase, simply fail to identify it and leave it rattling around

the carousel to be collected later if they get through.

I was taught how to play the queue. Arriving passengers were herded into lines by garlands of rope looped on chromium stands. A British queue, a Commonwealth queue, one for the EEC, as we called it then, and one for 'aliens,' which was the Home Office term for all the others. Each queue was controlled by one or two marshals who handed out landing cards to those requiring them and then regulated the feed of passengers to the desks as they became free. I was about to land an American student who was coming for a trip into Europe when Perry suddenly butted in with some more questions. I sat back and listened. I must have missed something, but just as suddenly, Perry said, 'OK, roll him,' and then waved to the marshal for another passenger. 'I thought you could do with a Kuwaiti for a change,' he said. He had looked up the queue, identified his quarry and then purposefully prolonged my interview until the Kuwaiti was at the front and ripe for plucking.

The twenty-five year old Kuwaiti had flown in to go shopping. I looked at him, wondering whether he was taking the mickey.

'What are you coming to buy?'

'Clothes.' He shrugged. 'A watch perhaps.'

'How much money have you got?'

Another shrug. 'About twenty thousand pounds.'

Now I knew he was taking the piss. 'Show me.'

He shrugged again and pulled out a leather wallet containing a wadge of one-hundred pound traveller's cheques. Two hundred of them. He was going to spend seven times my annual salary on a shopping trip.

'I thought you needed an education,' Perry explained afterwards.

During slack periods I read instructions. Did you know that the vehicles on the airside aprons must show an orange flashing light on the roof, not an orange rotating light? And it had been sanctioned from on high that IOs at Terminal Three could now wear a leather jacket in the place of the sports jacket or lounge suit if they wished.

One quiet spell I was sitting out on the desk. The arrivals hall was empty except for a Pakistani cleaner who was lethargically swinging an industrial floor polisher back and forth up at the far end. I was listening to Perry as he regaled me with outrageous tales of the activities of certain of his colleagues.

'Just a minute. Watch this,' he said.

He sidled over to the wall, leaned down and clicked off the switch for the floor polisher. Thirty yards away the cleaner stopped and looked at the

machine. He tugged at the cable and Perry switched the plug on again. Satisfied, the man continued his sweeping back and forth. Perry repeated the action, simulating a break in the cable near the machine by switching on and off when the operator moved the flex in a certain direction. We then sat there for ten minutes and watched the man polish the floor whilst holding a loop of the flex above his head in the belief that this was the only way that the machine would work. I didn't know what this proved but it was entertainment.

On another day I spent some time on the 'medical desk'. Immigrants coming to settle in the UK would be issued with a special visa which was usually an intricately engraved label which was stuck into their passport. They would have been accepted for settlement on the condition that they underwent a medical examination upon arrival. My job was mainly clerical. I checked that the person presenting the passport was the rightful holder and not some cousin or other impostor; I ascertained that their sponsor, that is, the person whom they were coming to live with, was in the airport to meet them. This was a useful double check upon the claimed relationship, and then I sent them along to see the Port Medical Inspector. The PMIs were general practitioner doctors who were paid to provide a twenty-four hour service at the port. Many of the immigrants were from the Indian sub continent – usually wives and children coming to join the father or husband who had been given permission to live here. Occasionally one would see an aged relative who qualified on the grounds that, as all the rest of the family was already here, there was nobody in their country to look after them. There was a gamut of different stamps and regulations to be applied and these differed between Commonwealth and alien passengers. I was out of my depth, utterly confused and very glad when my stint was over. And I am sure that I did it all wrong.

