

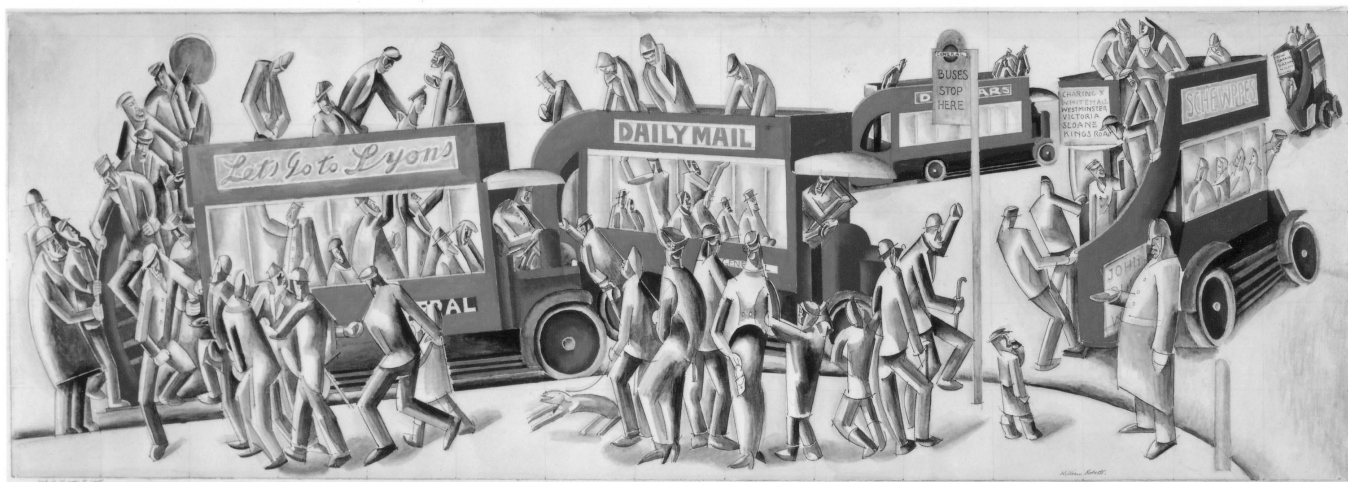
Newsletter

ISSN 1750-9408

No.49
March 2007

The Roads & Road Transport History Association

www.rrtha.org.uk



BUS STOP (Study for a Poster)

By Robert Williams c.1925

The last time we were at the Whitworth Art Gallery was in *Newsletter* 44. We then had a picture, "The Tyresmith", by James Abbott McNeill Whistler.

Now we have a picture from the Gallery's Contemporary Art or Modern Art Collection, a composition in pencil, pen, ink and watercolour, c.1925 by William Roberts, acquired by the Whitworth in 1927. (Acquisition No. D.1927.24)

It is reproduced in *Newsletter* by kind permission of the Whitworth Art Gallery, University of Manchester.

The picture captures a scene similar, *mutatis mutandis*, to that in Oxford Road, outside the Whitworth at the present day, where the endless buses of (at least) Stagecoach, Magic Bus, Bullocks and Finglands jostle at the stops for an unceasing flow of passengers.

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The Creation of Great Yarmouth Transport Ltd.

PETER BROWN

This article was originally published in the Railway & Canal Historical Society's Road Transport Group Newsletter

Great Yarmouth's municipal bus undertaking

The former Great Yarmouth County Borough Council operated trams from 1903 until 1933 and buses from 1921, providing a comprehensive network in the then Borough area, plus one route going north to Caister. After local government reorganisation in 1974, which added the rural hinterland to the Borough area and increased the population by about a third, the Council continued to operate the 'Blue Buses'. The route network stayed virtually unchanged, except for a few journeys into Bradwell, by then really a western suburb of urban Yarmouth, and some contract and tendered services. Most of the bus services in the rural area continued to be operated by the National Bus Company subsidiary, Eastern Counties.

The size of the bus undertaking can be gauged from its 1984/85 statistics:

Vehicle miles on stage carriage services	970,000
Vehicle miles on other services	13,000
Passenger journeys on stage carriage services	5,300,000
Turnover	£1,500,000
Number of buses	50
Number of permanent staff (more were employed in the summer)	126
Deficit borne by local taxpayers	£200,000

The size of the deficit is somewhat misleading because it included a contribution towards the cost of pension increases for former employees of the bus undertaking and also the hidden cost of concessionary fares. The 'Blue Buses' had half-fares for children, whereas Eastern Counties had charged them full fares on-peak since about 1972.

The Transport Act 1985

The main features of the Act were:

- ◆ Anyone would be able to run a bus service, provided they registered the timetable.
- ◆ If the free market did not provide a bus service for which there was a community need, either the county council or the district council could invite tenders from operators to put on that service.
- ◆ Local authorities' bus undertakings (such as the 'Blue Buses') would have to be turned into arms-length companies. They would not be able to have general subsidies from local taxes — they would either have to operate services at a profit or win tenders.
- ◆ Local authorities' concessionary fare schemes (for pensioners, handicapped people or children) must be applied to all operators equally.
- ◆ The Traffic Commissioner's role would be limited to registering services, ensuring that registered services were run, and safety standards.

The Government's view was that competition would give a service more in line with what the public wanted and would force operators to be more cost-effective. It also wanted to reduce the subsidies to buses, then totalling over £500 million nationally.

As with any change, there was apprehension about the effects. The main fears were 'unfair competition':

- ◆ There was concern that private companies operating school contracts would use those vehicles off-peak for cheap and direct 'shoppers specials', creaming off some of the income during the middle of the day but leaving the established operator with the expensive-to-run peak-hour services.
- ◆ Rival operators might register journeys on the most profitable routes, timing them to run immediately before the 'Blue Buses', possibly with lower fares.
- ◆ The 'Blue Buses' was a responsible employer with good rates of pay, an excellent pension scheme, a positive system of employing apprentices, and high standards of maintenance and cleanliness. (I think all these were true and not self-delusion — the bus service had a good reputation locally.) There was concern that pressures on costs would reduce standards, both to the employees and the public.

Councillors appreciated that 'proper costing' would highlight the losses on Sunday and evening services, and feared that for purely commercial considerations these would then be withdrawn. Either Norfolk County Council or the Borough Council would have to decide whether to subsidise these services and invite tenders, which were likely to be won by the operator which paid its drivers the least.

There was less concern about the principle of turning the undertaking into an arms-length company. The management saw many advantages from the greater independence. The Borough Treasurer welcomed subsidies being explicit. The Conservative politicians (then in control) agreed with the change, and Labour did not oppose it — indeed, a senior Labour politician became the first Chairman of the new Company.

Implementing the changes

The draft timetable was announced in advance of the Act being passed:

December 1985	Order from Secretary of State to form Company.
November–December 1985	Statutory advice from the Secretary of State concerning the Transfer Scheme.
January–February 1986	Form Company; submit Transfer Scheme to the Secretary of State.

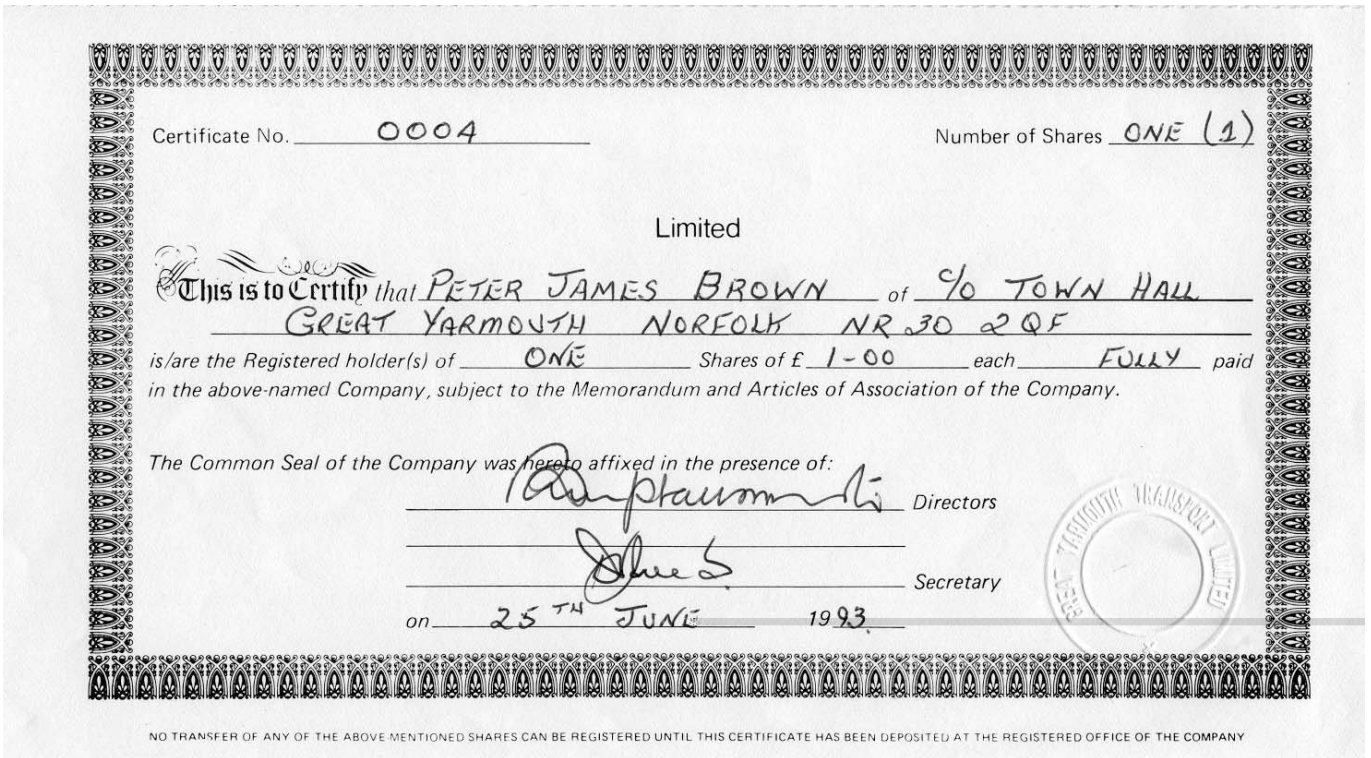
February 1986	Registration of unsubsidised services.
March–July 1986	County/district councils invite tenders.
April–August 1986	Registration of tendered services.
28 September 1986	Deregulation.

pension arrangements. It was agreed that existing employees would continue to be in the Council’s pension fund (which was administered by the County Council); the Company was to make alternative arrangements for new employees starting after the transfer date. A number of employees including the Transport Manager retired immediately before the transfer date; their severance and redundancy payments totalled £54,000, which was borne by the Borough Council. It was also agreed that the Council would take on the pension increase liability for former employees (£95,000 in 1985/86) and for the eventual cost of pension increase payments for existing employees in respect of their employment period up to the date of transfer; the new Company would meet pension increase costs in respect of service after that date.

This timetable slipped slightly, with the date of deregulation being put back by four weeks to 26 October 1986.

