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# Government Cars and Ministers – The End of a Special Relationship?

**Geoff Dudley**


Above: A convoy of Government Car Service vehicles was sent to Geneva in 1955 to provide transport for a 'Big Four' conference (of Great Britain, France, USA and USSR). This view is believed to have been taken *en route* in France. The cars are of Humber manufacture, mostly the Hawk VI model, but also include the larger Pullman or Imperial models.

On 5 September 1939, just two days after the declaration of the Second World War, the newly formed War Cabinet concluded that rapid mobility was now at a premium, and so decreed that all its members should be supplied with official cars and drivers. Previously, only the Home Secretary had use of an official vehicle in the form of a police car, and at the time extending their availability was viewed as a temporary expedient, with Foreign Secretary Lord Halifax observing that he desired use of an official car and chauffeur to save him undue fatigue during the emergency. In the event, the hire of six Austins for use by the Cabinet began a service to Ministers that has operated continuously to the present day. Nevertheless, it has invariably been a highly sensitive area of government, where its importance in political and symbolic terms far outweighs its size as an organisation.

This sensitivity means that the fortunes of official cars often reflect closely the political and economic trends and moods of the time. This has never been truer than in recent times, so that when David Cameron became Prime Minister in 2010, he quickly identified Government Cars as one area ripe for cuts in the hostile economic climate with which the coalition government had to contend. The reasons that official cars were singled out were not hard to find, for as Cameron himself had declared in 2009, "If there is something that really annoys people it's seeing politicians swanning around in chauffeur-driven cars like they're the Royal Family. In these economic times, when everyone is making their own sacrifice, this number [of official cars] cannot be justified. So the Conservatives will cut the budget for official government cars by a third."

In the event, the target set by Cameron has apparently been exceeded, and in January 2012 the Department for Transport, which is responsible for Government Cars through the operational arm of the Government Car and Despatch Agency (which also runs the government's internal mail services), was able to announce that in 2010-11 the cost of cars provided for Ministers was 44 per cent lower than in 2009-10 (reduced to £3.8m from £6.7m). The chief means of bringing about this economy was through a large reduction in the numbers of allocated cars, that is those specifically allocated to individual Ministers, from 78 to 13 (some cars are also allocated to senior Whitehall officials). Instead, those Ministers without an allocated vehicle could now draw from the general Ministerial Car Pool on an *ad hoc* basis.

Superficially, therefore, it might appear that the use of allocated vehicles by Ministers is now in a state of terminal decline, but the history of Government Cars suggests that things might not be so simple, and could easily change, particularly if and when the economic climate takes a turn for the better. At the root of the situation is the high value that Ministers often place on having an allocated driver, not only for the convenience, but also for the close relationships that often develop. Consequently, the driver can be the person the Minister spends most time with, and gets to know best, even more than other Ministers and their own civil servants. For Ministers, the nature of the job, and its pressures, mean that they can become quite lonely and vulnerable figures, so that the driver becomes a type of confidante and unofficial advisor.

Indeed, the closeness of the relationships means that drivers and Ministers can almost become part of each other's families. For example, Bill Housden drove Harold Wilson as Minister, Prime Minister, and former Prime Minister, and the two families became extremely close, including Harold Wilson and his wife Mary becoming godparents to the Housden's daughter. Margaret Thatcher was another Prime Minister who built particularly close relationships with her drivers, so that when her driver George Newell died suddenly in 1981, the Prime Minister insisted on attending his funeral with her family, and despite her 'iron lady' public image displayed considerable emotion. She described Newell as, "A wonderful man, a marvellous chauffeur, and a good friend, who could always make me laugh."

The unique position of the drivers also inevitably places a high value on confidentiality and discretion, as they literally hear almost everything that goes on within government. Thus Harold Wilson's political secretary, Lady Falkender, has described the drivers as the 'Outer Cabinet' because they are the depositories of every possible political confidence. The need for discretion, together with

the early security issues, are the two principal reasons why the Government Car Service (as it was then known) was not privatised, despite serious consideration being given to selling it off on several occasions in the 1980s and the 1990s. On the whole, it was considered that a private sector company could not be trusted to the same extent. The unique character of Government Cars can also play a significant part in ensuring its survival when the economic and political climate turns hostile, such as in current times.

Throughout its history, therefore, there has been an innate tension between the basic function of official cars in providing essential transport for Ministers, and the political sensitivities, indicated by David Cameron, concerning public perceptions of Ministers being ferried around in chauffeur driven limousines at the taxpayer's expense. In fact, these tensions have been present almost since the outset of official cars, so that shortly after Winston Churchill became Prime Minister in 1940, perhaps characteristically, he decided that his 23.5-horsepower Austin was not fast enough, and so a 28- horsepower Austin was substituted. However, when Minister for Labour Ernest Bevin requested a similar upgrade, his request was turned down on the grounds that the public could be critical of high-powered cars being supplied at public expense.

The wartime cars had been provided on an *ad hoc* basis, but in 1946 the Official Car Service (OCS) was set up (in 1952 it was renamed the Government Car Service (GCS), and since 2007 has been known as Government Cars), and it could be said that the chief reason for creating it, given in a Whitehall memo of the time, still holds good today. It stated, "It can be said with truth that a Minister is a Minister for twenty-four hours a day, and it is not unreasonable that they should be allowed to use an official vehicle at public expense." In the early days of OCS, its position was undermined by many government departments continuing to have significant car pools of their own, but when Churchill returned as Prime Minister in 1951, he brought virtually all these autonomous fleets within the newly formed GCS.

On the other hand, Churchill was extremely unhappy at what he considered to be the excessive use of allocated cars, and in a style almost identical with the action taken by David Cameron, drastically reduced the number of Ministers entitled to an allocated car to just three. However, the Prime Minister quickly encountered what amounted to a Cabinet revolt against the new restrictions, so that in effect many of the allocated cars remained in place, if only on an unofficial basis. One of the chief Cabinet rebels against Churchill's restrictive rules was Harold Macmillan, and when Macmillan himself became Prime Minister in 1957, he wasted no time in abolishing them, and instead allowed more allocated vehicles than at any previous time, while also publishing the Prime Minister's Rules for official car use, that have continued ever since (although, reflecting the sensitivity of GCS, they were not made public until the 1990s).

