ENGLISH LEARNING FOR CURIOUS MINDS



Episode #41
The Great Train Robbery
3rd Apr, 2020

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Transcript

[00:00:04] Hello, hello, hello, and welcome to English Learning for Curious Minds by Leonardo English.

[00:00:11] The show where you can learn fascinating things about the world and listen to weird and wonderful stories at the same time as improving your English.

[00:00:22] I'm Alastair Budge and today we are going to be talking about The Great Train **Robbery**[1].

[00:00:30] In 1963, just outside London, a train carrying today's **equivalent**[2] of 55 million pounds, 65 million dollars, was stopped.

[00:00:43] A group of men got onto the train and 15 minutes later they had managed to escape with all of the money.

[00:00:54] Today we are going to tell this story - the story of one of the greatest **thefts**[3] in British criminal history.

[00:01:05] Before we do that, though, this is just my chance to remind those of you listening to this podcast on Spotify, iVoox, Google Podcasts, Apple Podcasts, or wherever you get your podcasts that you can get a copy of the transcript and key vocabulary for the podcast over on the website, which is Leonardoenglish.com.

[1] a crime of stealing money or goods, often using force

[2] an amount with the same value

[3] crimes of stealing

[00:01:28] If you haven't yet tried listening to the podcast with the transcript in front of you, well you are **missing a trick**[4], it means that you can follow every single word and improve your English way faster than you would do just by listening.

[00:01:45] And it also comes with the key vocabulary, which means that you can learn new words and expressions at the same time as listening to the podcast.

[00:01:55] So go and check that out.

[00:01:56] It's at Leonardoenglish.com

[00:02:02] Okay then let's talk about this **fantastic**[5] crime.

[00:02:08] At about three o'clock in the morning on the 8th of August, 1963 a **Royal Mail**[6] train was on its way from Glasgow to London.

[00:02:22] It was carrying about 2 million pounds in **cash**[7], that's about 55 million pounds in today's money.

[00:02:31] It was carrying so much **cash** because there had just been a bank holiday, a public holiday, in Scotland.

[4] not taking a useful chance to gain an advantage

[5] amazing and hard to believe

[6] the British national postal service

[7] money in the form of paper notes and coins

[00:02:40] The **cash** it was carrying was a **whole load**[8] of old bank notes, old money, and it was carrying this old money to London to be burned and taken out of **circulation**[9].

[00:02:57] So, at three o'clock in the morning, the train slowed down as the driver saw a red signal telling the train to stop.

[00:03:08] They stopped, but the signal was still red.

[00:03:12] So the driver got out of the train to investigate.

[00:03:17] When he went to look at the light, he was **grabbed**[10] from behind and a man said, in a **harsh**[11] voice, 'if you make a sound, I'll kill you'.

[00:03:29] They took him back to the train.

[00:03:32] They **tied up**[12] the other workers in the first two **carriages**[13] of the train and then they **detached**[14] the first two **carriages**, they separated the first two **carriages** of the train from the rest of the train.

[8] a very large amount

[9] use by the public as money

[10] taken hold of suddenly and roughly

[11] rough and unpleasant

[12] fastened with rope so that they could not move

[13] the separate parts of a train that carry people or goods

[14] unfastened and separated

[00:03:48] And then the first two carriages were driven for a few miles further up the track[15].

[00:03:56] What this meant was that the workers in the rear[16] part of the train, the bit behind, they didn't have any idea that anything was wrong.

[00:04:06] They thought they had just stopped because of a routine[17], a normal problem.

[00:04:13] When the train had moved a few miles up the track, the gang[18] of robbers[19], they managed to get into the second carriage[20] where all of the cash, all of the money, was being kept.

[00:04:26] They overpowered[21] the guards and got all the money out.

[00:04:31] They threw the 120 bags full of cash down an embankment[22] to their accomplices[23], their fellow[24] robbers, who were waiting with cars nearby, the getaway[25] drivers.

[15] the metal rails that a train runs on
[16] back
[17] ordinary and expected
[18] a group of criminals working together
[19] criminals who steal, often using force
[20] one of the separate parts of a train that carry people or goods
[21] defeated using greater strength
[22] a steep slope of earth beside a railway
[23] people who help someone to carry out a crime
[24] belonging to the same group as them
[25] used for escaping after a crime

[00:04:47] In **a matter of**[26] 15 minutes, the **thieves**[27] had escaped with over 2 million pounds, as I said, about 55 million pounds in today's money.

[00:04:59] And this was all cash, right? It was all paper.