The basic legal requirements did not cause any great problems. The name chosen was ‘Great Yarmouth Transport Ltd’, with the bus depot becoming the registered offices. The objects of the Company were drawn fairly widely to enable all types of bus and coach services to be operated and for maintenance and other facilities to be provided to other organisations. On the other hand, certain activities previously done by the bus undertaking, such as management of the coach station, were retained by the Borough Council.

The new Company received ‘hidden’ assistance because the Council spent £67,000 on equipment and improvements in the summer of 1986. The accounting principles laid down by the government resulted in the balance sheet value of the Company (and hence its initial capitalisation) increasing by only £37,000.



The Government laid down rules concerning asset valuation and the financial structure of the new companies; advice was also taken from Coopers & Lybrand because the Borough Treasurer did not feel confident about advising on company taxation issues. In the event, the issued share capital comprised 559,000 £1 shares, all but one held by the Great Yarmouth Borough Council and one in the name of the Borough Treasurer. Debentures totalled £235,000; this money was actually repaid to the Borough Council within four years. Thus the total book value of the assets of the new Company was £794,000, of which land & buildings were £260,000, vehicles £375,000, plant & equipment £100,000 and net current assets (including cash transferred) £59,000.

The concessionary fare scheme for the elderly and disabled had to be redesigned, but this was a separate issue to the creation of the new Company. A decision needed to be made about children’s fares: in the event, the new Company said it would follow Eastern Counties’ policy of charging full fare on-peak, and the Borough Council resolved that it would subsidise half fares for the journeys to school. This policy had to apply to the whole area of the Borough, of course, so a calculation had to be made of the amounts to be paid to the ‘Blue Buses’ and to Eastern Counties — this was relatively simple as the numbers travelling and their fares could be ascertained easily. Under the Education Act 1944, the County Council paid for season tickets where pupils were having to travel more than three miles (two miles if aged eight or under); the County Council agreed it would pay the value of the

Some of the most critical decisions to be made concerned

reduction back to the Borough Council.

The Company took over all its bookkeeping & accounting, payroll and computer systems, whereas previously these had been provided by the Borough Treasurer's Department. The latter reduced its staffing by 1½ posts.

The changeover went remarkably smoothly. A few service alterations were made at the end of September when (as every year) the change was made from the summer to the winter timetable. Apart from the senior management and the trades union officials, most employees and all of the public were virtually unaffected by the creation of the new Company. Perhaps some of the passengers noticed the new logo put on the buses over the weekend of the transfer or observed that the drivers wore a new style tie — but the same buses still operated the same routes at the same times in the same basic livery.

Retrospect

The fears concerning 'unfair' competition following deregulation proved unfounded, at least in the short term. The coach firms who were the principal school contract operators never attempted to operate "shoppers' specials". A small minibus firm, imaginatively named the 'Flying Bananas', started up, operating conventional bus services, both peak and off-peak. It did not attempt to under-cut fares. However, it paid low wages and did not run evening or weekend services, which indirectly put pressure on the 'Blue Buses' to contain costs. The relationship between the 'Blue Buses' and Eastern Counties continued unchanged: the former operated the town services and the latter the country services; they competed only on tendered services. (I never wanted to know whether there was an informal agreement between the two companies — such an agreement would almost certainly have been illegal.)

Sunday and evening services were thinned but continued to be provided by cross-subsidy from other services for several years. The attitude of the 'Blue Buses' Board and management was that these should be provided for as long as they could afford to do so; to withdraw them would lose public goodwill and could allow competition into the area if the Company did not win any subsequent tenders for the replacement services. After several years the Sunday services were withdrawn, but the 'Blue Buses' won the replacement contracts in the town; indeed it also won a few contracts for evening operations in the rural area.

Without a doubt, management of the Company became more effective. When it was a Council undertaking, it was never clear whether it was a commercial activity or a 'social service'. The latter attitude made it difficult to amend or withdraw services or journeys, for example — people who lose a facility always complain more than people who have never had it, and councillors (of both parties) are much more sensitive to public opinion than the public generally perceives. As a free-standing company, if the management thought a particular demand was not commercially viable, they could (and did) say that the Company could not afford to do it, and the request should instead be made to the County or Borough Council

to subsidise such a service improvement.

Less tangible, but equally valid, was a change in the relationship with the unions. The drivers had had the reputation of being the most militant section of the Council employees. When the Conservatives were in power, my impression was that they seemed to have special problems in dealing with the unions and tended to avoid confrontation. When Labour were in power they actually seemed more effective in dealing with the unions, but of course the line management suffered from the handicap that the unions had direct private access to the influential councillors. Once the Company was formed, a much tougher line was taken. The initial Board of nine comprised three Conservative (then in control of the Council), three Labour, one Liberal and two managers, and appeared to act totally non-politically.

The Borough Council's Transport Manager had a long list of proposals for improved efficiency without affecting the service to the public, mostly by more flexible working. For several years he had had little success in getting these proposals accepted, but when the new Company took over, most of these changes were implemented by his successor. For example, service 8 (to Gorleston) and service 16 (to Caister) both had a quarter hour headway and needed four buses. By running the service through, the frequency could be maintained but only seven buses would be needed instead of eight. Greater flexibility was obtained in the timing of shifts. Many other artificial restrictions were negotiated out, including one which had limited the number of consecutive trips a driver could do on certain routes because they were 'boring'.

Financially the new Company's performance was initially satisfactory. Profits averaging £150,000 a year were made for the first few years, the surpluses being used to repay the debenture and to buy new buses. From 1990/91 the annual profits were much lower, averaging only £10,000 a year — this reflected the long term trend of lower passenger numbers and the emerging competition from the 'Flying Bananas'. In only one year was a dividend paid: £11,200.

Sources

The factual information is derived from various reports and papers of Great Yarmouth Borough Council, in particular:

- ♦ 'The Transport Bill' — report to the Special Bus Sub-Committee, 16 September 1985
- ♦ 'Formation of the new company' — report to the Special Bus Sub-Committee, 10 January 1986
- ♦ 'Local working conditions' — note prepared by the Transport Manager, 4 February 1986
- ♦ 'Bus Company: assets at 26 October 1986 and hidden assistance' — note prepared by the Borough Treasurer, 8 December 1988

The file containing these and other papers is to be passed to the Norfolk Records Office.

Any impressions and opinions are purely personal and subjective. The author was Borough Treasurer from 1981 to 2000.

26 January 2003

A Sussex Country Carrier in Victorian Days

DAVE BUBIER

An article by L G Slater originally published in 'Country Life' of October 6th 1960, reproduced with permission and with supplementary notes by Dave Bubier

In 1889 I was 11 years old. We lived in Sussex in a house at the crossroads in Ditchling. It was built in the 16th century and my father bought it for £350. It included a small shop, a dairy, a slaughterhouse and a shed for six cows.

My mother paid for my education with the profits from her small dairy farm outside the village. Each day I walked nearly two miles to a grammar school and two miles back. Most of the other pupils were boarders. My father, impatient of what he considered to be my idleness during the week, made me work for him every Saturday. He was the local carrier and he operated from Ditchling to Lewes and Brighton.

Seventy years have blurred my memories of school, except for history jingles and the faces of my companions, but I remember Saturdays with almost startling clarity, particularly during severe winters. I was wakened at 6 a.m, when I had to leave a deep feather bed on an iron bedstead.

‘Get up quickly. Your father is out at the stables. It’s Saturday,’ my mother would say, as she hurried into the room and put a tallow candle on the table. The flame flickered in the draught and sent distorting shadows over her face, her dress, the dark beams, and the needlework samplers on the walls. I hurried into my clothes, all hand-sewn by my mother, and rushed down the dark creaking staircase to the wash-house. Icy water from the only tap at a large stone sink completed my awakening and I was away and through into the milking shed. My first job was to take over the cans of milk, still warm from the cows, and deliver it around the village.

Back at 7.30 a.m. to the kitchen - a centre of warmth and activity in the cold dark house. A heavy white cloth covered the large scrubbed wooden table and a shining copper kettle hissed on the kitchen range. All the family had their places. Father at the head, my three brothers and five sisters at the sides. My mother at the foot, fetching and carrying. Breakfast was fresh baked bread, butter made in our dairy, and strong tea.

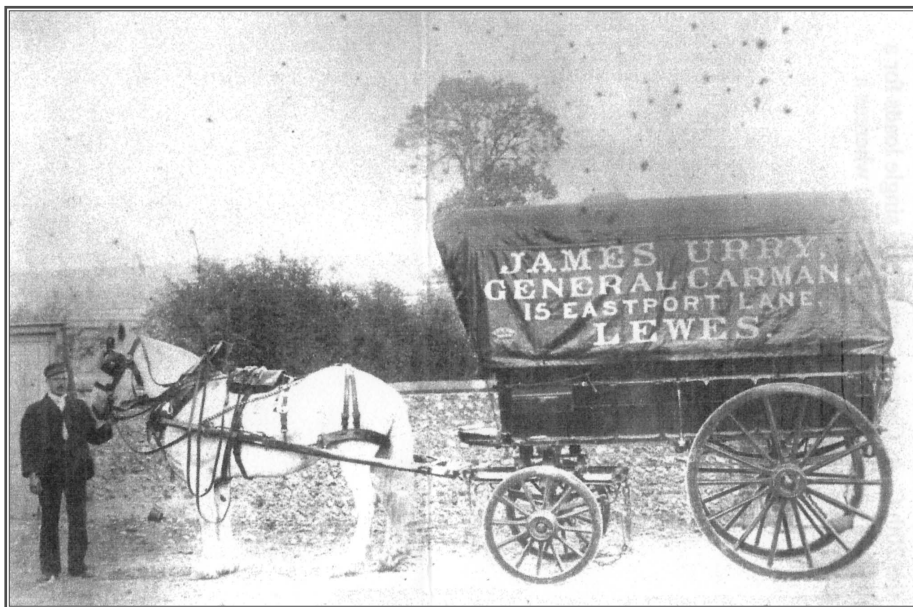
After this, my mother helped me into my coat, cap and thick mittens. I followed my father out of the house to the horses and the van. In bad weather I first took Peggy, the mare, along to the blacksmith to have her shoes roughed. Then father harnessed her. The van had four wooden wheels with iron rims, a yellow waterproof canvas roof, open front and back. In it we loaded everything labelled for Lewes. Pork from farms in Wivelsfield, hides for the Lewes tannery, rabbits in rows on poles, vegetables by the bushel, butter in chocolate boxes, baskets of laundry, razors, scissors and ploughshares for sharpening. There were also numerous parcels, their contents unknown.

I rode beside my father on a hard wooden seat. In the same manner David Copperfield rode with Mr. Barkis. On the outskirts of the village womenfolk waited patiently for us at the roadside. Their men were in the fields, where they would stay until sundown. Clad in skirts to the ground and heavy black boots, the women handed up scraps of paper listing their wants from Lewes, parcels for delivery, or more rabbits for sale. Many who could not write whispered their needs to my father, who wrote them in a small black book. There was infinite variety - two ounces of brimstone, a quarter of salts, a cure for warts, a bottle of physic for rheumatism, a bar of carbolic soap, a pound of mixed nails and a yard of tape. One woman often handed up a pile of blue linen smocks, the uniform of shepherds and labourers. They were sent to her from a shop in Lewes for smocking.