The Prime Minister's Rules left the number of allocated vehicles at the discretion of the Prime Minister, and it could be said that this power represented a valuable form of political patronage that was almost irresistible for successive residents of 10 Downing Street. Consequently, the number of allocated cars tended to rise inexorably over the years, with many Junior Ministers gaining an entitlement, together with other additions. One notable example occurred in 1975, when Prime Minister Harold Wilson announced that, henceforth, all former Prime Ministers would be entitled to use of an official car for life, just a year before he resigned and became a former Prime Minister himself!

One of the great attractions for Ministers in having an allocated vehicle was that the car and driver would remain available for the whole day. Given the often great length of a Minister's day, including attending official functions and late sittings of Parliament in the evenings, the working week of a driver could amount to as much as seventy or eighty hours, even if many of those hours consisted of waiting for the Minister to emerge and be driven home. Consequently, the drivers had a quite low basic wage, with the majority of their earnings dependent on extensive overtime. Even in the 1950s, pressure was placed on Ministers to change and accept more than one driver during the day, but the nature of the special relationship meant that

the Ministers invariably insisted on maintaining the status quo.

Matters eventually came to a head when the issue of the health and safety implications of the long hours worked by drivers could no longer be avoided. In particular, the EU Working Time Directive meant that change was inevitable, and in 2009 a new variable 48-hour contract was introduced. In reality, implementation of the Directive increased labour costs for Government Cars and, together with the large reduction in allocated vehicles, this imposed severe financial pressures, so that in 2010-11 Government Cars incurred a trading loss of £3.5m, despite the numbers employed being reduced from 190 to 127 during the year. This was chiefly because revenue was reduced drastically in the same period, from £14.6m to 8.9m, and it was acknowledged in the Annual Report that take-up of the Ministerial Car Pool had been poor.

The apparently low use of the Car Pool suggests that Ministers, encouraged by the Prime Minister, are finding other means of getting around. In fact, Cameron conceded that he gained many of his ideas for saving money on official vehicles from the published diaries of a former Labour Junior Minister, Chris Mullin. In *A View from the Foothills*, published in 2009, Mullin describes how he refused to use an allocated car as a Minister, and was shocked both by the cost of using the Car Service vehicles, and also the amount of overtime earned by the drivers. The current climate is therefore a long way from that where former Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott earned the nickname of 'Two Jags' through his choice of vehicles for private and official use, and who gained notoriety for using his Car Service Jaguar to travel 250 yards from his hotel to the conference centre at the Labour Party Conference of 1999.

Yet Chris Mullin himself concedes that it will only take an embarrassing incident, such as a Minister leaving official papers on a train, for the whole issue to be reviewed. There are, in addition, obvious potential security threats generally. More intangibly, it could also be said that the all round service provided by an allocated driver, including acting as a confidante, can hopefully assist a Minister to perform more efficiently in their job. Over time, it may be therefore that a balance needs to be struck between necessary economies and modernisation in the work of Government Cars, and the value for money it can provide in helping the wheels of government to run more effectively. More cynically, it is also not hard to imagine a future Prime Minister, faced with a rebellious Cabinet, judging that the creation of a few more allocated cars and drivers might help avoid some uncomfortable political crises.

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Geoff Dudley's full work on this subject, 'The Outer Cabinet: A History of The Government Car Service' (published in 2008) is available at:

www.dft.gov.uk/gcda/docs/History%20of%20the%20Car%20Service.pdf

# Association Conference

# Friday 12 and Saturday 13 October 2012

As indicated on page 5 in 'Association News' a conference will be held in Coventry on the evening of Friday 12 and daytime of 13 October. Fuller details will be given in the next issue. Speakers on the Saturday will include:

Stephen Barber 'Holidays by Coach – a look at 100 years of UK coach touring'

Ian Souter 'The British tram: basket-case or barometer?'

Richard Mellor 'Haulage as the crow flew'

# Association News

## *A message from your management committee*

## *Changes in office*

As members will know, we have recently passed through a difficult period. Key vacancies in office occurred at the same time. However, the Committee is pleased to confirm that that hiatus is safely behind us.

The first breakthrough occurred when Peter White, Professor of Public Transport Systems at the University of Westminster agreed to be *Editor,* in a personal capacity. Following the publication of a February edition, the former pattern of four a year now resumes with this current May edition. The Committee and Editor are agreed that *The Journal* will continue to serve a double purpose: a vehicle for articles, both academic and enthusiastic (the boundary between which is very much a matter of opinion!) and news of interest to members. Needless to say, the Committee accords the Editor full freedom of action and recognizes that what is published may well be without the Committee's *imprimatur*. Indeed, it is hoped that, as occasion demands, readers will find within *The Journal's* pages articles of provocation intended to excite the wider transport world.

John Howie, *Treasurer* and *Membership Secretary*, has very kindly agreed to take on the additional task of *Company Secretary* [attending to the statutory procedures involved in the Association's status as a company]. When possible, he would wish to handover responsibility as *Treasurer* and *Membership Secretary*. Members willing to consider assisting the Association by taking on either or indeed both these tasks are asked to let us know. Tony Newman remains our *Research Co-coordinator* whilst Professor John Armstrong remains our *Academic Adviser*. Philip Kirk, who splendidly kept the ship afloat last year, has agreed to be the *Administrative Officer*, assisting with routine administration, such as agenda dispatch, keeping minutes and room booking. Demands upon his time in his professional work are such that, as he puts it, he has no time to chivvy. That latter task falls to the *Chairman*, a post now filled by Robert McCloy, newly appointed to the Board and formerly a director of education and chief executive in local government.

## *Priorities and longer term planning*

The Committee and Officers thus now in place have met to review immediate priorities and to cast an eye over longer term hopes and ambitions. As for the former, the first task was to settle arrangements for this year's Autumn meeting. The event will take place in Coventry starting with a pre-conference dinner on the Friday evening of 12 October 2012 at the Ramada Hotel with the formal sessions on the Saturday, 13 October at the Transport Museum. The private dinner, to which partners are invited, is an opportunity of a social character, intended to be an enjoyable occasion when old friends can catch up with news and make new friends. A light-hearted talk will accompany the proceedings. Since this is an important celebratory year for Dickens, there will be readings from the writer on the theme of transport, with mulled wine. The more formal conference sessions will feature two contributors to the forthcoming *Companion*, to which further reference is made below, complemented, by way of balance, by a talk focusing upon freight transport. It is hoped that as many members as possible, with guests, will attend and take advantage of the negotiated relatively modest charges, making the occasion something of an Autumn break. It is appreciated that for members living some distance from Coventry an overnight stay is almost essential if tedious travel is to be minimized.