I had applied for the job of immigration officer after having seen an advertisement in the *Daily Mail*. One of the conditions of employment which appealed to my immature nature was the assertion, 'you may be required to drive a car'. Now that was a job with status! I was but a little disappointed after a few days at Dover East to discover that the port only possessed one official car for one hundred and fifty staff. It was a Mini Clubman estate complete with the imitation plastic wood decoration laid over the urine yellow paintwork. I only drove it once before it was sold and it was never replaced. My task on that occasion had been to deliver a passport to Heathrow as quickly as possible so that a refused passenger could be removed. I arrived at the airport in time, handed over the

passport and then realised that I needed to fill up the tank in order to get back so I pulled into a busy filling station on the Bath Road. Try as I might, I could not remove the filler cap. Unlike on the saloon version, this filler cap did not stand proud of the rear wing, it skulked in a sort of niche carved in the bodywork as if designed to house a religious relic or icon. There was hardly any space around the cap for my fingers. I tried my right hand, I tried my left. I tried both hands. I tried wrapping a rag around it to give me more grip. I tried straight-armed. I tried bent-armed. The filler cap was as if welded to the pipe. It did not budge one millimetre. By this time the other customers had recognised me as a trouble maker and had reversed and manoeuvred their ways around me.

‘Ya fillin’ up or just dancin’?’ the cashier’s tinny voice barked at me over the tannoy.

‘I can’t get the petrol cap off.’ I gave it a demonstrative wrench. The only result was a torn fingernail.

The aluminium door banged in its frame and the cashier waddled across the forecourt to me.

‘It’s not my car, you see,’ I explained in mitigation.

She looked at me with absolutely no expression on her face at all, clasped a hand around the cap and wrenched it off with a flick of the wrist and placed it with exaggerated care on the roof of the car.

‘And I’m not selling you more than six gallons,’ she said as she walked away.

‘Why not?’

‘It’s only got a six gallon tank.’

Terminal Three, I discover, have three cars. Perry is chatting to a colleague and breaks apart when he sees me. ‘If you’ve got room why not take my sprog with you,’ he suggests. ‘It’ll all be training for him.’

‘If you like.’ His mate holds out his hand to me. ‘I’m Derek.’ I never did learn his other name. ‘We’re doing a VIP embark. Chokky bikkies,’ he adds.

This is obviously a coded expression for something that I am supposed to be aware of so I hide my ignorance with a knowing nod. On the way down the corridor we pick up the other two IOs who are doing the embarkation with us. One is carrying a buff folder.

‘Which have you got?’ Derek asks him.

‘The Mini.’ He shows him the front of the folder.

The title on the file is a car registration number. I deduce that in the folder are the papers for the vehicle and the journey sheet that has to be

filled in every time that it is used. What I also notice is that somebody has written in bold red letters across the front cover, *'this car is dangerous and must not be driven.'* When I timorously draw this warning to Derek's attention he says, 'Oh that's been on there for ages.'

So all four of us invest the Mini. I am over six feet tall and Derek is built like a rugby forward and we are squeezed onto the back seat, sitting with our unyielding cases on our laps. They usefully fill the space that might otherwise have remained vacant between our stomachs and the backs of the front seats.

'Here, shove my case between you will you?' the driver says and another black official bag slithers over the back of the seats and falls into the only gap that remained between us. In 1974, seat belts were not fitted in the rear of cars. In our situation they would have been unnecessary – we could not have moved had we wanted to.

Off we go. I had assumed that we were going to the VIP suite at Heathrow but I was soon disabused of this with a derisory, 'oh that's just for posers. The real VIPs don't come anywhere near the terminal.' We were to embark a group of MPs who were taking a plane of the Queen's Flight to go to Paris. These operated from a small apron right over the other side of the field. In my ignorance of the layout of Heathrow, this seemed to be in the middle of nowhere. I suppose that was why it was safe – everybody could be seen approaching. Access was via another revelation – the cargo tunnel. Many people are familiar with the approach road to the airport from the M4 where it passes under the runway in a tunnel. I now learned that there was another tunnel to be found on the other side of the airport.

The Mini whines and smokes its way amongst the buses, taxis and lorries and we plunge into the sodium-lit gloom of the cargo tunnel. As we gather speed, the driver steers out towards the white line. A van coming in the opposite direction flashes its lights. He steers back and we nearly clip the barrier. Back we go again, this time crossing the centre line, then back to the wall, then back and half way into the opposite carriageway straight into the path of three thousand gallons of aviation spirit. The tanker blows its horn and puts its lights full up. Our driver yanks the wheel back and we see the wheel nuts on the tanker spinning past our ears.

'What did you do that for?' Derek asks. 'Christ!' he adds as we clip the kerb.