My father leaned down to talk to the cottagers and as he did so handed the reins to me. He had no need to ask their names to add to the list. He knew them well, and they certainly knew him. Born in 1834 he was then in the prime of life. Bearded, taciturn and proud, he was regarded by the villagers as true as steel. He was trusted. but he was not liked. He was a Calvinist in a village where most people followed the teachings of the established church. In those days the feelings between church and chapel were bigoted and strong. The division between classes was also deep and accepted. When the squire rode by men touched their caps automatically and women curtsied to the ground. Not so my father. He touched his cap to no man and so made many enemies. The last orders listed, we waved good-bye and started for Lewes. The roads were very rough. All were made from flints and chalk from the South Downs. To our right, the hills, to our left a view for over ten miles, with nothing to interrupt the arable and meadow land save a few scattered farmsteads and cottages. I huddled close to my father in the bitter winds. Roads were deserted, except for a foreman on horseback or a bailiff doing his rounds. Peggy plodded on slowly and the van creaked and swayed behind us.

We collected more goods from people in Streat, Westmeston and Plumpton. They too waited by the roadside. On the face of the Downs were two rows of young saplings, planted in the form of a V to celebrate the Queen’s Jubilee. My father spoke little, but if he did he spoke of the farms and told me who was doing well, who was doing badly, who was a man of straw and who was a man of substance. His ambition was to buy a farm. The short journey seemed unending. I suppose, with all the stops, we averaged about four miles an hour in good weather.

At Lewes we turned into the yard of the Bear, gave Peggy her oats and water and stabled her. There we met other carriers from all parts of Sussex. But I had no time to stand and stare. I was sent off at once to deliver the parcels and give the orders to the tradesmen. I went from the butcher to the chemist, to the cutler, to the chandler, to the draper, and lastly, with many orders for barrels of



The 'Sussex Cart' as used by Levi Slater was a distinct design, prevalent in the South of England. This example was contemporary with the story in the article. James Urry, b.1860, went into business on his own account in the mid-1880s and continued into the 20th century. A 'carman' contracted single loads for a customer (James Urry specifically advertised furniture removals), whereas a carrier accepted goods generally.

beer. Good ale was 1/- a gallon and shag for clay pipes was 3d an ounce. The town was not normally crowded but during the assizes there was bustle everywhere. I would then have to cross the roads between heavy farm carts, governess carts, perhaps a carriage and pair, even men on penny-farthing bicycles.

During the assizes the roads were covered with a waste product from the tannery, to dull the noise from the horses' hoofs, so that the judge could hear the evidence. On the rare occasions when I had a penny I would nip off furtively to the sweet shop. The old woman there would pour a drink for me. It was sweet, thick and syrupy blackcurrant or raspberry, I think, and always good value for a halfpenny.

The assignments completed, I ran back to the van. My father opened the food prepared by my mother. Mostly it was a home-made meat pie, bread and American or Dutch cheese. Then, we jogged around the town to collect the orders. This was a wearisome business, stopping and starting, jumping up and down. in and out of the van, checking the lists, and packing everything in piles. It was 3.30 pm or later when we left the town.

In winter the journey back was dreary, cold, and, to a boy of 11, terrifying. Even the stalwart figure of my father, stolidly beside me, brought little comfort. My imagination leaped from one horror to another. Darkness came early. There were no lights of any kind along the uneven winding roads. We carried no lights and there was only an old hurricane lamp with a flickering candle inside, so that we could identify the parcels. We had no visual means of warning anyone of our approach. If we heard another vehicle we shouted in unison to avoid a collision or being pushed into a ditch. There were many gypsies in that part of Sussex. They sold wooden pegs and watercress for a living, but some were vicious, dishonest, dirty and

unkempt. Sometimes we came across them creeping along in the dark with their horses, looking for a suitable meadow for grazing at some unfortunate farmer's expense. All children were afraid of them.

As Peggy slithered and the van creaked over the flints and the potholes I thought longingly of the kitchen at home, the warmth, the hot supper waiting and of my mother. I loved her dearly. I looked with envy towards the silent cottages as we passed, where families would be gathered around an oil lamp. I often winced at the severe pain from the chilblains on my fingers and toes. I knew better than to complain, knowing it would merit scant attention from my father, for he suffered no such physical ailments and he knew no fear.

At long last, a few flickering gas lamps meant that Ditchling was near. The women were again at the roadside, and they advanced out of the gloom, muffled against the weather. I jumped down, blowing warmth into my frozen fingers, in order to find their parcels for them. Individually they owed us little. A wage of 14/- a week with a cottage, perhaps ten children in a family, did not allow for long shopping lists. At the big houses I banged at the tradesmen's door. There was pandemonium as the dogs barked. After the noise abated somewhat there would be a protracted clanking and unbolting until a frightened servant girl opened the door a few inches.

'A parcel from the carrier,' I shouted.
'How much is owing?' she demanded.

It was usually 3d but she was always a long time collecting it. Meanwhile, I was left on the doorstep, stamping my feet. Eventually she came took the parcel and gave me the money. I took it back to my father, who put it carefully away. Gold went in one pleat of his pouch, silver in another, coppers loose in his pockets. Money in notes was unknown and cheques often a matter for great suspicion. However severe the winter, we always got back from Lewes with one horse.

The van empty, we led Peggy to her stable, bedded her down and went indoors. My brothers and sisters had eaten earlier with my mother, so I sat alone with my father at the table under the hissing single gas jet. My mother often gave us pork chops, cooked in a heavy pan on the open fire. They were small, sweet and delicious, unlike the large tasteless meat sold today. With them we had potatoes. The warmth came painfully back into my hands and feet. My mother sewed quietly in her wheel-backed chair. In the evenings she wore a long black dress with a gold chain and cameo locket. The others were in bed. After the meal, my father emptied his pouch on the table and counted his money. For 14 hours' labour I do not remember that he ever gave me a penny, or, indeed, that I

ever hoped for one. I envied my school companions who would have spent the day playing games or in other pleasurable pursuits, but I was grateful to be indoors, warm at last, and safe from the gypsies.

(Supplementary notes to 'A Sussex Country Carrier in Victorian Days' - Dave Bubier)

Accounts of the day to day operation of a horse drawn carrier's business remain rare, perhaps because they were once such a commonplace that it did not occur to record them. Such as has been written tends to focus on the nostalgic view of the carrier as the conveyor of country folk to market and ignoring that many, perhaps the majority, were not habitual passenger transporters, rather the means by which general small goods were distributed.

As a now virtually forgotten trade, misunderstanding easily arises. Once seen was an attempt to frame the schedules shown in a directory as being based on overnight stops in town, purely from use of the phrase '... puts up at the Rose Inn' therein. The term in those days merely meant the act of accepting and placement, for conveyance, on the cart of any goods up to what could reasonably be lifted by two men.

The foregoing account of the carrier at Ditchling, in Sussex, in the latter part of the 19th century is a well observed account by a then octogenarian. Even if it were to prove to have been 'ghosted' from family folklore, it retains an air of authenticity and the salient facts are verifiable. Levi Slater ('father') would have been very typical of the great number of similar carrier operations, combining this with other business, often small scale farming or a shop that could be attended to by a wife. He shared his runs to both Lewes and Brighton (where he used the 'Unicorn') on different days with Henry

Andrews, presumably that local blacksmith who 'roughed' Betty's shoes. Directories would also perhaps indicate a long suspected practice of exchanging the days of operation periodically. Indeed born in 1834 of local Ditchling agricultural stock, Levi Slater had married Emily Myram of Pulborough in 1862 - some of her family also being recorded as 'carriers' in later years - establishing himself in what was clearly a sound if modest way of business in his home town sometime in the 1870s. As a carrier he appears to have succeeded John Judge, who was working to a similar pattern in Kelly's 1867 Directory. Levi was to achieve his ambition of his own farm - by 1901 he and Emily held Greystoke, just outside the town and eldest son William had taken over the town centre shop, trading as a butcher. James Andrews, son of Henry, was by then seemingly the sole Ditchling carrier.

Easy to miss in the overall story is the evidence of how the carriers were networking goods around the county, probably beyond. The 'pork from farms at Wivelsfield' would, one would surmise, have been left with Levi Slater along with other parcels the previous day by those carriers going through to Brighton. Note the early morning loading of so many goods, not all of which would have originated in the village. Business at 'The Bear' would have entailed accepting parcels from elsewhere for conveyance back to Ditchling. How the rates were determined and reconciled is open to conjecture, but what little evidence exists shows a well organised and sophisticated system in place in many different parts of the country. Quite possibly formal 'associations' existed, although none have as yet been positively identified by this scribe.

Dave Bubier,
January, 2007

A Small Essex Town in the 'Thirties

JOHN HIBBS

I grew up in Brightlingsea, a fishing and yachting port on the Colne. We lived in 'the better part' of the town, but there doesn't seem to have been much in that - I guess everyone knew everyone else. But it meant that there were motor cars in Regent Road, notably my grandfather's Armstrong Siddeley, with its pre-selector gearbox. None the less, most wheeled traffic was either horse and cart or bicycle. The dustcart came up weekly, and the coal merchants too - when I was old enough, one of my jobs was to collect the horses' droppings for the garden (I guess there was an unspoken rule that you only cleared the bit outside your own property).

Grocers called weekly for an order and then delivered it, both trips by trade bicycle. One man didn't even have a shop, keeping his stock in a hired shed. While foodstuffs were largely sourced locally other goods mainly came in by train, along with coal, on the branch line from Wivenhoe - a town which we greatly despised. The International Stores, the Co-op and one shoe shop were the only firms not owned locally. Fish of course came straight out of the sea (apart from herrings) and a surplus of sprats meant horses and carts being loaded straight

from the boats on the Hard, to be ploughed into the fields. A surplus is never welcomed by farmers or fishermen; it just knocks down the price.

Buses to Colchester had been put on by Berry's in 1919, starting from outside the railway station. When there was a curtailment of rail services, the people expecting to go by train are said to have made for the bus. The driver 'phoned for a relief and many people never went by train again - railway managers, like bus managers later, failed to realise that they were in the competitive business of moving people. Eastern National, already running to St Osyth and Clacton, bought Berry's after a time.

The Sunday School summer outing was almost always by coach, to Clacton, Walton or Dovercourt. Once we had a booked carriage on the train, shunted at Wivenhoe, and once we went to Felixstowe to see the missionary ship *John Williams V*. Ten miles to Colchester was the limit of most shopping trips, and London was unusual. The fair on the Hurst Green was the occasion when the streets were busy - mostly I remember them as quiet.

Association Matters

▣ NEW MEMBERS

Ted Gadsby, Walsall
John Brown of Weymouth

The Annual General Meeting on Saturday 24th March at the Coventry Transport Museum will be followed by the usual Members' Meeting. (We have dropped the title Business Meeting to reflect that we try to concentrate on research and history rather than the workings of the Association). The Meeting has a full programme of presentations with external speakers, the Online Transport Archive and the Milestone Society, both talking to us about their work. Newly joined corporate member the B.P. Archive and long-established corporate member The Omnibus Society are making presentations, as is Dave Bubier on some recent research into road history.