A key initiative on the horizon is clearly the publication of the *Companion to Road Passenger Transport History,* a significant project that has been in preparation since 2003. The Committee, in collaboration with the editing team, is finalizing printing and publication arrangements and envisages the launch as a major event in the early part of 2013, probably at the time of the Association's Annual General Meeting.

## *Broader perspectives*

Turning to the longer term, the Committee is resolved upon increasing the Association's membership and strengthening its relationship with corporate members. Hitherto various initiatives had been identified. We are now intending to follow up these ideas with the co-operation of members. One possibility is to hold, say, the Autumn meeting in a venue especially associated with a corporate member, the theme relating to the particular focus of the corporate member. Attention is also being given to the overall shape of our programme, including the incidence, location, and themes of events. The production (and liberal distribution) of flyers describing the association's purposes and activities is receiving attention. Possibly this might be furthered in collaboration with our corporate members wherein we reciprocally support one another. The committee realizes that the internet must play an increasingly important part in not only effecting relations between the Association and its members but also in reaching out to a wider audience. To that end the Committee is reviewing how the current web site might be developed. Broadly, the Committee is resolved to reinstate the pattern of activities that has hitherto proved to be the most popular, complemented by adroit innovation! *The Journal* is a crucial instrument and our Editor will be given every support possible to expand its coverage and readership. In this connection the Committee urges members to respond generously to the Editor's invitation to contribute articles and items of news. On the publication front the Committee is examining a long-standing project: a book by Nigel Furness, *A History of the Tilling Group*.

The Committee would welcome any observations and suggestions on the future of the Association. Members wishing to respond or who might be willing to consider assisting in the Association's administration are asked to get in touch with any Committee member or e-mail robert.mccloy36@sky.com

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# Book Reviews

Ian Read, *Kirby's Luxury Coaches of Bushey Heath: The History of a Family Business*: Bushey Museum Trust, 2012, 52pp, £11.95 including p&p

This well-written history describes what must have been a typical family coach business. It originated with the expansion of an existing family concern, in this case George Kirby's bakers, which used horses in the course of its own business. In the late 19th century, the proprietor saw the opportunity to supply horses to others, then to run his own passenger transport, the resultant cab, trap and fly business initially being overseen by the baker's son Thomas. Encouraged by the arrival of railways in the locality, and the development of commuting, in 1900 a horse bus was purchased and feeder services to nearby stations were started. To keep up with developments in road transport, motor cars were operated for hire from the Edwardian period; and around 1926 the first motor bus was acquired, probably to be used on private hire and excursions, rather than on scheduled services. After the introduction of road services licensing under the Road Traffic Act 1930, licenses were obtained for trips to, for example, sporting events and the coast. This success was quickly curtailed by the outbreak of war in 1939, as a result of which leisure travel all-but ceased and three of the company's six coaches were requisitioned. Following post-war revival, Philip Kirby, the last of the family to run the firm, took the opportunity to sell it as a going concern to George Hutchings, under whose tenure it expanded massively until, prior to its sale to Trafalgar Leisure in 1980 it operated eighty vehicles. The Kirby business was finally dissolved in 1994.

The author has made the best of a difficult task, as he acknowledges that few records of the business under the several generations of Kirby family ownership survive. The book provides a wide background to the Bushey area and its road transport needs, with the company's origins sometimes illustrated by 'typical' horse and motor vehicles operated by other firms, in the absence of any early pictures of the Kirby fleet itself. There is a comprehensive narrative on the family behind the business, compiled from documentary records such as census returns and through interviews with family members. This history therefore portrays well the atmosphere of the business and the environment in which it operated. There is a full list of all the company's vehicles up to the time of its sale by the family; but in the absence of company documentation, there is no financial history. The story mainly covers the era of Kirby family ownership, with only a brief summary of the company's subsequent evolution and eventual demise.

The book is well presented, on good quality paper and profusely illustrated – including maps, reproductions of documentation such as licenses, as well as illustrations of many members of the Kirby family, the fleets operated and the premises they ran from. With two of Kirby's 1950s Bedford OBs having survived, an epilogue covers their preservation. A 'tailpiece' illuminates the story of the typical coach outing, with which the book begins: a neat and effective way of rounding off the Kirby's story.

Bushey Museum Trust is not a publisher your reviewer had previously known about, but their website reveals a long list of publications, some of which (e.g. *The Story of Bushey in the Age of the Steam Train* and several about film-making in Bushey under Sir Hubert von Herkomer) might interest RRTHA members. The museum itself must be worth a visit too.

Martin Higginson

Clive Pidgeon, *In for the Long Haul,* Available from the author at 9 Park Drive, Skewen, Neath, SA10 6SF (£11.99 + £1 p&p), ISBN 978-904564-41-6, 194 pp, illustrated.

The national advertising of this ambitiously-titled book promises more than it delivers. There is a short introduction to the history of both road haulage and the commercial vehicle industry, but reference to "the manufacture of lorries by hundreds of small companies" (page 12) and the persistent mis-spelling of 'Thornycroft' will put readers on their guard. The introduction is followed by a short chapter on legislation, with a strong anti-nationalisation and anti-BRS emphasis. The

text is made up of profiles of drivers/entrepreneurs (arranged alphabetically by forename!), with something of an emphasis on their military service, and the resulting distraction of numerous photographs of men in uniform (and of their weddings). There are some interesting and relevant illustrations of vehicles, but all with poor definition, May's Motors of Elstead is the subject of one of the profiles and the Association's *The Full Turn of the Wheel* (2007) is cited, which serves to underline the need for a bibliography, even of a dozen or so titles, in a work such as this.