[00:05:03] It weighed about two and a half tonnes.

[00:05:07] So that's heavier than the average car.

[00:05:10] That was how much money they stole.

[00:05:13] So it was pretty impressive to get all of that out of the train in under 15 minutes.

[00:05:21] The police were **alerted**[28] as soon as the guards in the back section of the train realised that something was wrong.

[00:05:30] And of course the police spent the next day **on the hunt for**[29] the criminals.

[00:05:36] But the **gang** was nowhere to be found.

[00:05:40] The police tried everything.

[00:05:42] They spent all day asking around in the local houses and farms.

[26] only about

[27] people who steal

[28] warned or told about a problem

[29] searching hard for

[00:05:47] They sent a special **robbery squad**[30] to the area - this was a team of people who were familiar with the criminal **underground**[31] to see if they would have any luck.

[00:06:00] They searched the houses of known criminals.

[00:06:03] They questioned the girlfriends and known **associates**[32] of some of the UK's most **infamous**[33] criminals.

[00:06:13] But still they had no luck.

[00:06:17] Five days after the **robbery**, though, on August the 13th they received a **tip-off**[34], a suggestion, from a local farmer that they should go and look into a place called Leatherslade farm, a farm which was about 20 miles or 30 kilometres, from the scene of the crime.

[00:06:41] The farmer said that he had seen lots of people **coming and going**[35], there had been an increase in activity, and it was definitely **abnormal**[36].

[00:06:53] So he said to the police, you should go and have a look at it.

[00:06:56] When they arrived at the property, they found it **deserted**[37].

[00:07:01] But they knew pretty soon that they were **onto something**[38].

[00:07:07] They saw 20 of the **Royal Mail** bags, with no money inside of course, and they also found the **getaway** vehicles, the cars used for the **robbery**.

[30] a small team of police officers with a special task

[31] secret world of people who live outside the law

[00:07:21] But the **thieves** had been pretty careful.

[00:07:24] They had **wiped everything down**[39], they had cleaned the property, to avoid leaving any **fingerprints**[40] or things that would be **clues**[41] for the police.

[00:07:37] However, the police found a game of Monopoly , alongside real money.

[00:07:44] The men had so much **cash** that instead of playing with Monopoly money, with the fake money, they just played with real money.

[00:07:54] I mean, they had two tonnes of it, so why not?

[00:08:00] Anyway, while playing Monopoly was no doubt good fun, it wasn't a good idea because on one of the Monopoly pieces, on the game pieces, the police found **fingerprints** which helped identify some of the men.

[00:08:18] A week later, they managed to **track down**[42] and arrest one member of the **gang** and within the next two weeks, thanks to **tip-offs**[43], thanks to people telling the

[32] people someone knows or works with
[33] well known for something bad
[34] a secret piece of information given to the police
[35] arriving and leaving
[36] unusual in a worrying way
[37] empty, with nobody there
[38] about to discover something important
[39] cleaned every surface with a cloth
[40] unique marks left on objects when people touch them
[41] pieces of information that help to solve a crime
[42] find after a long search
[43] secret pieces of information given to the police

police about the identity of some of the others, they had managed to start **tracking**[44] the rest of the **gang**.

[00:08:40] They'd managed to identify a lot of the men and they'd managed to locate some of them.

[00:08:46] The police discovered that the gang **consisted**[45] of a total of 17 people, 15 of whom were actually physically present at the robbery

[00:08:58] So who were these men?

[00:09:00] What did they all do?

[00:09:02] Well, it really was a bit of a mix, a **motley crew**[46], and they all played a slightly different role.

[00:09:11] There were the big guys, the guys who were there to **threaten**[47] the drivers, to be **the muscle**[48].

[00:09:18] There were the **getaway** drivers, the men who were waiting in the cars.

[00:09:24] Then there were those responsible for things like dividing up the money and for buying the farm.

[44] following and searching for

[45] was made up

[46] a mixed group of very different people

[47] say that they would hurt

[48] the strong men who used force or threats

[00:09:34] We know who they all are now apart from one person, and that man was the **man inside**[49], the person with the inside knowledge of the **Royal Mail**.

[00:09:48] The person who knew exactly when and where the train would be, the person who knew where the money would be and who told the gang how to actually **get away with**[50] the attack.

[00:10:02] The true identity of that man, although there are some theories, the true identity has never been revealed.

[00:10:12] And now that all of the men who took part in the **robbery** are no longer around, they've all **passed away**[51], his identity will never be revealed.

[00:10:24] But the rest of the men were captured, they were arrested by the police.