▣ CONFERENCE PAPERS 2006

Apologies are due both to members who were at the 2006 Conference in Reading last October and to those who have ordered and paid for the Conference papers at membership renewal time. There have been two or three hitches. The booklet should now be out in March. There will be a listing in *Newsletter 50* of the contents, and an opportunity for others to order the published booklet.

▣ POST OFFICE VEHICLE GATHERING AT AMBERLEY

The Post Office Vehicle Club (one of our corporate members) and the Amberley Working Museum have joined forces for a Post Office Vehicle Gathering at the museum on Sunday 22nd April. It is hoped that at least fifteen visiting preserved former GPO, Post Office and BT vehicles will join with the museum's own *Connected Earth* collection of six preserved vehicles and other vehicles from the *Connected Earth* collection at Milton Keynes. In addition to the Club's own display stand, it is hoped that the Letter Box Study Group and Unicorn Kiosk

Restorations will also be present so that all aspects of GPO heritage are represented.

The collection at Amberley includes many artefacts collected by members of The Communications Network (formerly the Institution of British Telecommunications Engineers or IBTE) over the past 35 years, so a number of them were in use locally.

The focus of the exhibition is on the "public face" of telecommunications, covering the development of the telephone itself, along with the work of the telephone operators and the various engineers. The street scene contains a variety of telephone poles connected by a variety of types of overhead wire, an underground cable cabinet and pillar used for cross connection of cable pairs and other familiar street furniture used in telecommunications.

On the road there are six telephone engineering vehicles, ranging from the simple handcart to the 1936 Albion Linesman's lorry with its body built by the local coachbuilders, Harringtons of Hove. In the Post Office, visitors can see the link between the postal service and telecommunications through the Telegram. Hand written messages pass from the Post Office to the Telegraph Room via the pneumatic tube system, and in the Telegraph Room the written messages are turned into the finished telegram. Early telegraph and telex machines are displayed around the room, whilst visitors can use an interactive display to change words into Morse Code, and hear the result.

Within the Telephone Room, the development of the telephone is traced through the decades right up to the present day. There is a range of period pieces on display including a "candlestick". Wallboards display a range of bells designed for specific situations, such as calling out firemen, fire alarms and for telephones used in noisy conditions. The Exchange Room shows a 1950's style office switchboard and equipment showing how telephone calls were connected using both automatic and manual exchanges. Alongside the public manual board positions is an audio visual amateur film taken in 1964 for the retirement of the then Chief Supervisor of Worthing Telephone Exchange, Miss Brice. The



President:

Professor John Hibbs O.B.E.

Chairman:

Garry Turvey C.B.E.
139 Imberhorne Lane
East Grinstead,
West Sussex,
RH19 1RP

Secretary:

Chris Hogan
124 Shenstone Avenue
Norton, Stourbridge,
DY8 3EJ

Treasurer:

Gordon Knowles
17 Spring Grove,
Fetcham, Leatherhead,
KT22 9NN

knowles.g@btinternet.com

Research Co-ordinator:

Tony Newman
21 Ffordd Argoed, Mold,
CH7 1LY

Academic Adviser:

Professor John Armstrong
Thames Valley University
London W5 5RF

Newsletter Editor:

Roger Atkinson O.B.E.
45 Dee Banks, Chester
CH3 5UU



NEWSLETTER No.50

- ▶ The target date for issue of No. 50 is
7 June 2007
Contributions by
8 May please
- ▶ Provisional target date for No. 51 is
6 September 2007
Contributions by
7 August
- ▶ The 2007 subscription covers Nos.49 to 52



film gives an insight into one of the largest manual exchanges in the country.

The Cable Room traces the changes in cable from the beginning of the 20th century through to modern day fibre optics. The cable test desk, which dates from the 1920s, was used to locate faults in the underground trunk network and a skilled engineer could pinpoint a fault to within a few feet over a distance of more than 100 miles! An audio visual monitor in this room shows archive footage of how both underground and overhead cables were installed and maintained along with examples of how telephone exchanges were changed over to new technology.

Other exhibits at Amberley Working Museum relating to the GPO include the Vintage Wireless Exhibition and the Rural Telephone Exchange.

Amberley Working Museum is a 36-acre open-air museum dedicated to the industrial heritage of the south-east. Admission is £8.70, over 60s & students £7.70 and children (5-16 years) £5.50 with a family ticket for two adults and up to three children for £25. It is situated in West Sussex on the B2139 midway between Arundel and Storrington, adjacent to Amberley railway station.

More information at www.amberleymuseum.co.uk or www.povehclub.org.uk

Brainstorming in Harrogate

Encouraged by the success of Chester's informal meeting last September, (*Newsletter 48*, p.10), an enthusiastic band of thirteen northern members, including Board representatives Roger Atkinson and Ken Swallow, met at Harrogate on 30 November. The event was generously hosted by Giles Fearnley, chief executive of Blazefield Holdings.

The meeting organised itself around a checklist, rather than a formal agenda. First on this was a warm-up invitation to those round the table to reveal their interests – and what a variety those proved to represent, except perhaps that there was mild evidence that the road passenger side was pre-eminent. However, when it came to promoting the Association and expanding its membership, it was felt the diversity of interests within the membership as a whole was both a market challenge and a strength – a thought that sparked off a discussion, and some useful practical ideas, on how the Association might be more effectively marketed. The thrust of a regenerated marketing effort should, it was suggested, be directed at universities, local authorities (including the Association of Public Transport Co-ordinating Officers), the trade press and, in particular, the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport. Help and advice on promotion, including marketing of the annual conferences, was graciously offered, but the gist of this part of the discussion was that this should be without prejudice to the appointment of a Director with a separate marketing brief. At a grassroots level, could not Association members contributing to research media ensure that their R&RTHA membership was referenced as a by-line?

The subject of the annual conferences received a generous, and constructive, airing. To those at the sharp end of organising them, attendances might seem low. But the meeting injected a touch of realism, optimism even: those attendances would be the envy of many other organisations, especially professional institutions. A range of advice was offered on venues ("somewhere worth a visit in its own right, better still one with transport interest"). For the north there was a view that Leeds or York were the best options – but on the western side "no further north than Manchester please". Depends

where you live obviously! – and the virtues of Coventry for the business meetings was explained and not disputed. But since the meeting was taking place when the Board was debating alternative choices of either Roads or Research for the subject of the 2007 conference, some timely expressions of view and suggestions for content were aired – and these have been captured in a note to the Board.

The Association's publications were reviewed and an up-to-the-minute report received on the state of play with the proposed *Companion to Road Passenger Transport History*, which was making good editorial progress and for which the Board was now seeking up-front funding. The Association's *Newsletter* was acclaimed for its content and its professional standard of presentation and a gentle invitation issued for items the editor could consider for publication.

There was a unanimous conclusion (warmly endorsed by the two Board members) that the day in Harrogate had been useful in introducing members to each other, some for various reasons not yet having the opportunity, or the convenient ability, to attend the Association's meetings. "We have now met each other" was expressed as a mark of its success. What that meant was "we have had an opportunity of an exchange of views and for sharing areas of research and we would welcome the prospect of a similar meeting in, say, a year's time". That's what they said in Chester too!



The venue of our meeting was billed as "Harrogate", because everyone has heard of Harrogate, but to be precise we met at Starbeck, on the Knaresborough road, where Blazefield have established their head office alongside their Harrogate & District bus depot. The transport historian might know of Starbeck as the principal railway centre for Harrogate when the railway arrived in the late 1840s and as the site of the former North Eastern Railway motive power depot, and closed, along with the adjoining marshalling yard, in September 1959.

A more distant piece of transport history with a Starbeck association relates to the Harrogate Gas Works. These, as would befit a town of genteel character, were built about a mile out of the town in what was virtually open country, on the Ripon road. When first built, all the coal to feed the works was brought by horse-drawn carts from the railway station at Starbeck, a distance of three miles. This arrangement lasted until the early 1880s, when sidings were laid down at Bilton Junction, on the Ripon line, and from there the gas company reportedly* trucked the coal in seven-ton road wagons in trains drawn by a fleet of road locomotives. This arrangement left the gas company having to be responsible for the upkeep of the road

because of the "special traffic" using it, so in 1908 it was decided to construct a 2-foot gauge railway from the sidings at Bilton Junction to the gas works on Ripon Road, 1¾ miles in length.

- * The notes above are taken from an article, 'An Interesting Narrow Gauge Railway', by Revd E J Robinson, in the August 1926 issue of *The Railway Magazine*, extracts from which, together with a sketch map of the railway, can be found at www.strps.org.uk/railhistory/harrogategasworks.htm

Ken Swallow

Editorial

From your Editor's point of view, one of the highlights of this issue is "A Bus Mechanic's Experiences" by "Norman". Norman's article is written history from a source rarely tapped, and a generation that is disappearing: a working life, centred on the spanner, that goes back to the early 1940s.

Graham Edge sets out fully the vicissitudes of publishing in the small-market enthusiast field. And he makes a valid point in talking of encouraging writers. But he criticises two of the book reviews in our last issue. Your Editor firmly supports the reviewers. Book reviews in *Newsletter*, if they are to be looked upon as a reliable guide for the potential purchaser, need to tell readers

whether the resultant books are good, indifferent or bad; and in what respects. Accuracy, depth of research, scope of coverage, standard of editing, quality of writing, quality of production and price are all matters which the reviewer may consider and comment upon, even adversely. Not all books from the same publisher, or even the same author, are likely to be universally praiseworthy. *Newsletter* now has an exceptionally good team of reviewers to draw upon. Several publishers are sending new books to *Newsletter* for review, unsolicited. Books supplied by publishers for review, are under the heading Book Reviews. Books that readers have bought, but feel ought to be 'noticed', are under Book Notices.

Letters

◆ BOOK PUBLISHING FOR THE TRANSPORT ENTHUSIAST MARKET

It was with a measure of disappointment that I read the book reviews section in *Newsletter* 48. Any reviewer has an absolute right to state what he or she thinks about any title, but a couple of comments were, I believe, rather over the top, hopefully through ignorance of the facts about book publishing for what is a tiny, niche market. As a publisher with nine years' experience of titles aimed exclusively at the road haulage enthusiast market, (which is even smaller than the passenger transport sector), I do feel that some response is necessary.

Inferring that a 144-page book priced at £18.95 is expensive ignores the realities of book printing and publishing. The printing cost of a title is determined by: -

- A The number of pages (Amount of paper used)
- B The quantity of colour photos included (The more colour the more expensive it is)
- C The binding (Case bound is now out of the question for most titles)
- D The number of copies in the print run (More than a 1,000 at least is necessary for an acceptable unit price)

If a publisher has to source photos commercially, then that cost has to be factored in and can put several hundreds of

pounds onto the production cost of each title. At our small print run levels the entire quantity has to be ordered and paid for. It is not possible to call off 100 or 200 copies at a time, except with digital printing methods. However, even using digital printing results in the individual book unit cost being far too high, and there are still some quality issues with this method.

