



BOOK EXTRACT

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Chapter 2 The Curse of the Train Robbers *(by Tel Currie)*

“Too many people knew about this bit of work and it was going to end in tears.” - Freddie Foreman

Time has not been kind to the Great Train Robbers. In fact, like those who discovered Tutankhamun's burial site at the start of the last century, many believe that the Great Train Robbery was cursed. I personally don't believe this theory, because surely the chief of the Tutankhamun adventure, Howard Carter, and the mastermind behind the train robbery, Bruce Reynolds, would have been the first to suffer the horrific curse. This never happened, of course, and in fact Bruce is still very much alive I'm a pleased to say. As for Howard Carter, he died of natural causes many years later. However, what cannot be ignored is the fact that both adventures ended with many questions still unanswered.

Out of the other Train Robbery gang members, Charlie Wilson was of course assassinated at his villa in Spain in 1990, Roy James died on the operating table during a somewhat experimental heart operation, Brian Field was killed in a car accident and Bobby Welch had serious walking difficulties for some years. Bill Boal had in fact had absolutely nothing to do with the Train Robbery but was sentenced anyway in what must be one of the greatest miscarriages of justice in British legal history, and Tommy Wisbey was sentenced along with Eddie Richardson on a cocaine charge (both Tommy and Eddie are now free). One of the three Train Robbers who got away and was never charged and who was a very close friend of Bruce Reynolds has also passed away.

Bruce Reynolds's health hasn't been great for a while now either, although I'm pleased to say I spoke to Bruce a couple of weeks ago and he's remaining positive. We had a good chat about which people we rated and which ones we didn't and we had a bit of a heart to heart. I have the ultimate respect for Bruce. I would say that, among the Chaps, Bruce and Charlie Richardson are the most intelligent, most highly read men I have met. There's always a book that they insist you must read. Charlie has given me a load of books lately, including ones on evolution, science and motor racing and one called *Honour Thy Father*, which is about 600

pages long. You name it and Charlie and Bruce have read it.

Of course, Buster Edwards' suicide shocked everyone. What also seemed shocking was that Frankie Fraser fell out with Buster because, according to Frank, he had met Buster when he was on his way to give evidence for the prosecution in the trial of the Taylor sisters. I have to say, however, that I've never heard this from anyone except Frank. Charlie Wilson's suicide was also a real shocker, and there's something about a suicide that makes everyone think that maybe, just maybe, they could've said or done something to prevent the tragedy.

In Buster's case, what makes the matter worse is the fact that Buster's despair seems to point more and more at one man's stupidity and incompetence ... that, and 30 tons of coffee granules. At this time Buster had lost some merchandise, the council was going to close his beloved flower stall outside Waterloo Station and he was skint. The sale of all that coffee was going to put him something like back on track. The coffee had to be delivered to Liverpool, but the driver tried to save money by not filling the lorry up with diesel and as a result it conked out and he just left it where it was. Buster's lifeline had gone up in smoke. The combination of financial ruin and the possibility of going back to prison was very hard to swallow. The next day Buster hung himself in the lock-up of his flower stall after drinking a bottle of vodka. It was an absolute tragedy. Buster's tragic story also put paid to the view still held by some that the Train Robbers had millions stashed away from 1963. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Another major cock-up occurred in the post-robbery clearing-up process. Someone was simply supposed to go back to the farm that the gang had been using as their base and clean it up after the robbers had left, making sure that all fingerprints were removed and it was completely evidence-free. That never happened, so then it was on to Plan B – burn the place down. Guess what? That never happened either. The bloke never turned up. So there it was - a great big standing clue! And Biggsy's prints were found on a Monopoly board.

This guy must've been one of the worst villains and unluckiest men in general. His name was Tommy Marks, better known as Ginger Marks. In 1965 he was walking down Cheshire Street in Bethnal Green with his mate Jimmy Evans, when he thought somebody called him from a car. Marks bent down to see who was in the car, shots were fired and Marks was never seen again. His disappearance into thin air would later be repeated on Jack McVitie and Frank Mitchell. Marks was not a mistake - he was supposed to get it as well, but Jimmy Evans was target number 1.

In one of life's ironies, the guy who coshed Jack Mills and as a result got most of the others 30 years was one of the three robbers who were never caught! The length of those ridiculous sentences caused outrage among the public and some factions of the law, but the law justified it every time by bringing up the coshing of the driver. Without that, such draconian sentences could never have been dished out. So the fact that the one man that got them those sentences was never caught must have been extremely difficult to accept. However, the Train Robbers were all men of honour and at no time in the 43 years since the robbery has a single one of them revealed the names in public of those who got away or that of the man who coshed the driver. Of course, it's all well known in certain circles, but it has never been made available for public consumption. When you consider the treachery that's gone on with all the other major robberies since, it's amazing that all these men have kept quiet since 1963! I don't think that type of 'wall of silence' would ever happen again, especially with a job of that size. Nowadays people are falling over themselves to grass on others, so unless you have been lucky enough to have been told personally by one of the Train Robbers who was involved, you will never know, not while some are still alive anyway.

The man who had ordered the hit on Charlie Wilson, Roy 'The Lump' Adkins, was gunned down in September 1990 - shot five times in the head. The other two men accused of being involved in the killing of one of the most liked Train Robbers were Danny 'Scarface' Roff and Billy 'Porky' Edwards. Roff was shot in 1996 and suffered a severe spinal injury that confined him to a wheelchair. But Roff did not escape his final punishment. As he parked up his driveway in March 1997, two masked men pulled up and shot him in the head and chest. Surely these men couldn't have been stupid enough to think you can kill a man like Charlie Wilson and get away with it? Billy 'Porky' Edwards is still alive but will have to spend his life on the run. Charlie's old pal Freddie Foreman said chillingly: "These things are never forgotten. It doesn't matter how much time goes by, it will not be forgotten. Payback can come at any time." Coming from a man whose nicknames are 'The Undertaker' and 'Brown Bread Fred', that's rather worrying. But it's pretty obvious that this would be the case. Keep running, Porky!

The Train Robbery also throws up the contrast in opinions between Fred and Frankie Fraser. Fred says: "I was asked to take part

in the train robbery but declined. Too many people knew about this bit of work and it was going to end in tears.” Frank, on the other hand, insists: “My two big regrets in life are, one, that I was never part of a major robbery and, two, that I never took part in the Great Train Robbery.” When you consider what happened to most of the robbers, you would have to agree with Fred. It’s a massive price to pay to be a legend.

As for Ronnie Biggs’s plight, was anyone to blame for tempting him back from Brazil? I’m afraid in the underworld names get thrown up just because the one saying them has a longstanding grudge with the other. If I had a pound for every time I heard the word ‘grass’ being hurled about. Of course, names have been thrown up and I have had doubts, but the fact is that Ronnie was extremely ill back then and still is today (2008). He was simply too ill to stay in Brazil and wanted to die in his homeland. He was promised a financial deal from a top newspaper that would have solved all his solvable problems. It didn’t. It got swallowed up by legal and medical bills, and Ronnie was arrested on the plane at RAF Northolt, England.

So the Great Train Robbery has long been and gone, and as I write (August 2008) Ronald Arthur Biggs is still here and still stuck in HMP Norwich. Norfolk.