[00:10:30] This didn't happen at the same time, and it wasn't until April of the next year that they were actually **sentenced**[52], that they were sent to prison.

[00:10:42] But the story **most certainly**[53] does not end there.

[00:10:48] Several of the men escaped from prison, running away to places like Belgium, France, Canada, Australia, and Brazil.

[49] a person with secret knowledge of the organisation who helped the criminals

[50] escape being caught for

[51] died

[52] given an official punishment by a court

[53] definitely

[00:11:00] The most famous **escapee**[54], the most famous of the men who managed to escape, was called Ronnie Biggs.

[00:11:09] He was only 32 when he was caught and he was sentenced to 30 years in prison.

[00:11:17] But after 15 months in prison, he managed to escape, climbing over the prison walls of a maximum security prison in London.

[00:11:30] He **fled**[55], he ran away, first to Brussels and then to Paris where he had **plastic surgery**[56] to change his appearance, for obvious reasons.

[00:11:42] He then **fled** to the other side of the world, to Australia, and when the police got close to him there, he **fled** on a passenger ship with a fake passport to Panama and then to Brazil.

[00:11:59] In Brazil, he was safe, comparatively speaking, as Brazil didn't have an **extradition**[57] **treaty**[58] with the UK.

[00:12:08] This meant that the Brazilian government didn't have to **deport**[59] him, to send him back to the UK, to be **tried**[60].

[54] a person who has got out of prison

[55] ran away quickly to avoid danger

[56] medical operations to change how a person looks

[57] the official sending of a person to another country to face trial

[58] a formal agreement between countries

[59] officially send out of the country

[60] judged in a court of law

[00:12:17] So he lived pretty openly in Brazil for almost 30 years.

[00:12:23] He couldn't work though, given his status as a known criminal.

[00:12:29] So he used to host barbecues at his house.

[00:12:34] Tourists could pay to go and have a barbecue with one of the most famous **robbers** of all time.

[00:12:43] However, the story doesn't end particularly happily with **Caipirinhas**[61] on the beach for Ronnie Biggs.

[00:12:53] His health **deteriorated**[62], it got worse, and he **longed to**[63] return to the UK.

[00:13:01] And in 2001 he did return, but he was immediately arrested.

[00:13:08] Even though he was in his seventies he had **committed**[64] a pretty serious crime, and he still had 28 years to **serve**[65] of his sentence.

[00:13:20] So he was put back in prison, and he **served**[66] another eight years.

[00:13:26] In 2009 he was released from prison on what's called '**compassionate grounds**[67]', basically he was very ill.

[61] Brazilian cocktails made with a sugar cane spirit, lime and sugar

[62] became worse

[63] wanted very much to

[64] carried out

[65] spend in prison

[66] spent in prison

[67] reasons of kindness and sympathy, such as serious illness

[00:13:36] And he died four years later in 2013.

[00:13:40] I should add that although this crime has gone down in history and has been **romanticised**[68] quite a lot, including I guess what we're doing here on this podcast, it was obviously a pretty serious crime and not completely **victim**[69]-free.

[00:14:01] During the robbery, one of the guards of the train, a man called Jack Mills, was hit over the head with an **iron bar**[70].

[00:14:12] Although he wasn't killed, he suffered **severe**[71] brain damage and never properly recovered from his injuries.

[00:14:21] So it was definitely not **victimless**[72], the crime.

[00:14:26] And it obviously was a pretty serious crime.

[00:14:29] It was the biggest **cash robbery**, the biggest **theft**[73] of physical money in Britain for 40 years, until it was **eclipsed**[74] by a robbery in Northern Ireland in 2004.

[68] made to seem more exciting and attractive than it really was

[69] a person harmed by a crime

[70] a long, heavy metal rod

[71] very serious

[72] causing no harm to anyone

[73] the crime of stealing

[74] beaten in size

[00:14:44] In any case, The Great Train Robbery has gone down in history, and you will find references to it throughout British **pop culture**[75], from Beatles **lyrics**[76] to Agatha Christie, from Inspector Clouseau to James Bond, it's everywhere and it has had an impact on British culture like no other crime, I guess.

[00:15:13] Not just because it's a huge **robbery**, but it's also a story of escapes from prison, a global **manhunt**[77], and then the ultimately sad end for many of the robbers.

[00:15:27] Okay then, that is it for today's episode.

[00:15:32] I hope you've enjoyed it and I certainly hope that it hasn't **inspired**[78] you to start **robbing**[79] trains.

[00:15:39] As I said, the story doesn't end well.