The costs of advertising in specialist magazines, public liability insurance (my policy is £650 this year but I must have it in case somebody injures himself with a book. Yes, really!). And then there is the biggest cost of them all, namely large trade discounts to other specialist booksellers and wholesalers.

Gingerfold Publications has always been run as a hobby and part time business, but one that has taken an inordinate amount of time over the last nine years. When I launch a new title I hope to sell 50% of the print run in year one, then typically it will take up to five years to sell the rest. Money is thus tied up in books plus storage. Currently I am holding 3 tonnes of books in stock!

Like other publishers in this niche market, Gingerfold Publications is struggling to maintain annual sales levels because of competition from the internet. Also the predominantly elderly readership is gradually

diminishing. The grim reaper is taking his toll and those on small fixed incomes have to make economies in their non-essential expenditure. Those who die are not being replaced by younger would-be enthusiasts. There is simply not the interest there used to be.

Is it all still worthwhile these days? I am seriously beginning to wonder.

Graham Edge (Gingerfold Publications)

◆ MORE ABOUT BOOK REVIEWS

Thank you very much for sending me a copy of *Newsletter 48*, with its review of my "Northern Counties of Wigan". I felt the reviewer had been very kind to me. Richard Storey also rightly paid tribute to Eric Ogden's original history of the company, now some 30 years old. Without Eric's pioneering work my task would have been all the more difficult. It was perhaps with some embarrassment that I noted that Eric is to review (in this current *Newsletter*), my Ashton & Manchester Trolleybus book.

However, in *Newsletter 48*, you also included a review of the recent Venture Publications book on Lancashire United, by Eric Ogden. I rather felt that the reviewer of this book was a little unfair. He did your readers a disservice in not highlighting such issues as the original research on the background of why LUT was so

successful, so profitable and yet being 'independent' could act like a BET Company. When one learns that the one-time BET Chairman was its Finance Director, it was perhaps not surprising. Yet as a former employee of two BET companies, it was the first time I had seen any reference to this situation, and I feel that more credit could have been given to this new Ogden / Senior research.

Bob Rowe

◆ MEMBERS' CONTACTS & INTERESTS

I feel that a Membership List, as suggested in *Newsletter 48*, p.10, would be a great help, with the opt-out for those who don't want to be included; otherwise how are we to know where our mutual interests lie? Also, at times, we all find items not of personal interest but certainly worth re-directing to an appropriate person.

Paul Lacey

◆ EARLY CONTINENTAL TOURS

Can any reader tell me who operated the first continental coach tour, and with what vehicles? I believe that 'Battlefield tours' to France and Belgium commenced shortly after the Armistice in 1918, but did any tours to the Continent take place before World War I? I am not overlooking the reference to Gregson & Gregson on p.14 of *Newsletter 45*, but am seeking to explore earlier than that.

Eric Ogden

Research

From the Research Co-ordinator (Tony Newman's) Desk

◆ ARCHIVES OF TRAFFIC COMMISSIONERS – AN EXCEL FILE

In my last column (*Newsletter 48*, p.20), I referred to the subject of 'Traffic Commissioners' and the A2A site listing of over sixty archival deposits containing these words, at various Record Offices. I suggested that some of these items might be clarified by the visit of a local member to check the content of the record(s). I am pleased to say that one member has taken up the challenge and inspected the holding at East Sussex County Record Office. My list in Excel format is still available and I would be glad to hear from any other members who may feel they could spare an hour or two in pursuing these items at their local County Record Office.

◆ TRANSPORT HISTORY SOURCES – Cumberland Motor Services

Thanks to the Omnibus Society's Provincial History Research Group *Newsletter*, I am able to draw attention to the fact that the Directors' Minute Books of Cumberland Motor Services Ltd have been deposited at the Cumbria Record Office and Local Studies Library, Scotch Street, Whitehaven. We are all grateful to the Managing Director of Stagecoach North West who took action to ensure the future safekeeping of these records.

◆ TRANSPORT HISTORY SOURCES – Fodens Ltd

This is not new information, but a reminder that Cheshire and Chester Archives and Local Studies Service at Chester

has a comprehensive archive, including minute books, engineering drawings, and photographs of vehicles relating to Fodens Ltd.

Edwin Foden and Son commenced production of agricultural stationary engines at their foundry in Elworth near Sandbach in 1876. In 1902 Fodens Ltd was formed. The company soon became a leading manufacturer of steam wagons and later diesel trucks. Fodens was taken over by Sandbach Engineering Co in 1981 [*C P Kennett, The Foden Story, (Patrick Stephens Ltd), 1978*].

◆ LOCAL HISTORY SOURCES

– Links with Local History Organisations

I have decided to pause in my very active attempt to discover what Local History Societies may have recorded, relative to the objectives of our Association. After approaching just over 100 such bodies, I have a volume of material that needs to be assessed and followed up. I would greatly welcome an offer from among our members to assist in this process. An example of the unexpected results of this survey is the story of the steam propelled road vehicles produced by Liquid Fuel Engineering Co Ltd of Cowes, IoW. These were marketed under the name 'Lifu' and appear to have operated briefly in a number of places as far apart as Dover and Edinburgh. A well-researched paper on the operation of such a steam omnibus in Mansfield was published in a Nottinghamshire local history journal relatively recently. It is remarkable that this article neatly complements an article on the Lifu Steam Bus which appeared 53 years ago

in *Buses Illustrated* issue 17, which goes to show that research is always ongoing.

◆ FAMILY HISTORY SOURCES

– Links with Family History Organisations

Ken Swallow has been active in proposing similar links with the parallel activity of Family History research. Another item of unexpected connection was an article in

Family Tree Magazine, February 2007 which reviewed 'Internet Sources for Roads and Road Transport'. This is well worth a read and it was gratifying to see that our Association has not been overlooked in this article. In July 2005 the same journal carried an article by our member Paul Lacey, with the title 'Was Grandma on the Buses?'

AGN

8 February 2007

Obituary

Geoffrey W. Morant (1928-2006) was one of that select band of schoolboys who, in the 1940s and in the austerity years that followed, helped to lay the foundations of the PSV Circle. In those days, there were no printed records available and, until 1944 Ian Allan publications dealt solely with railway matters. By compiling reports of London bus sightings, Geoffrey and others like him made it possible for basic lists of the London bus fleet to be compiled, maintained and shared by a growing group of enthusiasts. He subsequently became an active member of the Omnibus Society. In later years, he became very

involved in Buses Worldwide, an international association of people interested in bus operations. From being a founder member in 1982, he was eventually made Emeritus President of that organisation. It was only in his last years that Geoffrey joined our Association, but sadly health problems prevented him from becoming involved to the extent that he had intended. Throughout his life, Geoffrey made a wide study of road passenger transport and developed some keenly held views which, at times, he would express in no uncertain terms.

AGN

Use of Family History Connections

PAUL LACEY

As well as my extensive local transport researches, I have also been pursuing my family history for many years. So, naturally enough, I soon realised that it would be useful to adopt 'family history' methods to reach the relatives of persons with significant input into historical transport. By using such methods I have been able to trace people in less than obvious locations, despite surname changes, and sometimes even after they have moved abroad.

Without the success of these methods, some of my books would certainly have been a lot less detailed, whilst the volumes on the *Penn Bus Company*, *Thackray's Way* and *South Midland* might not have appeared at all. With the Penn company I traced the son of the owner and one time general manager, who still kept in touch with all the surviving employees! The Thackray's project was stalled over issues relating to the early roots of the family and its ventures, until I found several family members after appealing through the columns of *Family Tree Magazine*. After that the family gave me all the clues I needed, plus access to photo albums. Dave Flitton's work on South Midland also benefited from the boost of finding the daughters of the original manager and several early drivers.

The use of the Census Returns for the period 1851-1901 can be useful for revealing country carriers, cab proprietors, plus coachbuilders, particularly when checked alongside local trade directories. This allows a pattern of when activities came into being or ended, to be established.

My own studies of the country carriers of the Newbury area in west Berkshire were greatly assisted by using

those methods. I note also a comment made elsewhere in *Newsletter* regarding the lack of writing on the country carriers. I had a 2-part article on carriers in *Family Tree Magazine* published in March and April 2006. I also did one on the World War 1 lady conductors on the British Automobile Traction Reading Branch in that same magazine's issue of July 2005, [referred to in Tony Newman's "Research" report above], whilst other regular contributors have covered such topics as railway workers and bus crews over the past year, so the crossover between the two areas of research is definitely a valuable and fertile one.

During my own family history I have found examples of the following involved in transport:

Horse-drawn era: Horsekeepers, ostlers, cab ostlers, tramway stableman, bus washer, bus conductor and several country carriers. Also one relative killed by 'mortal collision with a horse tram' at St. Georges Circus in Southwark, London.

Railway era: Engine builders and fitters, fireman and engine driver, craneman, rail ganger, electrification ganger, station porter, station master and parcels clerk.

Motorbus era: Bus mechanic, wartime conductress and motor cab proprietor.

Other areas: Brewer's drayman, carman (horse and motor), army drivers, a surveyor of roads, a shipwright and even a submariner!

One day perhaps they will identify a 'transport' DNA gene?

Book Reviews

◆ THE DEFINITIVE HISTORY OF WILTS AND DORSET MOTOR SERVICES LTD

By Colin Morris and Andrew Waller
Hobnob Press, East Knoyle, Salisbury, 2006
ISBN (from Jan 2007) 978-0-946418-56-5
Hardback 152 pages, £19-95

This book claims to be “the definitive history” - so is it? My criteria for a successful bus history are that it should deal with the people - proprietors, management and staff; it should do justice to the places and routes; many will demand that it covers the hardware of vehicles and premises; and it should give attention to ephemera such as timetables, maps, tickets, and publicity.

The authors explain the involvement of such figures as Douglas Mackenzie and Alfred Cannon, and the links with Southdown. Nonetheless it was a small and impoverished business until railway investment came in 1929, leading to its becoming part of Tilling/BAT and later the Tilling Group. It was unusual (if not unique) for a “territorial” company to be as dependent as was Wilts and Dorset on a single market, i.e. the thousands of service personnel based on Salisbury Plain. This meant rapid growth and adaptation during both World Wars, with a continuing semi-captive market of National Servicemen in the early post-war years.

There is both attention to detail and a readable conversational style - with occasional digressions, so that we improve our knowledge of the history of smuggling in the area. There are also good homely descriptions of how the weekend forces’ leave services were operated; this I found invaluable as the kind of material that would otherwise be lost.

Separate chapters cover the two large independents absorbed in later years, Venture of Basingstoke and Silver Star of Porton Down. These chapters are expanded into more general descriptions of the areas covered and, in the case of Silver Star, the development of the weekend leave expresses. While I can understand the authors’ reasons for tackling as they did, it leads to a rather disjointed sequence. In an academic textbook they could perhaps be regarded as case studies, but I’m not sure it works here.

