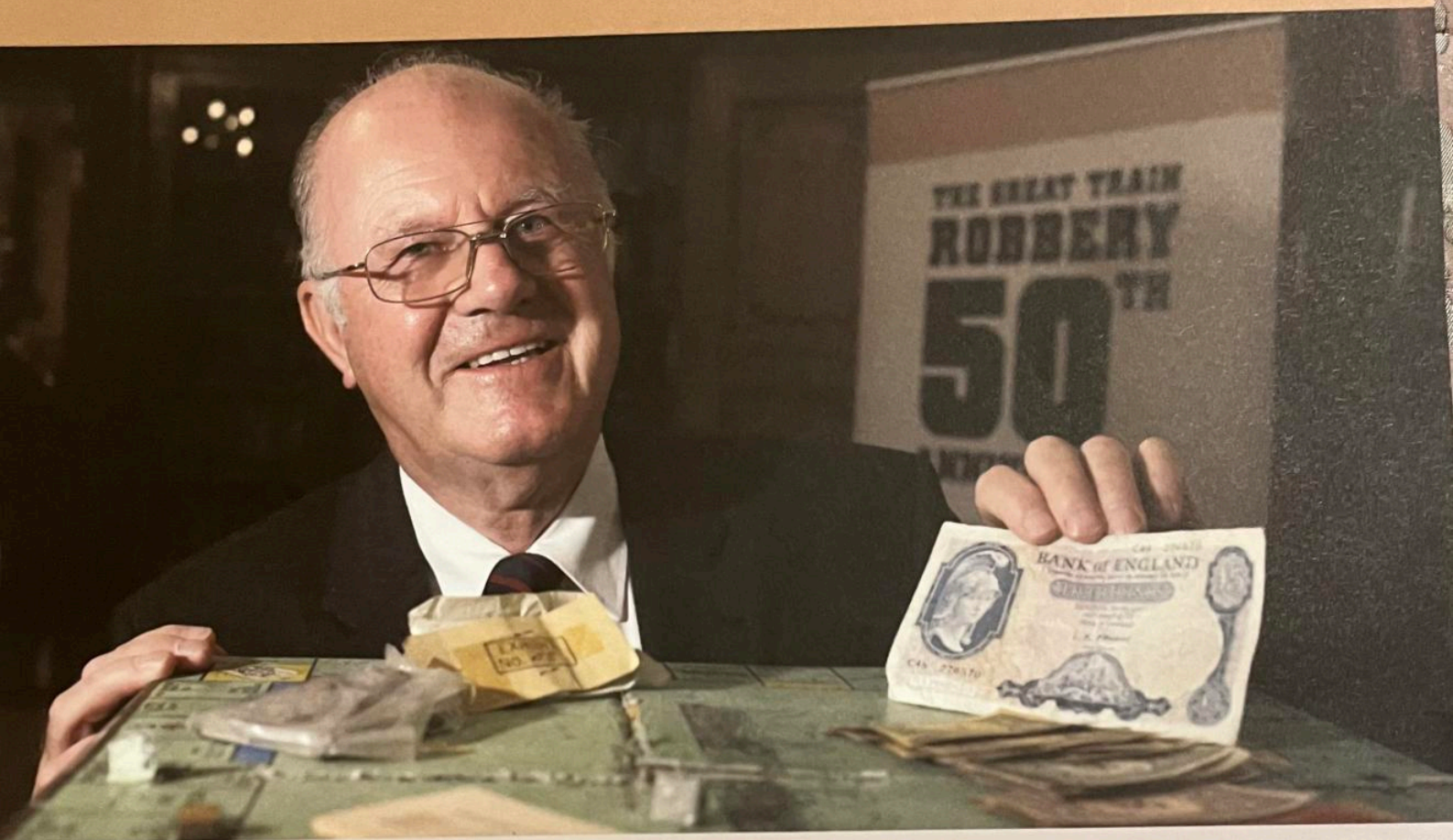


A thamesview special edition



**THE GREAT TRAIN  
ROBBERY  
50<sup>TH</sup>  
ANNIVERSARY**

\*Photo courtesy of: Steve Parsons/Press Association Images

**6.40PM 7 AUG 1963:**  
The Royal Mail train sets off from Glasgow.

**3.03AM 8 AUG 1963:**  
Forced red signal brings the train to a halt near Sears Crossing.

Train is driven to Bridego Bridge where the money is unloaded. The unloading takes just 25 minutes.