[00:15:42] As a quick reminder, if you are looking for the transcript and key vocabulary for the podcast, you can find that at leonardoenglish.com.

[00:15:53] It is a really useful resource for following along and improving your English at the same time as listening to the podcast.

[75] the music, films, TV and books enjoyed by most ordinary people

[76] the words of songs

[77] a large, organised search for a person

[78] encouraged or persuaded

[79] stealing from, often using force

[00:16:00] So I definitely recommend going and checking that out if you haven't done so already.

[00:16:07] You've been listening to English Learning for Curious Minds by Leonardo English.

[00:16:12] I'm Alastair Budge.

[00:16:14] You stay safe and I'll catch you in the next episode.

[END OF PODCAST]

[END OF EPISODE]

Key vocabulary

Word	Definition
Robbery	a crime of stealing money or goods, often using force
Equivalent	an amount with the same value
Thefts	crimes of stealing
Missing a trick	not taking a useful chance to gain an advantage
Fantastic	amazing and hard to believe
Royal Mail	the British national postal service
Cash	money in the form of paper notes and coins
Whole load	a very large amount
Circulation	use by the public as money
Grabbed	taken hold of suddenly and roughly

Harsh	rough and unpleasant
Tied up	fastened with rope so that they could not move
Carriages	the separate parts of a train that carry people or goods
Detached	unfastened and separated
Track	the metal rails that a train runs on
Rear	back
Routine	ordinary and expected
Gang	a group of criminals working together
Robbers	criminals who steal, often using force
Carriage	one of the separate parts of a train that carry people or goods
Overpowered	defeated using greater strength
Embankment	a steep slope of earth beside a railway

Accomplices	people who help someone to carry out a crime
Fellow	belonging to the same group as them
Getaway	used for escaping after a crime
A matter of	only about
Thieves	people who steal
Alerted	warned or told about a problem
On the hunt for	searching hard for
Squad	a small team of police officers with a special task
Underground	secret world of people who live outside the law
Associates	people someone knows or works with
Infamous	well known for something bad
Tip-off	a secret piece of information given to the police

Coming and going	arriving and leaving
Abnormal	unusual in a worrying way
Deserted	empty, with nobody there
Onto something	about to discover something important
Wiped everything down	cleaned every surface with a cloth
Fingerprints	unique marks left on objects when people touch them
Clues	pieces of information that help to solve a crime
Track down	find after a long search
Tip-offs	secret pieces of information given to the police
Tracking	following and searching for
Consisted	was made up
Motley crew	a mixed group of very different people

Threaten	say that they would hurt
The muscle	the strong men who used force or threats
Man inside	a person with secret knowledge of the organisation who helped the criminals
Get away with	escape being caught for
Passed away	died
Sentenced	given an official punishment by a court
Most certainly	definitely
Escapee	a person who has got out of prison
Fled	ran away quickly to avoid danger
Plastic surgery	medical operations to change how a person looks
Extradition	the official sending of a person to another country to face trial

Treaty	a formal agreement between countries
Deport	officially send out of the country
Tried	judged in a court of law
Caipirinhas	Brazilian cocktails made with a sugar cane spirit, lime and sugar
Deteriorated	became worse
Longed to	wanted very much to
Committed	carried out
Serve	spend in prison
Served	spent in prison
Compassionate grounds	reasons of kindness and sympathy, such as serious illness
Romanticised	made to seem more exciting and attractive than it really was

Victim	a person harmed by a crime
Iron bar	a long, heavy metal rod
Severe	very serious
Victimless	causing no harm to anyone
Theft	the crime of stealing
Eclipsed	beaten in size
Pop culture	the music, films, TV and books enjoyed by most ordinary people
Lyrics	the words of songs
Manhunt	a large, organised search for a person
Inspired	encouraged or persuaded
Robbing	stealing from, often using force

Language spotlight

1. Missing a trick

- **Meaning**: Failing to take advantage of a useful opportunity.
- **Synonyms**: missing out, losing a chance, overlooking an opportunity
- **Antonyms**: making the most of it, seizing the opportunity, taking advantage
- **Examples**:
    - If you don't use the free gym at work, you're really **missing a trick**.
    - The shop was **missing a trick** by not selling anything online.

2. On the hunt for

- **Meaning**: Searching carefully and determinedly for someone or something.
- **Synonyms**: searching for, looking for, in pursuit of
- **Antonyms**: giving up on, ignoring, abandoning the search for
- **Examples**:
    - We've been **on the hunt for** a new flat since January.
    - She spent the whole morning **on the hunt for** her car keys.