The history finishes in 1972, when W&D was merged into its (by then National Bus Company) neighbour, Hants and Dorset; the authors felt, probably rightly, that the re-created Wilts & Dorset Bus Co Ltd which appeared at the time of deregulation in 1986 was a different animal. One consequence is that, although there is a generous list of photographs (including a commendably large number from early years) there is limited opportunity for colour. I did catch just a whiff of sour grapes at the disappearance into Hants and Dorset, which does not seem to have been handled with great skill by management.

Thinking of what the authors did not cover, one key aspect is staff relations, perhaps because W&D seem to have avoided the confrontations and resistance to change

experienced by others. Straitened circumstances may have been a blessing in this respect; certainly the company appears to have proceeded rapidly with single-manning from the 1950s, while its neighbours experienced trades union intransigence until the “consolidation” agreement of 1969.

So is this the “definitive history”? I would say it meets all my criteria to a degree achieved by few. It is unlikely that anyone would want to challenge Morris and Waller’s book as the authoritative work, and it fills a gap in the list of serious company histories. Definitely one for the bookshelf.

David Holding

◆ HALIFAX PASSENGER TRANSPORT

By Geoffrey Hilditch, OBE
The Oakwood Press, Usk NP15 1YS, 2006
ISBN (from Jan 2007) 978-085361 647 4
Hardback 336 pages, £27-00

This is a well-written and interesting book, very well produced and plentifully illustrated. I infer that the author regards it as his *magnus opus*. There are many facets of it which entitle him to do so. He had it gestating, at least at the back of his mind, for 43 years. So, enormously sensibly, he garnered in material for it during his years as General Manager of Halifax Corporation Passenger Transport – and has used that material to very good effect.

The early chapters are very impressive. They do not claim – as authors of histories of other towns have been known to do – that “passenger transport came to X with opening of the Corporation tramways”. They go back to hackney cabs in 1848 and horse buses introduced by the Halifax Omnibus & Cab Company in 1865. Michael Holroyd Smith and his complete working electric tramway, demonstrated in the grounds of his house in Halifax in 1883, is brought in.

Throughout the book there has been wide use of various sources and coverage of many aspects – the Pye Nest Hill tramway disaster of 1907 is minutely examined. The impact of the trams on railway traffic, the abortive plans for a tramway lift at Salterhebble, the speed at which lines, once sanctioned, could be constructed and the curtailment of electricity supplies during the coal miners’ strike of 1921 are tackled. In many contexts, there crop up the problems presented by the hilly nature of Halifax and overcome by the tramways (and, later, the buses). Enough diverse situations to keep the reader interested and informed.

But, as one goes on reading, at least two factors begin to irritate. The more important one is the chronological treatment, which means reverting, year by year to the same location or operational or vehicular problem, instead of this being dealt with from start to finish in one series of paragraphs. The second factor is locating the umpteen place names. I am familiar with the suburbs of Halifax

and was content with the map of the area on the inside cover, which shows the routes and most terminal places named. But I am less familiar with individual streets, and had to keep my finger in pages 6 and 7 for a map of the town centre, and even then sometimes got lost.

I do not wish to infer that the later chapters lack interest. Moving on to the period of the buses, there is good explanation of the railway involvement in the setting up of the Joint Omnibus Committee, bus operators acquired are succinctly dealt with, the early purchase of and standardisation on the AEC Regent chassis is well covered. The involvement and dominating character of Alderman A H Gledhill is portrayed.

However, there is a criterion which, perhaps a little idiosyncratically, I personally apply to histories of public transport undertakings – do they adequately cover the Second World War? Very few do. (*Wolverhampton Transport Vol.2*, by Paul Addenbrooke is my benchmark, which merits 10 out of 10). Are the Council's deliberations – surely there must have been some in most towns by 1943 or 1944 – on post-war reconstruction and the role of public transport, covered in the book? Notices in the buses (compare Coventry Transport in *Newsletter 46*, p.24), the impact of the black-out, the obligation to form queues, the impact of conductresses, the observance by cinemas and theatres as well as on the buses of the curfew time for last departures; overcrowding, wear and tear, should, in a comprehensive history, all be covered. Hebble, I know, had a good many buses on works services to Avro at Yeadon. Did Halifax JOC not have any "hush-hush" services to armaments factories or the like? A middling 6 out of 10 to this book on its wartime coverage.

At the end of the book, there are useful Appendices, (including heights of various places above sea level) and an Index. But no summing-up. Several intermediate summings-up on various matters would have been helpful.

Overall, the book deserves the status of *magnus opus*. It is a marvelous achievement. But it is not the author's best work. That was his two-volume autobiography, *Steel Wheels and Rubber Tyres*, (reviewed by David Harman in *Newsletter 37*).

◆ **CHEVROLET & BRITISH-BUILT CHEVROLET BUSES** by David Hayward.
52 pages softback. Nostalgia Road Publications Ltd., Kendal, Cumbria. [Volume 4 of Fare Stage Series]
£8.95 ISBN 1 903016 65 7

Many people know that Bedford trucks and buses were successors to Chevrolet, but what is not commonly known is that, according to the author, the change came about because of 'anti-American' feeling following the 'Wall Street Crash' in 1929 and the recession it caused in Europe.

The Chevrolet Motor Company was formed in 1911 and a subsidiary company started in Canada in 1915. In 1918 Chevrolet became a division of the General Motors Corporation and General Motors of Canada Ltd. was

incorporated in Ontario. Initially the only commercial vehicles exported to Europe were Oldsmobile 1-ton truck chassis, but in 1920 the Chevrolet Model T arrived. This was exhibited at the *Scottish Commercial Vehicle Exhibition* in 1921. General Motors set up a subsidiary operation at Hendon to deal with the assembly and sales of vehicles from the US.

Various different models were available throughout the 20s and these are described in detail in the book. Two important innovations towards the end of this period were the introduction of the 6-cylinder engine in 1929 and the introduction by the 'British Longframe Sixwheeler Co. Ltd.' of an extended LQ chassis enabling a body with 20-seats to be carried. In 1930 it was noted that 46,863 units had been assembled in Hendon and Chevrolet had provided 28% of the entire British Commercial vehicle sales in 1929. As there was no room for expansion at Hendon, but there was spare room at the Vauxhall plant in Luton, the decision was made to start production there, using as many locally produced components as possible. Production started in March 1930 and in May 1931 these were being advertised as 'Bedford Model' Chevrolets.

At the *Commercial Motor Exhibition* in 1931 both Chevrolet and Bedford chassis were exhibited, so that prospective purchasers could make a comparison. The last Chevrolet was built in April 1932 and thereafter the only commercial vehicles built at Luton were Bedfords.

This is a well-researched book explaining the history of the various companies involved with General Motors and details of all the Chevrolet models produced. Well illustrated, it will make a very worthwhile addition to your bookshelf.

AML

◆ **FORTY YEARS OF THE FORD TRANSIT 1965-2005**
by Robert Berry
Nostalgia Road Publications Ltd ISBN 1 903016 61 4

Introduced in 1965 and still the market leader in the small van world, the Ford Transit has undoubtedly become an icon. Indeed, small vans have become generically known as 'transits'. As such, it is a worthy subject for a book and this addition to the Nostalgia Road Series makes a valiant, though not altogether successful, effort.

The book begins with a brief history of Ford light vans from the earliest days of the Model T, built at Trafford Park, through to the Transit, built initially at Langley before being moved to Southampton.

After a promising start regarding the policy thinking behind the early development, the book begins to give the impression of running out of something new to say. This impression is emphasised by filling the pages with a larger font size than previous Nostalgia Road books that I have, although they cover much broader subjects. An example of this is the introduction of the Transit 230 model in 1993. The first Transit 'heavyweight', it was developed by Ford's Special Vehicle Engineering Department and big fleet users were BT and the AA. But that's it! Nothing more said about it.

RA

The 52 pages, packed with mainly black and white photographs and a small colour section, provide as much variety as possible, but a rectangular box looks just that, whatever the livery. These photographs are predominately from the Ford archive and as such are posed press photographs, which always lack the character and interest of genuine working scenarios.

Robert Berry has made a commendable attempt, and has an obvious enthusiasm for the Transit, but I was left thinking that too much of the text was padding and that more research was needed to fill the pages. Most disappointing is the standard of editing. If it were self-published by an enthusiast it would be understandable, but from a publisher, it falls far below standard.

With a cover price of £8.95, it is not expensive, but at just 52 pages with soft covers, it does not offer particularly good value. Previous books in the Nostalgia Road Series have offered excellent value, both in content and cost.

Roy Larkin

◆ **ASHTON & MANCHESTER'S TROLLEYBUSES**

by Bob Rowe

Venture Publications Super Prestige series.

128 pages, softback £16-95. ISBN 1905 304137

This book is a worthy addition to Venture's Super Prestige collection. It tells concisely the story of the closely connected municipal trolleybus fleets of Manchester and Ashton-under-Lyne Corporations, and it contains a fine collection of well-produced photographs including 29 in colour. Among the latter are some gems including Ashton's pre-1951 blue, red and white livery and some scenic shots of Manchester vehicles. Manchester's pioneering Rochdale Road trolleybus depot, and Ashton's bus and trolleybus depot converted from tram use, are also illustrated. On pages 83 and 84 some complex overhead wiring is impressively shown against a dull, rainy sky. On page 38, "before and after" views of the Manchester Piccadilly trolleybus terminus show the Victorian warehouses in the background and the cleared site after the 1940 blitz.

The author begins with an outline of trolleybus operation in the North West. The relative locations of the operators are shown in a useful double-page map, though curiously Ashton is not named. Manchester had decided on tramway abandonment and the question was whether to replace the trams with motor buses or with trolleybuses. Shortly after R Stuart Pilcher's arrival as Manchester's general manager at the end of 1929, the first conversion to motor buses took place in April 1930. By 1935, however, some councillors were advocating trolleybuses. The discord between the City Council and the Transport Committee and general manager is described, with the full Council eventually deciding in favour of trolleybuses. Ashton had been an early trolleybus operator initially running a joint service with Oldham between the two towns, commencing in 1925. Oldham ceased its two vehicle contribution the following year, but Ashton continued to the boundary at Hathershaw in 1939.

Ashton councillors were content to provide modern trolleybuses as their contribution to the joint services with Manchester. The long routes between Manchester and Ashton, by both the Old Road and the New Road, were ideal for trolleybus operation which commenced in March 1938.

Further plans and extensions are described leading to the effects of the Second World War on the two systems. A significant extension at this time was to the aircraft factory of A V Roe in Chadderton, which was provided with its own bus station. A remarkable photograph on page 82 shows eight Manchester trolleybuses awaiting homebound workers at this station. The author explains the reasons for Manchester continuing to receive trolleybuses up to peacetime standards up to 1943, while Ashton only received four utility vehicles with wooden-slatted seats.

Development of the systems continued on the return to peace in 1945, within the constraints of the export drive necessary to get the country back on its feet. However, it was not until 1949 that Manchester's first post-war trolleybuses arrived. Similar Crossleys were delivered to Ashton in 1950. Two years later, the trolleybus systems were at their maximum extent with a total route length of 44 miles.

In the chapter "Behind the Scenes" the author describes the electrical arrangements in a manner which is both interesting and informative.