Richard Storey

Peter C Killick (editor and compiler) *Wheels of the West.* 68 pp, illustrated. West Country Historic Omnibus and Transport Trust, available from whom at Kalmia, Church Road, Colaton Raleigh, EX10 0LW, £12.95

This is essentially a scrapbook, made up principally of material from *Commercial Motor* for the period 1950 – 1965, but the choice of articles and the linking, contextual material by the editor cover both the national scene and the West Country in a particularly satisfying manner. Milk, cider, meat (imported through Bristol, and locally produced), timber, feedstuffs, grain, lime and other bulk materials feature prominently in text and pictures, as do the Rowe Hillmaster and Tiverton Coachbuilders. British Road Services, licensing and clearing houses also appear in this interesting compilation, which gives a vivid picture of operations in and from a somewhat remote rural area in an age before the motorway system facilitated the long haul.

Richard Storey

Mike Forbes (ed) *The Great British Lorry.* Ian Allan Publishing (WH Smith exclusive) 2011, 130pp, illustrated. £7.95. ISBN 978-0-7110-3492-5

This is one of a series produced for exclusive sale in WH Smith stores, so it is obviously designed to appeal to a wider audience than the dedicated members of such organisations as the R&RTHA, or the CVTRC. It therefore carries a large number of illustrations, both black & white and colour, but this is not to say it is a 'picture book'. The illustrations have been carefully selected to make their point, are in general well reproduced, and did not leave this reviewer with a sense of *déjà vu.* They have informative captions and are arranged to accompany a carefully-devised text, with chronological chapters interspersed with such themes as steam vehicles, liveries, tipper operation and preservation (perhaps emergency vehicles could have been excluded). 'British' lorry is given a wide interpretation, with ample coverage of such marques as Bedford (GM), and Ford, the inclusion of an early Berna and a 1933 Mercedes-Benz. Although the book is not a history of road haulage, its coverage of goods vehicles accepts the incursion of foreign chassis from the 1960s onwards. Perhaps we may hope that an interesting an attractive publication such as this will help to develop a new generation of enthusiasts to join us in researching and recording the vital role for over a century of commercial road transport.

Richard Storey

Stephen Pullen *British Leyland*. Moretons Media Group: *Heritage Commercials* (WH Smith exclusive), undated, 130pp, illustrated, £6.99. ISBN 978-1-906167-69-1

In some ways a dauntingly complex history, it has here been helpfully dealt with by its division into numerous, mostly short, chapters, some on companies, others on products. There are chapters dedicated to the constituents of the British Leyland Motor Corporation, which was created in 1968, Leyland Motors and British Motor Holdings, to BLMC itself and BMH constituents: MG, Riley and Wolseley, and also to Alvis, Jaguar and Triumph/Standard-Triumph. Taxis, Rover 4x4 vehicles, the Mini, the Leyland Sherpa, Vanden Plas coachbuilders, Aveling-Barford and the Leyland National receive separate attention, as do AEC, Albion, and Scammell. Within AEC there are sub-sections devoted to Crossley, Maudslay and Thornycroft, although the last is not flagged up by a sub-heading. It is disappointing that Guy Motors receives only a single sentence (page 35), although

another Jaguar acquisition, Coventry Climax (the forklift manufacturer) is covered on pages 88 and 89-90. To round off this survey, Nuffield/Leyland Tractors, Avon Special Products, gas turbine power for road vehicles, and the Denovo tyre receive separate attention. Pages 98 to 103 reproduce part of a large Leyland publication showing what Leyland brought to BLMC: 29 companies are listed, with an accompanying map of their locations, from Glasgow to Basingstoke. All in all, this is a brave and largely successful attempt to record the fascinating but complex history of a twentieth century industry, and excellent value for money.

Richard Storey

Laurie Akehurst and Guy Marriott *Loudwater's Little bus 1928-1972.* London Transport Museum Friends, 2012, £2. 12pp, illustrated. Available from Friends Office, London Transport Museum, 39 Wellington Street, London WC2E 7BB (make cheques payable to 'London Transport Museum Friends' and mark the envelope '336A booklet').

Published to mark the 40th anniversary commemoration, on 25 March 2012, of the last run of this service, this attractively-produced A4-size publication provides a comprehensive account of a somewhat unusual component of the London bus network. Not be confused with Loudwater near High Wycombe, the Loudwater in this case is a settlement between Chorleywood and Rickmansworth in Hertfordshire. It was built in the 1920s as an exclusive, high income development by Cameron Jeffs, who commenced a bus service between the estate and Rickmansworth station in March 1928, providing a limited peak service with some additional shopping journeys.

On creation of the LTPB in 1933, an agreement was reached that Jeffs would continue to operate the service, in contrast to the complete absorption of most bus services in the region around London at that time. This continued until 1950, from when it was operated by LT as service 336A. Small normal-control vehicles operated the service throughout its life, latterly the Guy GS type from 1953. This publication is very extensively illustrated, and records not only the basic factual details of timetables and vehicles, but also the human interest angle, notably the roles of Jeffs as promoter, and of Harry Cross, who drove the service for 17 years up to 1971.

Peter White

Steve Koerner *The Strange Death of the British Motor Cycle industry.* Crucible Books, Lancaster, 350pp. ISBN 978-1-905472-03-1. £14.99

Canadian historian (and motor cycle enthusiast) Dr Steve Koerner has produced a convincing study of the motor cycle industry. He concentrates, with detailed research, on the post-war period, but sets this in context with two opening chapters from the end of the First World War to the end of the Second. Despite the urging of the Director of the Manufacturers' and Traders' Union, Major Watling, they industry remained, in Koerner's view, far too closely tied to the heavier machine favoured by sporting-inclined enthusiasts. There were exceptions, such as the two-stroke Levis, "the pioneer of all light-weight two-stroke motor cycles", with a new 'Baby' produced in 1936, "in response to a wide demand", and others, such as the BSA 'Bantam' and 149cc Velocette, much used for police patrols, but they only serve to 'prove the rule' – the industry was over-committed to the 'big bike'. The author makes his case with fully detailed research and there are well-chosen illustrations in the text.