**4.30AM 8 AUG 1963:**  
Alarm raised by the signalman.

# THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY

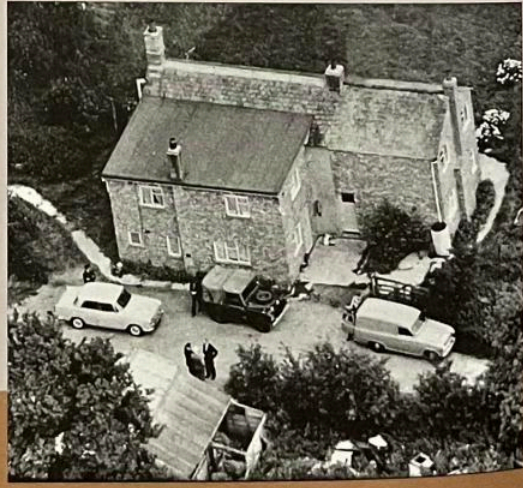
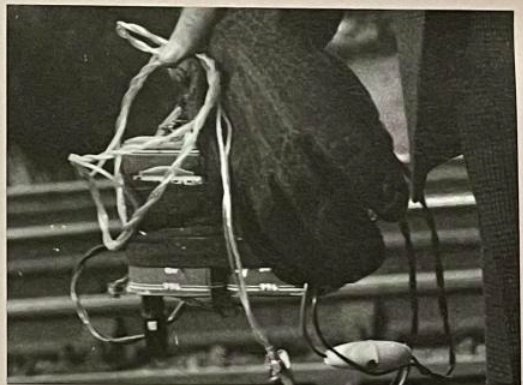
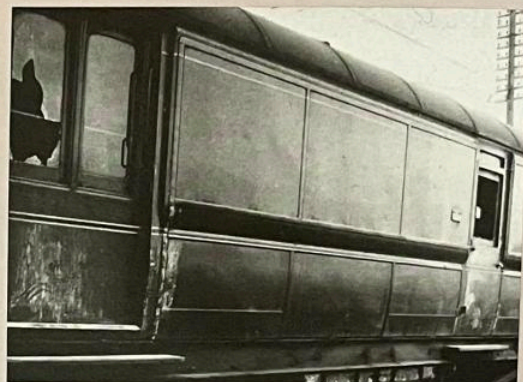
**THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY of 1963 has become one of the most infamous heists of all time.**

- Taking place a day later than originally planned, the gang set off from Leatherslade Farm near Oakley, Buckinghamshire at around 1am on Thursday 8 August 1963. Reaching their destination, Sears Crossing between Leighton Buzzard and Cheddington, the train signals were rigged to stay red, forcing the train to come to a halt at 3.03am.
- The gang, disguised in masks, army uniform and boiler suits, swarmed the train and quickly detached the two front carriages from the rest; the front two being where the cash and high value packages (HVPs) were kept, then forcing the train driver, Jack Mills, to drive the two carriages half a mile further up the track to Bridego Bridge. This is where the unloading of the cash took place.
- There were no police or security officers on board the train, and although more than 70 mail sorting staff occupied the rest of the train, they were left unaware of what had happened.
- When the robbery began it was David Whitby, acting secondman, who left the train to address the red lights. Upon discovering the phone wires had been cut he was then confronted and thrown down the embankment where gang members restrained him.
- Meanwhile, Jack Mills had begun to put up a fight in order to prevent the gang from boarding the train; however this resulted in him being coshed over the head by another gang member who had boarded the train from behind him. The perpetrator of the blow has never been identified though it is believed to have been one of the 'heavies' employed by the gang.
- The robbers had planned for one of their number to move the locomotive and the two detached carriages but the robber realised he could not drive the large diesel, having had experience on diesel shunters only. Jack Mills, bleeding profusely, was then forced to drive the train to Bridego Bridge.
- The gang had thought to cut the phone lines so it was not

until 4.15am that the alarm had reached the signalman. By this time the robbers were arriving back at Leatherslade Farm. It was here that they celebrated the robbery, divided up the money shares, and played a game of Monopoly using the money they had just stolen.

