



## Holidays in France

By Alan Philpott

Dad of course, being a full-time employee of the railway, had privilege tickets and also privilege tickets available for use by his family. And once a year, of course, this meant that we could go on a continental holiday. So, we're talking 1948, 49, 50 – that sort of period. And we rather liked - or Mum and Dad rather liked – the south of France. I certainly enjoyed it and my sister I think probably enjoyed it slightly less – she was ten years older than me. But we would go to Nice, we would go to Menton and we would use the privilege ticket to get us there. And we would even use the railways to get us into Ventimiglia in Italy or along to St Juin-les-Pins, places like that. What happened was we got a family ticket for four people and we'd pack up, get on the train at Rye, go up to Ashford, pick up a steam-hauled boat train at Ashford. This would be a slower train which would potter down through Folkestone and along to Dover and to the Dover maritime station. And there we would get off, we would get on to one of the Southern Railways cross Channel ferries, take us across to Calais, and there at Calais there would be the train for Paris headed by a gigantic, dark black engine.

Well, I've seen them and they were very masculine and butch but we would get on a couchette - SNCF couchette carriage - at Calais, find our reserved compartment and that would take us to Paris. And at Paris it would be de-coupled, taken around the Paris circular railway, round to the Gare du Lyon, I think it was, be hitched on to the second portion of the Blue Train so that we'd travel in our couchette compartment for four all the way from Calais down to Nice, or Menton if we were going to Menton, without actually having to get off it. So, we'd be taken round Paris, put onto the Blue Train where the man would come and put the couchettes down and we'd all bed down and we'd awake occasionally when we stopped at various stations on the way and then go off to sleep again, and wake up about six in the morning to go and have our continental breakfast. I actually remember something about the continental breakfast that has suddenly occurred to me. French coffee was lovely and it came in enormous great cups. They were very, very big cups. And if you were having a French breakfast on the Blue Train going fast down to the south of France, the coffee would spill. Except that if you put your spoon in it, it acted as a breakwater and kept the coffee from spilling over the edge. And I remember that well. That was a tip Dad gave us, "Put your spoon in your coffee". That would be our holiday, so we'd end up down at Nice and we might travel along the railway backwards and forwards when we were down in the south of France. Very strange for a, I suppose what we would describe ourselves as a white collar working class family, to go on holiday 'en famille' to the south of France. But that was one of the benefits of having a dad working on the railway.