Richard Storey

## AEC Centenary Event Saturday 10th June 2012

The 100th anniversary of AEC bus manufacture will be celebrated with a Pageant Run from the Royal Forest Hotel at Chingford at 0930 to the Walthamstow Pumphouse Museum, 10 South Access Road, London E17 8AX www.walthamstowpumphousemusuem.org.uk

AEC manufacture took place at Walthamstow from 1912 to 1933. The Museum event will run from 1100 to 1700, with an entrance charge of £5.00 (children free). A range of AEC buses and other vehicles will take part in the rally and be on display at the Museum. Further details from the organiser, Mr Lindsay Collier at l.collier418@btinyernet.com

# Wartime Travel in Swansea

# Robert McCloy

### Part 2 (concluded from the February issue)

## 1944 and 1945: years of weariness and hope

As the war's end appeared in sight and tolerance levels declined, criticism of transport intensified. Complaints were addressed to both the SWT and the council. In turn, the latter sought the company's comments which, generally, were that Morgan would be unsympathetic and that much, in any case, was exaggerated. At the Advisory Committee's June meeting, Watkins, the deputy town clerk, reported on discussions with the Swansea and District Travellers' Association who had suggested establishing separate central Swansea bus stops for the Blackpill service as a means of deflecting the 'selfish' Sketty passengers, which was accepted as a way forward. Complaints had been received that the Pentrechyth, Llanshamlet, service lacked its own bus stop signs to the confusion of many. The council representatives suggested marking appropriate lamp posts, the company's demurring: the posts were in the wrong positions. A solution would have to await licences for materials. Bus stops were now inconveniently located in Fforestfach following decisions of the police and commissioner. It was agreed that the council representatives would confer with the police and the company would seek the commissioner's co-operation to restore, exceptionally, the former stops. The company agreed in principle that were the council to make a payment the company would carry wounded soldiers free.[1]

On 20 September, 1944 the council was stunned to learn of the death in a road accident of the Mayor, Alderman W. Harris. Bowen, who was accompanying the Mayor, was injured. Rather startlingly, this is recorded in the minutes of the UWS board as 'Mayor of Swansea killed by United Welsh bus.'[2] A recovered Bowen reported on transport matters to the parliamentary committee in October. The committee resolved that the Town Clerk be instructed to make representations 'to secure an increase in the number of omnibuses operating within the Borough and the restoration of bus services on routes from which they had been withdrawn.'[3]

A briefing paper was prepared for Bowen for a meeting with Morgan.[4] Its starting point was the county borough's unusual geography, then the fifth largest in area in the United Kingdom. Transport provision was inadequate, hardship was caused which 'could, and should, be avoided', and already full buses passed passengers who had long waited at stops necessitating journey abandonment, or sometimes very long walks. They had interpreted 'recent Government announcements as a desire to relieve, as far as possible, the strain imposed on the people by the various wartime restrictions…' Improvements sought were: increasing Caswell Bay summer services, provision of a Fforestfach-St. Helens service [for essential access to the Guildhall], a service for Heol-las 'where residents have to walk one and a half to two miles', re-introduction of Port Tenant service via Grenfell Park Road, and between Morriston and Port Tenant, 'to connect two thickly populated areas and relieve town centre bus stop congestion'; a general frequency increase to reduce long waits at bus stops, largely without shelters which, 'with the approach…of the sixth winter of the war…would no doubt assist in maintaining what is generally called the morale of the people…'; providing at least a skeleton Sunday morning service; delaying the curfew for all services to the town centre to

[1] CTA., *Advisory Committee*, 20 June, 1944.
[2] Droitwich, KTA., *United Welsh Services Ltd. Board Minutes*, 15 August, 1944, p. 186.
[3] WGAS., TC3/64, parliamentary.& general purposes committee, 10 October, 1944.
[4] WGAS., TC/54 A 2058, *Swansea Transport Services*, *Note for the Town Clerk*, undated but probably prepared on 14 November, 1944.

about 10.45 p.m., 'now that lighting had been restored' to be achieved, 'possibly, by redeploying vehicles and staff lightly engaged between 8 and 9 pm'; abolishing 'workers only' buses since the definition was imprecise and unfair to those engaged in voluntary work; press the government to allow buses to show more light, within and without, allocating more fuel to public transport before private cars which would make their own labour demands; and that Cardiff seemed ' to enjoy transport services far superior to Swansea'.

The paper reminded Bowen that he had discussed these matters with Turner, the chief constable, who had given the proposals his full support. Indeed, Turner, had given Bowen on 13 December a comprehensive document specifying individual services, including recommendations for improvement of services, and the reference to Cardiff. Comparison of the briefing note with Turner's document suggests that the former is largely a summary of the latter.[5]

The Bowen-Morgan conference duly took place on 15 December, 1944 when Bowen 'placed before the commissioner' the views of the council. A formal reply was made on 18 December: significant easement was announced involving service revision and increases.[6] Increased services were authorized from Swansea to Llanelly, Llanrhidian, Pontardawe, Llanrhidian [via Dunvant], Fforestfach, Neath, Kidwelly, Carmarthen, Sketty, Tycoch, and Morriston. As far as a general increase was concerned, were SWT able to recruit more staff he would so authorize but the War Cabinet had required the Ministry of Labour to continue to call up men for the forces and a labour shortage would remain. There was little prospect of providing shelters. It was a national policy that Sunday morning services could not be re-introduced, and a later curfew was not possible. Morgan drew attention to the Home Secretary's revised regulations concerning vehicle lighting and hoped further improvements could be made in the near future.