- It was at the farm that their plan began to fall apart. Fingerprints were left on items in the farmhouse after the accomplice hired to burn it down failed to stick to his word; leaving their identities exposed. Perhaps luckily for the gang, the local media had wrongly reported that the police were searching farm houses within a 30 mile radius from the robbery, thus scaring the gang and forcing them to leave Leatherslade earlier than planned. This meant they had not spent time covering their tracks properly.

- The farm has since been described as 'one big clue', and items found inside Leatherslade including the Monopoly set are now on display at the Thames Valley Police museum.



13 AUG 1963: Leatherslade farm discovered by the police.

15 APRIL 1964: Train Robbers receive sentences of between 24 and 30 years.

9 November 1968: Bruce Reynolds captured after 5 years on the run.

MAY 2001: Ronnie Biggs finally returns to England after 35 years on the run.



# BROUGHT TO JUSTICE

## BRINGING THE CRIMINALS involved to justice was never an easy task.

The majority of the gang were eventually sentenced to a combined total of over 300 years imprisonment.

Leader of the gang, Bruce Reynolds was captured after five years on the run and Buster Edwards after fleeing to Mexico for three years.

Ronald 'Ronnie' Biggs was sentenced to 30 years in jail but escaped from Wandsworth prison in 1965 and spent the following 36 years as a fugitive residing in Paris, Australia and finally Brazil.

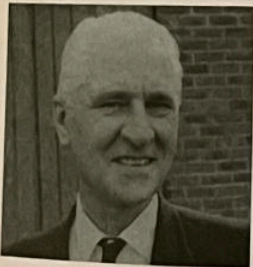
In addition, a further 17 people were charged with offences ranging from conspiracy to obstruct justice, harbouring wanted persons, and receiving stolen property.

Officers from the Buckinghamshire Constabulary were joined by members of the British Transport Police as well as detectives from the Metropolitan Police's Flying Squad. The investigation into the train robbery was a massive one and employed over 70 dedicated officers working on the case.

In total, over 2,000 official reports were documented and of the original 2,535 witness statements, over 250 witnesses were called to court.



# KEEP IT IN THE FAMILY



## THE GREAT Train Robbery is something very close to the heart for Acting Detective Sergeant, Rachel Jackson and her family.

Rachel's grandfather, Malcolm Fewtrell was the Head of Buckinghamshire CID at the time of the robbery.

Chief Inspector Fewtrell, who was born in Ryde Police Station in 1909, where his father was the Station Sergeant, led the investigation into the Great Train Robbery.

It was in the early hours of Thursday 8 August 1963 that he was called out to the scene of the crime at Sears Crossing.

Once the scale of the robbery became apparent he was assisted by Scotland Yard Officer, Chief Inspector Gerald MacArthur.

It was their decision to announce that they believed that the robbers

were holed up within 30 miles of the robbery that led to the discovery of Leatherslade Farm and a mass of fingerprint and other forensic evidence. This remained the only evidence upon which so many were convicted.

Chief Inspector Fewtrell interviewed the robbers and built up the case for the trials which took place in 1964.

He and MacArthur arrested the first two of the robbers, Roger Cordery and William Boal, in Bournemouth approximately ten days after the robbery and returned to Aylesbury with them and £150,000 cash. This was the only money found in possession of any of the robbers.

The tracking down of those who went on the run was done solely by the Flying Squad led by Tommy Butler, as they were all London based criminals.

Fewtrell remained virtually full time on the case and investigation until the end of the trial in April 1964 and gave evidence at the trial. He retired soon after the trial ended having been in Bucks Constabulary for 31 years.

Fewtrell wrote his book 'The Train Robbery' which was serialised in the Sunday Telegraph and did many lectures on the robbery in the UK and Europe through the

Foyles Lecture Agency.

He did numerous TV and radio interviews throughout the rest of his life, always being called upon whenever it was in the news until he died aged 96 in Swanage in 2005.

On reminiscing about her grandfather Rachel says: "Grandad was always so interested in the policing world and would often talk about his time as a detective. He was so passionate about his job and his previous cases.