The first trolleybus abandonments took place in April 1955, as the first 62 new BUT vehicles arrived in Manchester in June of that year. The gradual decline is described, culminating in the final day of public service on 30th December 1966 when the newest trolleybuses were only ten years old.

Following the main text is a series of illustrations of the vehicles in service in order of route numbers, many with a background of their operating terrain. There is a trolleybus fleet list for both operators. The few grammatical infelicities may be forgiven since this is a worthy account of its subject and can be highly commended.

Eric Ogden

◆ **TODMORDEN'S BUSES – A Century of Service**

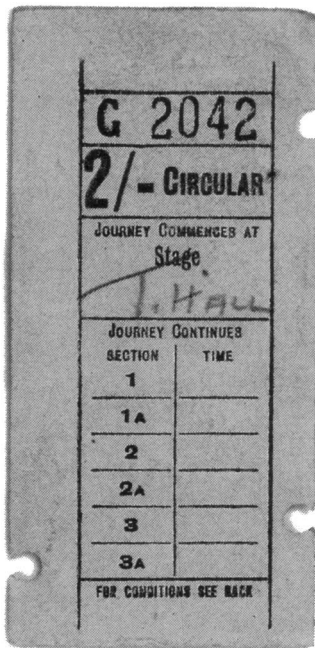
By Ralph Wilkinson Softback 52 pages

Published by Nostalgia Road Publications, ISBN 1 903016 68 1. Price £8.95.

Todmorden had cause to be proud of its buses. This book shows that it had less cause to be proud of its Councillors, at least in the long period of the undertaking's decline. When the buses had been making a profit, money had been happily extracted to the relief of the General Rate. But when, from the 1950s, road traffic increased and bus passenger numbers fell, and there were calls for bus shelters and a small bus station to be provided, and new buses to be bought, the Councillors were not interested. Rescue came in 1972 by absorption into the new Calderdale Joint Omnibus Committee, and the position, in

the shape of better buses and better services, was further enhanced by bus deregulation in 1985 and the subsequent privatisations.

But – and this is a very large qualification indeed – the town of Todmorden had lost an asset that had made it individual and distinctive. Todmorden's buses had started in 1907. The author has traced the early history well, and then followed through from the 1920s to the 1960s, with thoroughness. He has written a good history. As the title required him to cover a century of service, about two pages have been suitably devoted to last 35 years – acknowledging the improvements that they have brought.



The ticket illustrated here (but not in the book) is at least 55 years old, and is from the period before Ibiza had been thought of. It reflects the simple pleasure that local folk could derive from a circular trip, with breaks in Burnley and Bacup, on TJOC buses. Todmorden to Burnley, Burnley to Bacup, Bacup to Todmorden (or t'other way round). Impressive scenery, evocative place names: Portsmouth, Chatham, Cliviger Pit Brow, Stage 11, Deerplay Inn, Temperley's, Spring Well and Top Ram's Lumb. All those, with Burnley and Bacup as well, for 2/-. It would be interesting to know how well this book has sold locally in 2006/7. It ought to sell to a few R&RTHA members.

◆ **BRITISH POLICE CARS OF THE 1950s & 60s**

By Alan D Johnson and Robert W Berry
Published by Nostalgia Road Publications,
ISBN 1 903016 14 2. Price £8.95.

At first glance, this 52-page book is simply about cars, amply illustrated, and they are almost all British-built and mostly powerful. But the story it tells is also one of the police forces responding to a time of considerable change, whether in political control, transport technology,

mechanisation of crime or reduced availability of staff. At the beginning of the period it covers, the typical British policeman walked the beat on foot or in rural areas rode a bicycle (*Newsletter* 48, front page). Cars available for senior officers were British-built, painted black, and fitted with shiny chrome bells in front. The style and function of police cars had changed little since before 1939. The television programme *Dixon of Dock Green* epitomised policing as inherited from previous decades, while the programme *Z Cars* reflected the new role of motorised police responding to the emerging motorway networks, increased car-ownership, and the growth of car-related crime.

The authors note the initial uncertainties about the role of the motorway network; was it intended to replace the railways and perhaps use their rights-of-way? And was there to be a dedicated national Motorway police force, possibly a branch of British Transport Police? Motorway construction began as a series of unconnected by-pass roads, the first around Preston in 1958, though the inauguration of construction on what became the M1 did not take place until 1959.

White liveries were originally chosen for motorway patrol vehicles instead of the traditional black or dark blue, but as cars generally began to appear in lighter colours, some reflective stripes were added to distinguish police cars. At first there was no top speed limit on motorways, and after 1965 all motorway patrol cars had to be capable of at least 90 mph.

Manpower shortages led police forces to introduce "unit policing" in the 1960s with Panda cars replacing men on the beat. The authors note that while in some places this reduced crime, it could also alienate local people from the police.

Ford Anglias, Morris Minors and Vauxhall Vivas were among cars used, and they were usually painted in a distinctive livery of pale turquoise blue with a broad white stripe from door-to-door over the roof between the A and B frames of the car. Police forces remained fiercely independent and this was reflected in the choices of vehicles which provide a whole catalogue of British-built quality cars. Much of what the police did was made possible by radio communication, although at the start of the 1950s the extra battery space needed for radio in a Vauxhall Velox meant that the heater had to be omitted. But this was certainly the era when radio replaced the whistle and the blue police box.

RA Compiled by transport historian Robert W Berry from notes prepared by the late Alan D Johnson, this lavishly illustrated book provides a mass of information useful to the road transport historian of any discipline, even to those for whom the cars themselves are not the main interest. Well-produced and excellent value.

Ian Yearsley

Memoirs of a Pump-Boy

DAVID HARMAN

Paul Jefford's reference (*Newsletter* 46) to the website devoted to the history and design of filling stations reminded me of my experiences in the petrol trade.

The earliest school holiday job I recall having was blackcurrant picking, which was backbreaking and poorly-paid work. Hence, when my best friend, John Marshall and I heard a rumour that there were jobs going at Hensmans' petrol station, we hastened there on our bikes at the earliest opportunity.

Jean Pierre Hensmans is believed to have moved from his native Luxembourg to settle in Brentwood early in the 1920s. He opened a motor garage at Brook Street on what later became the A12. I haven't researched his background but guess that like many others, he must have become acquainted with motor vehicles during the Great War. The business prospered, taking on a dealership for Ford motor cars, and in 1929, branching out into motor coaches. As Sunset Saloon Coaches, Hensmans began running two Gilfords in 1930 on a regular service between Brentwood and Charing Cross, in competition with Edward Hillman (see *Newsletter* 47). The fleet eventually grew to nine Gilfords, operating very profitably until the advent of the Road Traffic Act and the formation of the London Passenger Transport Board. After some procrastination, the latter took control of Sunset on 25 January 1934, although arguments over what constituted a fair price for the business were not resolved until 1936.

Hensmans henceforth devoted his energies to the motor dealership. By the time John and I had puffed our way down there on our Raleighs, this had become a substantial concern with a string of premises, in and around Brook Street. These housed used and new car showrooms (then stocking the Anglia, Capri, Consul, Zephyr and Zodiac models), sales and servicing depots for Thames commercials and Fordson tractors and agricultural equipment, and a service garage, plus petrol station.

The manager of the latter, an elderly, wizened and kindly man named Len, confirmed that he needed two likely lads to cover for staff on holiday, and as we appeared to be sound in wind and limb, we would fit the bill. Would we like to start now? Would we! Without further ado, we donned long brown dustcoats, two sizes too big, and set to work, serving petrol.

The Hensmans petrol station was of a then conventional layout: a rectangular forecourt with 'islands' arranged in two arcs. On each island stood three pumps. There were two for Paragon Super, plus one each for Paragon Regular, Regent Super, Regular and Derv. Hensmans was an 'independent', not tied to an oil major, and were supplied by Paragon Petroleum, an Esso distributor, in turn supplied from the Coryton refinery. Paragon accounted for the bulk of Hensmans' sales for the simple reason that it was the cheapest petrol in the district. Regent was stocked as insurance in case of disruption to supplies. How Hensmans' managed to buy Esso petrol via a

distributor and undercut 'tied' Esso petrol stations in the vicinity (supplied direct from Coryton) remains a mystery to this day.

The pumps were of the old, tall Avery-Hardoll type with 'clock' faces and the now, highly-collectible, glass globes. The Regent ones bore their normal red, white and blue logo, but the three Paragons merely had the most important attribute, then as now - price, emblazoned in flord blue characters: Super: 4/9d, Regular: 4/6d.



Quick Cheerful Service

YOU ARE ENTITLED to more than the best quality petrol and oil when you drive in to a filling station. You are entitled to service. Quick service. Cheerful

service. Q.C.S.! That's the plus you'll get when you use your local Regent Station. Next time you need petrol or oil, drive in at the Regent sign and see!

♪ *Regent Stations serve you well — And they've got the best to sell* ♪

from Mansfield District Traction Co.
bus timetable ~ June 1958

Operation was simple. You rotated a knob to the desired number of gallons - from one to twenty, flicked a lever upwards to start the motor, and petrol would then flow as you squeezed the nozzle trigger. The motor would stop automatically. A golden rule was to put the car's filler cap on top of the pump, so that you would see it when you returned the nozzle to the cradle, and thus, remember to put it back on the car. Despite that, customers would occasionally pay in advance and drive off before you refitted the cap, and consequently we had a box full of assorted, left-behind caps in the office.

The most common sale was one for which the arithmetic is engrained in my memory: four gallons of 4/9d and four 'shots'. "Shots" (at 1d each) were REDeX, a red-

tinted oil squirted from a hand-dispenser into the tank before the petrol went in. This was 'upper cylinder lubricant' and many motorists then swore by it. The arithmetic, by the way, was memorable inasmuch as $4 \times 4/9d + 4 \times 1d = 19/4d$, for which most customers proffered a £1 note, followed by those magic words "... and keep the change ...". The office contained a small counter on which sat a large "National" cash register. This was more complicated to learn to operate than the pumps, with all sorts of buttons to record different types of sales, plus a ledger card printing device for account customers.

"Customer service" was all-important although Len didn't need to teach us this. As soon as you heard the bell ring when a car crossed the rubber strip laid at the forecourt entrance, you raced out. It was a matter of pride not to spill petrol on the coachwork, and some customers stood over you, watching just in case. It was less easy when they asked you to "fill her up", but anti-siphon filler pipes lay in the future, and you could usually see right down to the bottom of the tank. Some customers maintained meticulous records of mileage and petrol used, so they would want the tank filled exactly to the brim. This again required skilful control of the nozzle as automatic 'cut-off' was also a thing of the future.

We always offered to check the oil, clean the windscreen and check the air in the tyres, all of which usually generated tips. Sales of oil were common, for cars then routinely burnt it to a greater or lesser degree. For the single SAE grades, we had a green Castrol cabinet containing hydraulic dispensers, on top of which stood a row of measuring jugs. By convention, these were arranged in a line, in order of size, like a mother duck and family of ducklings. New-fangled multigrade oils, like Castrolite were sold in strip-top cans, together with their Havoline (Regent) equivalents. Customers regularly bought gallon cans of oil, particularly if they were driving old oil-burners like the Ford V8 Pilots, the big Humbers, Daimlers and Armstrong-Siddeleys.