Nationally, the road transport industry confronted a serious staff shortage. Regional committees were established '…to consider the supply, dilution, training and allocation of drivers and other skilled workers.' By mid January, 1944, an additional mileage about half a million had been authorized [of which a quarter could not be put into operation for lack of staff].'[7] The annual number of passengers carried by The annual number of passengers carried by SWT had fallen from the war-time peak of fifty-seven million in 1942 to fifty-three in 1943 and fifty-two in 1944.[8]

## 1945: peace but not plenty

The council continued to seek further improvements and complaints were patiently pursued with SWT. Early in the new year discussions centred upon providing an additional stopping place on the Mumbles Railway at Lilliput to accommodate, especially, wounded soldiers, which SWT would examine; the Kilvey ward Labour party's continuing complaints about inadequate services and solutions, which SWT deemed would not be acceptable to Morgan; their proposal to extend the local service in Kilvey to Winchwen and curtailing it at the Market, which SMT considered would prejudice other passengers; their concern about the Pontlasse service, which SWT noted had only recently been dealt with by Morgan; their representations about Sunday services. which SWT considered would be largely met by a new service starting on 14 January; their contention that the Pontardawe service should change from two hourly to hourly, which SWT believed was not possible because of labour shortages; their proposal for a new circular service covering several hospitals, which SWT considered would be largely met by the new Sunday service; and Gors Avenue residents' representations about school children and workers, which SWT considered had now been met in the case of the former, and lacked evidence of substance, in the case of the latter.[9]

This continuing pressing for improvements and the weary responses now seem to presage a collision of mutually unsympathetic parties wherein the council's capacity to play a moderating influence seems to be in decline. Much had been achieved in 1944 and the parameters within which solutions could be realistically sought would surely have bee

[5] Ibid., TC/54 A 2058, *Omnibus Services in Swansea*, letter, with Swansea Borough Police Special Report, from Turner to Bowen, 13 November, 1944.
[6] WGAS., TC54 A 2058, commissioner to town clerk, 18 December, 1944.
[7] TNA., MT 55/109, *Historical Survey*, p.4.
[8] South Wales Transport, *50 Years of Service*, p. 18.
[9] WGAS., TC54 A3817, memorandum of interview with SWT traffic manager, 5 January, 1945.

and its handling of industrial relations at its Neath depot, where a dispute arose over the rights of representation at disciplinary hearings had led to high level briefings in the Ministry of Labour, now seem to be a of a piece and a potent of pots-war years.[10] A sign of the prospect of a changing agenda was the parliamentary committee's Springtime deliberations on the trunk roads legislation.[11]

In May, SWT held its company annual general meeting, when it was possible for J.S.Wills, the chairman, to reflect upon wartime activities. The company's relationship with the council was a key theme: large payments in rates and electricity charges had been paid to the council in addition to the payments made under the 1936 Act. This latter sum, for 1944, was £29,996, an increase over that for 1943, of £5,565. This had been paid in spite of serious operating difficulties, acute shortage of labour and 'of almost every commodity required'. Wills observed that in the previous year it was only possible to operate two-thirds of the vehicle miles run in the year before the war; nevertheless, passengers carried increased by 18 per cent, largely attributable to serious crowding. Such profit levels could not be expected in future as higher standards of provision returned. [Arguably, wage increases were justified and could have eased recruitment.] Disclosure restrictions lifted, Wills was also able to report numerous journeys for military personnel for D-Day: of the 158 vessels from south Wales ports the larger part were loaded in Swansea. Further, over 1,000 men were transported day and night between their homes and the site where the pre-fabricated Mulberry Docks were being built. He speculated upon the undesirability of public control of transport, tourism prospects, and the development of wider and more comfortable vehicles. Tribute was paid 'to the commissioner and his officers for their valuable co-operation in dealing with the many problems we have had to solve and also to the Corporation Members of the Advisory Committee for their assistance to the Company during the year…'[12]

Comparison with the national position is instructive. Overall, bus undertakings had carried greater numbers over greater distances: many between 30 and 50 per cent more in 1941 than 1938 [several, 80 to 100 per cent], with a fuel reduction of about 40 per cent compared with pre-war.[13] Locally, SWT had carried twenty-three million passengers in 1937, fifty-three million in 1953, and this was to rise to seventy-seven million in 1949.[14]
In May, Morris also yielded his 'high and responsible duties in the administration of the Civil Defence Services in the Wales Regions…'[15] Later, that Summer, further complaint of services appeared in the press occasioning a defensive letter from SWT to Bowen, the gravamen of which was that labour shortages were extremely serious [154 driver vacancies, 31 per cent down on pre-war, about 30 cent of platform staff working without rest days] and, meanwhile, conditions were being made worse by the large number of holiday seekers.[16] The year concluded with Bowen writing to SWT concerning the agenda for the next meeting of Advisory Committee: 'the only items I have are Pentregethin Road stopping places, Landore and Plasmarl Areas Omnibus Services, Omnibus Stopping Places, Transport Service- Increase in frequency…I shall take an opportunity of discussing these matters with Mr, Blake before the meeting.'[17]

## Assessment

Much was achieved in maintaining mobility in difficult circumstances. Overwhelmingly, however, the quest for economy in transport, had brought about a remarkably comprehensive raft of benefits: orderly queuing at bus stops, shift staggering to spread demand as well as maximizing productivity, shop closure by 4 pm. to ease peak time congestion, greater use of railways, healthy short distance walking by increasing the distance between stops and abolishing short distance fares, alternative fuel propulsion experiments, prioritizing categories of passenger, discouraging inessential travel, increasing vehicle capacity, greater mechanical ingenuity as old equipment broke down, and, minimising congestion, greater

[10] TNA., LAB 10/524, Ministry of Labour and National Service, *Dispute between the South Wales Transport Co. Ltd., and the National Passenger Workers' Union,* internal memorandum, 20 February, 1945.
[11] WGAS..,TC3/65, parliamentary and general purposes committee, 9 March and 10 April, 1945.
[12] WGAS., A3817, *The South Wales Transport Company Limited, Chairman's Speech Delivered to the Shareholders on May7, 1945.*

[13] TNA., MT 55/109, *Historical Survey*, p. 2.
[14] South Wales Transport, *50 Years of Service*, p. 18.
[15] WGAS., D53/4/2, letter of H.M. the King to Morris, 17 May, 1945.
[16] WGAS., TC 54 A3817, letter from Blake, SWT, to Bowen, 27 July, 1945.
[17] WGAS., TC 54 A 3140, letter of Bowen to SWT, 26 December, 1945.

equal opportunity in employment, and optimum use of local amenities. Rationing had practically justified the title *Omnibus*. This catalogue, though spurred by war and occasioning problems, was, from the perspective of current environmental concerns, essentially benign, prescient, and beneficial. The limited utilization of alternative fuels and further experimentation was attributable to easement in the supply of ordinary fuel, it's very effective rationing, and organizational inertia.