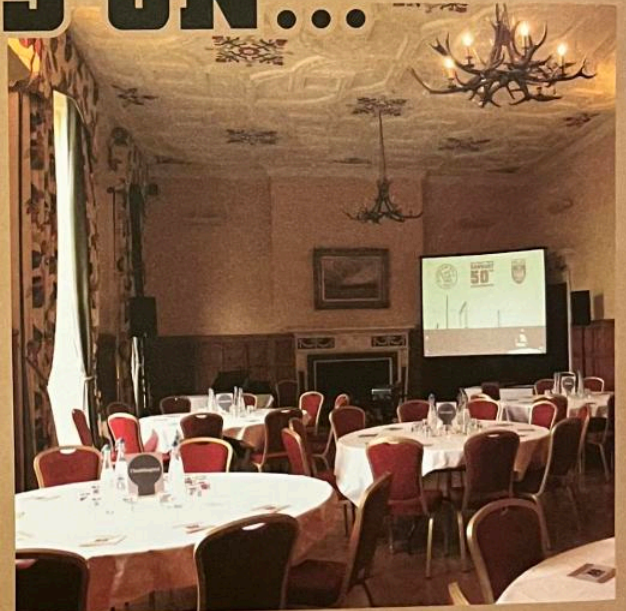
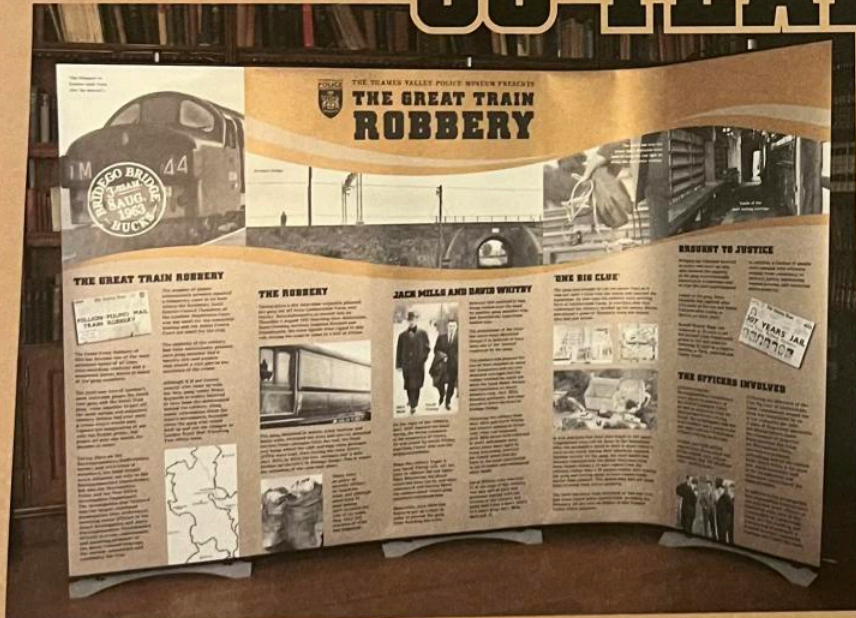
"The Great Train Robbery in particular was always a major topic of conversation in our family and his stories never grew old. I remember him still doing both television and radio interviews right up until the later years.

"Grandad was one of the most active people of his age and was still playing golf almost up until he died at the age of 96. Similarly his mind and wit never faltered and he would always enjoy winding people up! He definitely led to my interest in joining the police and in particular joining Thames Valley Police. My aspiration was always to become a detective and follow in his footsteps. Luckily he was still alive as I was filling in the application form to join the police so although he was no longer with us when I joined he gave me plenty of tips."





# 50 YEARS ON...



## 50TH EVENT AT EYNESHAM HALL

**THE CHIEF CONSTABLE** hosted an event at Eynsham Hall on Wednesday 7 August for retired Buckinghamshire Constabulary officers and staff who worked on the Great Train Robbery.

The event marked the 50th year since the robbery took place and saw retired officers and staff sat alongside serving officers to commemorate and commend the dedication of those involved in bringing the robbers to justice.

Chief Constable Sara Thornton said: "The coverage in the newspapers and the discussion is always about the offenders in this notorious crime. I wanted to balance that by thanking the police officers and police staff who played a very important role in making sure that those men were brought to justice 50 years ago."

This special edition of Thames View was produced by Steve Smith, Laura Deane and Claire Brand from Corporate Communications.