3. Onto something

- **Meaning**: Close to discovering something important or useful.
- **Synonyms**: on the right track, getting close, getting warm
- **Antonyms**: on the wrong track, barking up the wrong tree, off the mark
- **Examples**:
    - The researchers felt they were **onto something** when the first results came in.
    - I think you're **onto something** with that idea for a new business.

4. Motley crew

- **Meaning**: A group of people who are very different from each other and seem unlikely to be together.
- **Synonyms**: mixed bunch, odd assortment, ragtag group
- **Antonyms**: close-knit team, uniform group, like-minded group
- **Examples**:
    - Our book club is a **motley crew** of students, pensioners and a retired pilot.
    - The band started as a **motley crew** of friends who could barely play.

5. Long to

- **Meaning**: To want something very much, especially something that is difficult to have.
- **Synonyms**: yearn to, ache to, wish to
- **Antonyms**: dread, be reluctant to, not care to
- **Examples**:
    - After months abroad, she **longed to** see her family again.
    - He **longs to** retire to a small house by the sea.

Quiz

Listening Comprehension Multiple Choice Questions

1. Why was the train carrying old bank notes to London?

a) Banks in London had run very short of notes

b) They were to be burned and taken out of use

c) They were wages for workers after the holiday

d) They were being moved to a safer bank vault

2. What made the driver stop the train?

a) A car was parked across the track

b) Someone pulled the emergency brake

c) A fallen tree was blocking the line

d) He saw a red signal telling him to stop

3. Why did the workers at the back of the train not realise anything was wrong?

a) They thought the stop was a normal problem

b) They were asleep through the whole robbery

c) The robbers told them it was a police check

d) The engine noise hid what was happening

4. What helped the police identify some of the men at the farm?

a) Photographs left in the Royal Mail bags

b) Names written inside the getaway vehicles

c) Fingerprints on pieces from a board game

d) Papers showing who had bought the farm

5. Why was Ronnie Biggs relatively safe in Brazil?

a) He had become a Brazilian citizen there

b) He paid officials to keep him hidden

c) The police believed he had died at sea

d) Brazil had no extradition treaty with the UK

True or False

6. The robbers got the money out of the train in about 15 minutes. (True/False)

7. The stolen money weighed less than the average car. (True/False)

8. A local farmer told the police about unusual activity at Leatherslade farm. (True/False)

9. The identity of the man with inside knowledge of the Royal Mail has now been revealed. (True/False)

10. Ronnie Biggs returned to the UK in 2001 and was immediately arrested. (True/False)

Fill in the Blanks

11. If you haven't yet tried listening to the podcast with the transcript in front of you, well you are missing a _____, it means that you can follow every single word.

12. And of course the police spent the next day on the ____ for the criminals.

13. They had wiped everything ____, they had cleaned the property, to avoid leaving any fingerprints.

14. Well, it really was a bit of a mix, a motley ____, and they all played a slightly different role.

15. In 2009 he was released from prison on what's called 'compassionate _____', basically he was very ill.

Vocabulary Practice

16. What does "**infamous**" mean when describing some of the UK's criminals?

a) Not known to the public

b) Very skilled at their work

c) Well known for something bad

d) Recently released from prison

17. What does "**deserted**" mean when the police arrive at the farm?

a) Empty, with nobody there

b) Badly damaged by fire

c) Guarded by police officers

d) Recently sold to new owners

18. What does "**deteriorated**" mean when describing Ronnie Biggs's health?

a) Became much better

b) Became worse

c) Stayed the same

d) Was checked by doctors

19. What does "**romanticised**" mean when talking about how the crime is remembered?

a) Forgotten by most people over time

b) Turned into a love story in films

c) Investigated again by the police

d) Made to seem more exciting than it was

20. What does "**eclipsed**" mean when comparing the robbery to one in Northern Ireland?

a) Beaten in size by something bigger

b) Blocked from view by a shadow

c) Copied by another criminal gang

d) Planned in secret for many years

Answers

1. b) They were to be burned and taken out of use
2. d) He saw a red signal telling him to stop
3. a) They thought the stop was a normal problem
4. c) Fingerprints on pieces from a board game
5. d) Brazil had no extradition treaty with the UK
6. True
7. False
8. True
9. False
10. True
11. trick
12. hunt
13. down
14. crew
15. grounds
16. c) Well known for something bad
17. a) Empty, with nobody there
18. b) Became worse

19. d) Made to seem more exciting than it was

20. a) Beaten in size by something bigger