Accordingly, it is held that the bus played a central role in the conduct of Swansea's war, that it was a major concern of the Council which acted, to good effect, in fully supporting the quest for economy and making the best use of resources by judicious and tactful intervention with the Ministry, Commissioner, and operators, unilaterally, and with others

Right: The South Wales Transport Company's engineering works at Ravenhill in Swansea. The staff are seen inspecting some newly delivered AEC chassis in 1946. Note the wartime camouflage still adorning the façade of the works.



Left: A huge fleet of AEC Regents with Brush lowbridge bodies entered service with South Wales Transport in 1932. These operated over the longer routes, such as that to Brecon. The bodies were not Transport in 1932. These operated over the longer routes, such as that to Brecon. The bodies were not very durable and most were sold at an early stage. The bus uppermost [WN 4892] was fitted with an oil engine when two years old. [J. Higham]

Right: United Welsh Services was formed in 1938 by the Red & White Group of Chepstow, to take over the small fleets of bus & coach operators that had been purchased in the 1930's and to combine them into one unit. Red & White had an agreement with GWR and Western Welsh not to take over companies that competed with them and *vice versa*. This was the reason why R&W took over the small Swansea firms in the west and Cheltenham & District etc. in the east. The photograph shows a wartime Guy Arab fitted with a Strachan highbridge body. It is in Tilling red and cream with Tilling name transfers. As the Monmouthshire registration would indicate, it once belonged to R&W. Many transfers took place during WW2 that had to be sorted out when hostilities ceased. The fleet livery began as two-tone blue but changed to the red and white of the parent company at the end of the war. [J.Cull]


# SCAMMELL 12-TONNER & SOUTHERN ROADWAYS

## Roy Larkin

Scammell Lorries of Watford were the British pioneers of the articulated or flexible lorry. Practical experience gained by Lt. Col. Alfred George Scammell during WW1 convinced him that higher payloads could be achieved with articulated vehicles than rigid lorries.

The first Scammell artic left the Fashion Street works of G. Scammell and Nephew in 1919. Capable of carrying an advertised 7 tons at 3-ton speed and cost, it proved so successful that it was a further nine years before the first road going Scammell rigid lorry was built.

In 1921, Scammell moved to Tolpits Lane, Watford, Hertfordshire, the new company of Scammell Lorries Ltd. was created and lorry production began in earnest. In the spring of 1923, an order for 6 lorries, four with cargo bodies and two with tipping bodies, for Southern Roadways Ltd., of Poole, Dorset set new industry standards. Although the Scammell dominance of the flexible 6-wheeler market was being tested by Leyland and A.E.C., the use of tipping bodies on flexible lorries had remained the preserve of the Continental makers.

The innovative Southern Roadway's Scammells were the only vehicles in their class to allow the huge, for the time, payload of 12 tons to be discharged by tipping the body. The Scammell is also believed to be the first of this size to allow discharge from the rear and both sides by using a body designed to tip three ways.

The Scammell cab at this time had only a roll back canvas hood as driver protection. The standard 4 cylinder, 7 litre Scammell engine was used. To cope with the extra payload the cast iron pistons were

replaced with cast aluminium ones, increasing the RAC rated horse power from 40 to 55 and also improving fuel consumption. The standard 3-speed gearbox and chain drive rear axle was used. Dunlop giant single solid rubber tyres were used on the drive axle and carrier, whilst Dunlop single solid tyres were fitted to the front wheels.

To cope with the extra payload, a heavy duty pressed steel turntable was bolted to the chassis immediately above the drive axle. The turntable comprised a ball joint to locate with a socket on the trailer

## Development of trailers

The carrier, it was some years later that Scammell first referred to 'trailers', was based on heavy duty nickel steel chassis rails. Curved humps were formed towards the front of the rails to allow clearance for the prime mover wheels when fully articulated. A single beam axle mounted on steel leaf springs with two cast wheels with solid tyres comprised the running gear. The carrier brakes were operated by a lever in the driver's cabin, which controlled a series of pivot bars designed into the turntable and trailer coupling. Scammell recognised the benefits for some customers in being able to load one trailer while the motive unit was away delivering another. Special jacks were supplied with the lorry, if required and at extra cost, which lifted the front of the trailer clear of the turntable. They then supported the trailer while the motive unit was driven away to be coupled to another trailer.

Bromilow and Edwards, later to become Edbro, designed and built the hydraulic tipping gear. Two hydraulic double extension rams were mounted adjacent to the inside of the chassis rails. The rams were mounted to the chassis with double trunnions for strength and to aid stability. The widespread positioning of the rams increased stability for end tipping and provided the facility for tipping the body to each side. The rams were connected to the body by ball joints to allow the freedom of movement necessary to facilitate both end and side tipping.

Bromilow & Edwards also designed and built a hydraulic pump especially for the lorry. It was mounted in an aluminium box bolted to the chassis under the passenger side door. The pump was driven by a friction wheel, which was thrown onto the engine's flywheel by a hand lever. The pump provided the pressure necessary to raise the hydraulic tipping rams of the body. A spring loaded release valve prevented excessive pressure in the rams. To lower the body, a screw down by-pass valve allowed the hydraulic fluid to drain from the rams. The rams could be raised either together for end tipping or independently for side tipping. The body could be tipped to a maximum of 50 degrees, whether side or end tipping was employed.

The carrier body for the Southern Roadway lorries was made from steel with 9 cubic yard capacity. This could be increased to 12 cubic yards using side extensions or 'greedy boards'. Larger bodies of 16 and 30 cubic yards were also available although the largest body was only available as an end tipper. The larger bodies incorporated the famous Scammell 'bow front', of which Downer & Co Ltd of London and Southampton were users. The Downer lorries also featured a coachbuilt cab with the luxury of opening windscreens. The smaller capacity bodies were intended for dense heavy loads such as asphalt for road making, sand, etc. whilst the 30 cubic yard body was suitable for lighter bulkier cargo such as coke.

The body was attached to the chassis by means of three mounting brackets along each side. These brackets could be changed to hinges by twisting a lever and withdrawing a locking pin. The rearmost brackets, which were mounted on the very rear edge of the chassis, were designed to allow both side and end tipping.