'It's the bloody car. The steering's all to cock.'

'Slow down then, try to get a hold on it.'

He brakes and the amplitude of our zigzags begins to diminish until we are travelling more or less where the driver points us. We are now doing

only twenty miles per hour and until we leave the tunnel we, in the back seat, are terrifyingly aware of the front bumper of a very frustrated lorry as it bounces and lurches four feet behind our skulls.

When we climb out, Derek observes, 'The Mini is alright with two up, but as soon as you put anybody in the back seat it lifts the weight off the front wheels.'

'But it does say on the folder that the car is dangerous,' I point out.

'Yeah, perhaps that is the reason. The steering needs tightening up.'

I look over the roof where I can see the top of a small airliner. 'That looks like a Hawker Siddeley 748.'

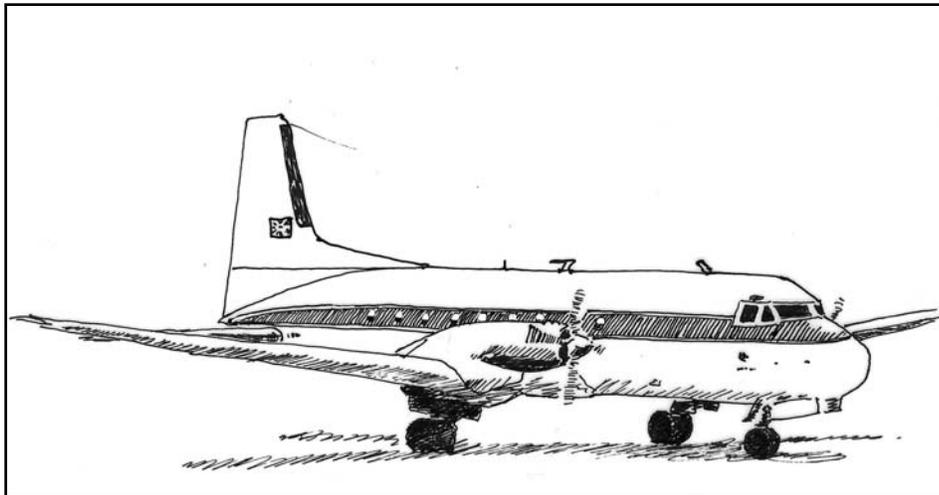
Derek grins at me. 'That's what happens when you get paired up with Perry Humber – you start plane spotting.'

'Not really. I used to travel regularly with a cheapy airline called Skyways. They used them. They were noisy, rattly and slow.'

'Yeah well this is not a cheapy airline; it's the Queen's Flight.' I was aghast. Did the Queen really fly in crates like that? 'Come on, we've got work to do. Chokky bikkies.'

'Right. Chokky bikkies.'

I still did not know what, in this context, the colloquialism for



THE QUEEN'S FLIGHT

It was a Hawker Siddeley 748!

'chocolate biscuits' signified.

We followed the other two officers into the building. It looked like one of the original wartime huts that had then become the newly opened

Heath Row Airport when it had been handed over by the RAF in 1946. It was the typical prefabricated concrete construction with uniform windows running down both sides and huge concrete beams arching over to support the ceiling. This particular building had been divided half way along by the later addition of a pair of concertina doors. These were closed when we entered but we could hear the voices of a small congregation coming from the other side. We introduced ourselves to the customs and special branch officers and then sat back on the steel framed canvas chairs to wait.

After five minutes Derek decided that he had waited long enough and rapped on the doors. After some fumbling, they were opened by a young lady in a blue suit. Behind her, it was another world. No linoleum but plush blue carpet; not canvas and steel but upholstered armchairs. The group was even drinking percolated coffee.

‘Immigration,’ Derek said. ‘Passport control.’

‘Oh gosh! Yes. Well, this is the Foreign Secretary’s party. They’re going to Paris for the talks.’ She tapped her clipboard importantly.

I was impressed. The Foreign Secretary. Wow! Derek nodded.

‘Then they will all have their passports with them won’t they?’

‘Oh yes,’ she grasped the offer. ‘They all have their passports.’ She smiled sweetly, assuming that to be the end of the conversation.