One thing I only dimly recall is the periodic arrival of the Paragon tanker with our 'drop' of fuel. This was a major event as the forecourt would have to be temporarily closed and we pump-boys had time to kill - or so we thought. (Len usually set us to work cleaning and polishing the pumps). The tanker was a 4-wheel rigid, small by today's standards, but probably ideal for Paragon's main trade, which was the supply of heating oil, agricultural fuels and lubricants. Make? Maybe a Leyland Comet or an AEC Mercury.

The days, weeks and summer flew by and in no time at all, school once more beckoned. We asked Len the inevitable question: were there any Saturday jobs going? Alas, there were not, so John and I switched from the petroleum industry to the grocery trade (shelf-stacking at Fine Fare), an altogether different story that I won't bore you with.



What has changed since the 1960s? Well, apart from the significantly more painful impact that tanking-up now has on the wallet, the most obvious difference is that at the modern petrol station, it is the customer who does the pumping. The pump-boy has been relegated to the history books. But, there are other differences: the hours at Hensmans' were quite civilised: we opened at 8 am and closed at 8 pm, Monday-Saturday. The idea of being open 24 hours or on a Sunday would have had Len spluttering. Secondly, the only things we sold were petrol and oil. There may have been the odd rack of Turtle-wax air fresheners on the counter, but that was about it. Selling the welter of other things found at the average petrol station nowadays, would have been unthinkable.

But one thing hasn't changed. Petrol remains a 'distress' purchase, and extremely price sensitive. Motorists travelled miles to Hensmans' just for the "4/9d". I must have pumped oceans of it.

Follow-Ups

VEHICLE BODY STAMPING PLUGS

Bill Taylor, writing in *Newsletter 48* asks for information regarding a small lead disc fitted to the sideboards of a Bedford S-type tipper lorry, registration mark 648 CVX. A good picture of this disc is illustrated and shows it to have on it a crown and two sets of numbers - 271 and 67.

Back in the mid 1980s I was transport manager for a sand and gravel company which operated a large fleet of tipper lorries. All of our vehicles were fitted with a very similar seal which was attached to a measuring stick inside the body to show the measurement of the load. We made little use of them, but on occasions they were useful for measuring loads carried from sites with no weighbridge available.

I was sure that ours were not round but multi-sided so I asked my brother, Andrew, who is the Deputy Chief Trading Standards Officer for the Corporation of the City

of London for information. His reply is shown below.

The item shown is a stamping plug for a cubic measure comprising a vehicle body. For many years vehicles have been made with bodies manufactured of a particular volume for the measurement, transport and delivery of sand, gravel etc. The volume of these bodies would be verified by local weights and measures authorities to enable the measurement to be lawfully determined for trade.

The body would have calibration strips indicating the total volume, and any subdivisions, running the height of the internal faces of the sides with these strips being securely affixed by bolts. On each strip one of the bolts would terminate within the casing of the sealing plug which is then filled with lead. Onto this lead plug the weights and measures

authority would apply the crown and the authority identification number. The number 271 is currently listed with the DTI as being issued to Suffolk County Council which is likely to have remained unchanged since 1967 when it was last stamped. The 67, as rightly pointed out in the enquiry is the date of calibration. The purpose was to prevent removal or alteration of the calibration strips without the destruction of the lead plug and the verification stamp. Thus any repairs or replacement require a fresh test of the body's volume and reinstatement of the stamp with the by then current date. Thus the stamp's date cannot be taken as a reliable indication of the age of a vehicle's body.

Since the plug is round, the body will be calibrated in imperial units (cubic yards) as would of course been the norm in 1967. Later metric measures were denoted by the use of a hexagonal stamping plug.

Finally it was required that the body bear a plate indicating the maximum volume that could be contained (e.g. 10 cu yd) and this would have been attached near the cab but is presumably missing from the vehicle illustrated.

He went on to tell me that as a trainee Weights and Measures Inspector, as they were known in those days, one of the most unpopular jobs would be to sit inside a metal bodied vehicle without ear protectors holding a block of metal against the inside of the seal while an inspector stamped the outside. If a number of vehicles were to be calibrated his ears would be ringing for some time afterwards. What would the Health and Safety Executive have to say on this practice these days?

Alan J. Whittington

The Weights & Measures Act required the sale of sand, ballast etc. by weight or measure. If no weighbridge was available, transport by volume required the vehicle to be

calibrated (as described above).

When the motorway M1 was being built, huge numbers of vehicles had to be calibrated to carry the volume of spoil required to be moved. There was good work on the hard; poor jobs on the rough ground that broke your vehicle very quickly indeed.

Bob Kilsby

One or two additional points: It was the driver's responsibility to level the load to the appropriate mark on the "iron". In those earlier days weighbridges were few and far between. Today, the movement of this type of traffic is almost all carried by weight. For this method, the conveyance note must be supported by a weighbridge ticket. A typical ticket, (courtesy of Michael Mudge Ltd) is illustrated here.

Peter May

MICHAEL MUDGE Ltd.
 PLANT HIRE & HAULAGE CONTRACTOR
 SELF DRIVE PLANT - TIPPER HIRE
 EXCAVATION - DEMOLITION - SITE CLEARANCE
Crenver Depot, Praze, Camborne, Cornwall
 Tel: 01209 831584 Fax: 01209 831960

CUSTOMER'S NAME: _____

	WEIGHT AS TAKEN AT WEIGHBRIDGE		MATERIAL
	Tonnes	kg.	
GROSS			_____
TARE			
NET			

WEIGHBRIDGE OPERATOR: _____

DATE: _____ TIME: _____

Warning of Speed Traps

Members who attended our 2005 conference, or who have read the published papers, will recall the problems which faced the early AA patrolmen who frequently found themselves accused of obstructing the police when they warned motorists of police speed checks. Ever since, the rights and wrongs of such warnings have been debated and as recently as December 2004 a milk tanker driver from Yeovil, who had waved his arms out of the cab window to warn other drivers that they were approaching a speed camera, was found guilty by magistrates of obstructing a police officer. However, an appeal against that decision was successively upheld by the Crown Court and the High Court and the prosecution's request for the matter to be taken further was turned down. Whilst everything depends upon the circumstances of each

individual case, it does appear that drivers who alert others to police activity are not always in the wrong and indeed the High Court judge commented "some people might think that the police ought to appreciate the efforts of others to prevent speeding".

Such comments will be lost on those pioneer AA patrolmen who time and time again were hauled before the courts, but sometimes our legal processes can be very slow! However, as the AA has pointed out, in those faraway days, the aim was to protect persecuted motorists, now the emphasis should be on getting motorists to drive at a legal speed at all times.

Garry Turvey

A Bus Mechanic's Experiences

"NORMAN"

When I left Midland Red after 47 years (redundant), I was not interested any more until 1994, when I sent a letter to the *Black Country Bugle* about Douglas motor cycles. I had a reply back from a Mr Geoffrey Hill, who had worked at Bearwood Garage from about 1937 to 1943, and we got writing to each other about Midland Red.

Now, breakdowns. I took the garage van with the van driver and Norman Davis and we went to a CM6 coach which was stranded, jammed in fourth gear. We took a gearbox, plus cradle and lifting jack, and we changed the gearbox. I then received a telephone message "Could you go to Newport Pagnell Garage?" – I think it was a United Counties garage. But the Midland Red breakdown truck had not been able to tow it any further than that. We found another CM6, with a broken crankshaft. This vehicle had been towed to Newport Pagnell. I did not know any other details; all I knew was that they had taken the Constant Flow System (CFS) pump's belts off, to fit the breakdown truck; so I was left with a vehicle with only a handbrake. I had to get on to Digbeth to send the parking driver with land rover and belts.

The van driver had gone home after following us to Newport Pagnell, while we drove the repaired CM6 there. I would have driven the other CM6 without brakes, but could not do so with the broken crankshaft, as we could not use the engine and gearbox to act as a brake.

Whilst waiting at Newport Pagnell for belts, there was another call; this time from Luton. Another Midland Red broken down on private hire. No one at Luton to bring a replacement United coach to Birmingham. So could I do anything to help? United would tow the broken down Midland Red to Toddington services, and take the stranded passengers to Toddington services as well. So I sent Norman Davis to Toddington, to pick up the passengers in the repaired CM6 – the first one we had dealt with — and take them (and their driver) to Oldbury, and then return to Digbeth. Meanwhile, I waited for the belts to arrive, fitted them, and drove the CM6 with the broken crankshaft to Digbeth. As I said before, no fierce acceleration possible and no usage of the engine for braking.

The coach that had broken down at Luton had the con-rod through the side of the crankcase – very unusual. Not

much traffic on a Friday night; and it must have been about 3.00 a.m. on a Saturday morning when I got to Digbeth. You have to remember you also have to eat. You may not think such an episode could happen, — but you must believe me; it did in those days — and that is why I have never written anything about these happenings before.

I will just write about one more breakdown. I went to three CM6s left in Samuelson's garage at Victoria. Two with faulty gearboxes, one with crankshaft C.F.S. pulley and alternator pulley off, because the bolt had snapped in end of crankcase. So we left Digbeth garage at 5.00 a.m. on Sunday morning, with land rover which carried one gearbox, plus lifting jack, gearbox cradle and tools. I decided that I would opt to take and fit the new gearbox to one CM6, then take the gearbox out of the CM6 with the engine fault and use it to replace the gearbox of the other CM6. So, three gearboxes out; two fitted.

I also took a spare fluid flywheel in case the coupling (Metalastik) was faulty or flywheel leaking. I had to use this coupling in poor shape on one CM6. So we had two CM6s for drivers to pick up and take, on service, to Birmingham.

I then removed the propshaft off the other CM6 and fitted a ring to the differential flange. (The ring mentioned was made in Carlyle Works by the machine shop, so that it could be fitted to differential pinion flange. The differential flange bolts were too long, so that you needed either this special ring or had to use washers to make up the space. Very difficult for me to explain). So I was left to take the vehicle on the road with handbrake working. Transmission handbrake by cable, never very efficient, always adjusting cable and handbrake calliper, which had two small round disc pads. In that state, the CM6 was towed to Bearwood by the land rover. I had taken one man with me, Trevor Hale.

Happily, Mr Geoffrey Hill (see opening paragraph) is still with us and is going to receive a copy of this *Newsletter* as soon as it appears. But, sadly, all these people I took with me on these jobs are now dead, so I cannot verify the facts. That is one reason why I have never written about these things. And I am still wary of these facts being published; no heroics on the road for me.

TWO APOLOGIES

Two items in *Newsletter 48* were either not acknowledged or were incorrectly attributed, Your Editor apologises:

The picture on the front page of Police Constable Ben Smith was attributed to Slaidburn Heritage Centre. This should have been to Slaidburn Archive. The Archive is housed in the Heritage Centre, but operates and is financed as a separate entity.

Sir Henry Maybury – the picture of Sir Henry on page 3 of *Newsletter 48*, ought to have been acknowledged to Shropshire Museum and Archives, who were very helpful in providing it.