

### **The Palestine Railway Token / Bobby Brown**

After two unsuccessful attempts by Turkish forces to capture the Suez Canal, the British military in Egypt decided in 1916 to cross the canal and drive the Ottoman Turks far from the Canal. That decision would eventually lead to the liberation of Palestine and the establishment of the British Mandate of Palestine.

The British were very concerned that they would find themselves too far ahead of their supply lines. Always mindful of their need to supply their troops with food, water, ammunition, and have a means of bringing personnel and soldiers back and forth from Egypt. In order to supply their troops the decision was made to build "the Sinai Military Railway". The British army would advance 25km a month, exactly the speed of the railway construction.

To maintain security, workers were given a crude numbered token with the initials "SMR" (Sinai Military Railway). These tokens were manufactured in Egypt and copied the personnel identification system used in England and in other railways in the British Empire.

The Sinai Military Railway ran along the northern Sinai coast and eventually connected in Palestine to the Turkish tracks in Rafia and Gaza.

By 1918, after their victory in Palestine, the British force renamed the railway "The Palestine Military Railway". New tokens were made in Egypt with the initials "PMR" on them. Each token had a unique employee number inscribed on its face as well as the initials of the employee's department. The worker would use this numbered token to enter and leave railway property, to identify himself to railway clerks and officials as well as to receive credit to buy uniforms, food and drink. This included meals he would be entitled to as a per diem expense at work or other food he could buy in railway stores on trains or in stations.

By 1920 the decision was made to create an independent company named "The Palestine Railway". Employee tokens were changed to bear the initials of the new company "P.R."

Until the late thirties Palestine railways was the largest employer in Palestine with almost 50,000 employees, Jews, Arabs and British officials, each of whom had an employee number and ID token.

The tokens were made of copper or brass except during World War II when copper was needed for military purposes and a white metal was used as a replacement.

It is estimated that approximately 60,000 tokens were produced. Today approximately 100 still exist.

Each department would receive blank tokens and be responsible for punching in the letters and numbers that would identify that department employee. Changing departments would often mean a new number would be punched in the back of an existing token.

Besides the known departments (that were punched in), there may be additional departments than those that are known to me. I have listed here known departments along with their real (or assumed) sections name:

E – Engineering branch

L- Mechanical Branch (Locomotive)

RL – Running Line Section (Traffic)

S – Stores Department

A – Audit Section

CS – Control Section

T – Track Maintenance Section

A number of satellite companies and other institutions working with the railway had their own previously unknown metal I.D tokens.

As we discover new tokens, additional information reveals itself and gives us more facts about this fascinating institution that was a major influence in the development of both modern Israel and the entire Middle East.