‘Good,’ said Derek. ‘Then can I see them?’

‘You want to see their passports?’ She was nonplussed.

‘I didn’t come here to look at your pretty blue eyes, my dear, I am an immigration officer and we are here to embark those passengers.’

With this, she became brisk. She disappeared into the melé and returned with a dozen passports stacked in her hands. Derek picked up the top one and read out the name.

‘Mr. Call-ag-han.’ He pronounced the name as if he had never read it before. ‘Which one is he.’

The girl was wide-eyed at his ignorance. ‘That’s the Foreign Secretary.’

‘I know what he is, my dear, I want to know who he is. Which of this assembled crowd is Mr. Call-ag-han?’

‘He’s that one over there.’ She half-turned and, hiding her finger under her nose, she pointed out the Foreign Secretary with her flicking eyes and jabbing digit.

I thought Derek was being a little unfair on the poor girl. She was only a PA or something. But Derek had not finished. ‘I can’t see his face. Can you get him to turn around please?’

This was too much for the PA. The thought of asking the Secretary of

State for Foreign Affairs of Her Britannic Majesty's Government to turn around so that an IO could check his passport was beyond the pale.

'But he's the Foreign Secretary. Surely you know him?'

'Never met him,' Derek said and then raised his voice, 'Mr. Call-ag-han, could you turn this way please?' The PA crumpled into the concertina doors, hoping that they would eat her and the Right Hon. James Callaghan, MP, turned and waved at Derek. 'Thank you sir.'

The rest were easy.

And when they had all tramped up the steps and were safely on board, the significance of the phrase, 'chokky bikkies' was revealed to me. As the aircraft taxied away, in one body the customs officers, special branch and IOs turned and stampeded back into the building, through the concertina doors they raced and sharp right to the table where the percolator was still bubbling. Scrabbling hands fought over two plates. Derek turned, a chocolate digestive biscuit held daintily in his fingers.

'Chokky bikkies,' he said. 'It's what the job is all about.'

Well, they had not told me that on the training course.

I was to make another visit to the VIP terminal before my training at Heathrow was finished, in different company and for different passengers. HRH Princess Alexandra was due in on the Queen's Flight. We motored over, thankfully not in the deathtrap Mini, and stood outside the building whilst she disembarked from the plane. A green Austin 1800 drove up to the foot of the steps, she got in and was whisked away. As the car swept past the short line of officials who were trying not to look too deferential but were nevertheless standing almost to attention, Princess Alexandra turned and gave us a huge grin and a frantic wave. Caught unawares, we all waved back as if she was just our cousin going home and then we saw each other doing it and felt embarrassed.

But Heathrow had not finished my education. One sunny Saturday afternoon I drove in for a late shift which would finish at midnight. The traffic into the airport was unusually heavy and I supposed it to be because it was the weekend. Then we all stopped and did not move. Nobody was going anywhere. I eventually joined some others and pulled off the road and parked on the middle of the roundabout. There we waited. A bomb had just exploded in the multi-storey car park at Terminal One. The central area was now closed. We sat there in the gentle haze of falling kerosene and cooked in the afternoon heat. After a long delay, the traffic began to move once again and, an hour late, I made it to the staff car park, northside. Traffic had all been diverted around the perimeter road

which was two lanes only and our shuttle bus was no exception. We crawled and sweltered and swore. We were not allowed to alight because no pedestrians were permitted so we were trapped. Happily for the drivers who had arrived at the airport behind us, the act of diverting us around the scenic route now freed up the road to the centre. When I arrived on duty, the later shift had already been working for half an hour. I was sure that this sort of disturbance was not going to occur down at Dover. It had only been a small bomb and nobody had been hurt. The only effect I could distinguish was a scorch mark on the brickwork and the bizarre sight of a car park full of cars all with their boot lids raised, presumably by the shock of the explosion. I did not take the threat seriously. Bombs were for other people. Within a few months the IRA had killed two in a pub in Guildford, two more in a pub in Woolwich, twenty one with one hundred and twenty injured in Birmingham and finished off with a Christmas bombing campaign in London.

Perhaps some of what they told us at Lunar House had been important.