For tests, to which the press were invited, the vehicle was loaded with 12 tons of gravel. Part of the test included the climb up Rickmansworth Hill near Watford. This hill has a gradient of 1 in 7 and the Scammell used second gear on the approach. A change down to first gear was needed but a speed of 4m.p.h. was maintained thereafter until the vehicle was halted halfway up the hill for re-start tests. The lorry re-started on the 1 in 7 gradient apparently easily and without need to unnecessarily race the engine.

Manoeuvring tests proved that the flexibility of the design allowed access to be gained to loading and unloading positions that were inaccessible to rigid lorries. Despite carrying twice the payload of many 4 wheel 6-tonners the distribution of the weight across three axles meant that the lorry was still capable of traversing soft ground.

## Origins of Southern Roadways

Southern Roadways Ltd., besides being general hauliers were also shipping and forwarding agents, wharfingers and warehousemen. Operating from the crowded West Shore Wharf in Poole, Dorset, the flexible Scammells proved ideally suited to the congested wharf. The fleet comprised ten Scammell 12-tonners, using a variety of carriers, Thornycroft J-Types, a Maxwell 30cwt for express deliveries and a Peerless. The Peerless, with the addition a Scammell turntable, was used to move trailers around the wharf. Southern Roadways owned more carriers/trailers than prime movers, to facilitate loading while the prime mover was out on deliveries.

Much of their work was in conjunction with Henry Burden, Jnr. & Co, whose cargo steamers plied twice weekly between Poole and London. Common loads were grain, sugar, cement, coal, and road materials, usually for delivery within a fifty mile radius.

Two of the Scammells were equipped with tipping gear and several tipping trailers were used. The rest of the trailers were dropsided, general cargo carriers except one, which had Scammell's Brewer's bodywork for the carriage of drums of Mexphalte for Dorset County Council. In this guise it carried seventy-two barrels, weighing 12 tons 2 cwt. All of the fleet was garaged and maintained at West Shore Wharf.

To speed the unloading of the packet steamers, large hoppers were built, capable of loading a full 12 ton load of grain, etc. into the tippers in three minutes.

Employed on a mixture of short journeys with frequent stops for deliveries and long distance non-stop journeys, the Southern Roadway's Scammells averaged 4 miles per gallon of petrol, 750 miles per gallon of oil and 12,500 miles per set of tyres. Careful planning ensured that loaded mileage averaged 75% of total mileage and that most of the loaded mileage was carrying a full 12 tons load.

With 12 months records to use for comparison, it was found that the ton/mile cost of operating the Scammells was little more than that for the Thornycrofts in the fleet, despite being capable of twice the payload. The extra loading time involved with 12 tons instead of 6 tons was compensated for by the hopper arrangements installed at the wharf. The improved manoeuvrability compared to the Thornycroft rigid lorry and drawbar trailer proved a big time saver in the congested confines of West Shore Wharf, and at customer's premises.

This lorry was an early example of the Scammell willingness to co-operate with customers to provide the vehicle most suitable to their needs. It also demonstrates the Scammell's ability to extend the boundaries of lorry, and particularly trailer, design to new limits at a time when all the major manufacturers were developing new products in their attempts to gain market share.

The Southern Roadways story begins at the turn of the century at the Fashion Street premises of G. Scammell & Nephew. Brought into the business by their father, two brothers, Alfred G. Scammell and Alan H. Scammell were finding their way in the motor trade.

When war broke in 1914, A.G. Scammell enlisted and served throughout the war, returning as Lt-Colonel, D.S.O.

A.H. Scammell spent the wartime years continuing the business, which was deemed to be of great national importance and was kept working day and night on war work.

After the war, A.H. Scammell was taken ill with overstrain and invalided to Bournemouth for complete rest in 1920. A.G. Scammell took over the running of the company, which became Scammell Lorries Ltd. Tiring of nothing to do, A.H. Scammell decided to return to business in 1922, a decision his doctors only agreed to with the proviso that he never returned to London to work.

He persuaded his brother to send one of the new Scammell six-wheelers to Bournemouth, despite his brother's opinion that Bournemouth, being almost entirely a resort, not much could be done with the lorry. Although managing to sell one or two lorries in the area, generally there was little or no interest in the vehicle.

Undeterred and recognising the potential of the 10-12 Ton lorry, he formed Southern Roadways Ltd, to operate in connection with West Shore Wharf in Poole. This connection soon led to Southern Roadways taking over the entire wharf.

In 1925, the company handled 6,000 tons of freight per annum using 4 Scammells and 2 Thornycroft 4-Tonners.

Such was A.H. Scammell's business acumen, that by 1930, Southern Roadways was handling 150,000 tons of freight per annum. The fleet had grown to seventy lorries, comprising: 27, 8-wheel, 18/20-Ton Scammells; 10, six wheel, 12-Ton Scammells; 1,

pneumatic tyred, 12-Ton Scammell; 4, 6-Ton, 4 wheel Scammells; 3, 6-Ton Leylands; 6, 4-Ton Albions; 1, 30cwt Albion; 1, 30cwt Morris; 3, Mercedes Benz diesel engined lorries; 1, Associated Daimler and 1, Manchester lorry.

Additional wharfage had been acquired and a £20,000 Arrol-Temperly transporter installed for the rapid handling of bulk cargoes. Large dry stores had also been incorporated into the wharf by 1930 to store bulk cargoes, thereby allowing speedy turn around of the steam tramp boats that were the mainstay of the business.

Further expansion of the company included organising and transporting 20,000 gallons of milk a day to and from Mr Ernest Debenham's dairy in Dorset and also the transport requirements of Mr Debenham's 14,000 acre agricultural estate. Ernest Debenham and his son, Piers, joined the Board of Directors of Southern Roadways as part of this arrangement.

Southern Roadways took over Hack & Co., Liverpool and merged with Mayhew Transport Company, of Edgbaston, Birmingham, with Colonel Mayhew taking a seat on Southern Roadways Board of Directors.

In 1930, Southern Roadways had branches in Poole, Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham and London and operated a fleet of lorries that required 1,000 tons per day to keep utilised.

In addition to Southern Roadways, A.H. Scammell formed 'Worth Quarries Ltd.' which produced 25,000 tons of Purbeck limestone per annum, most of which was transported by Scammells.

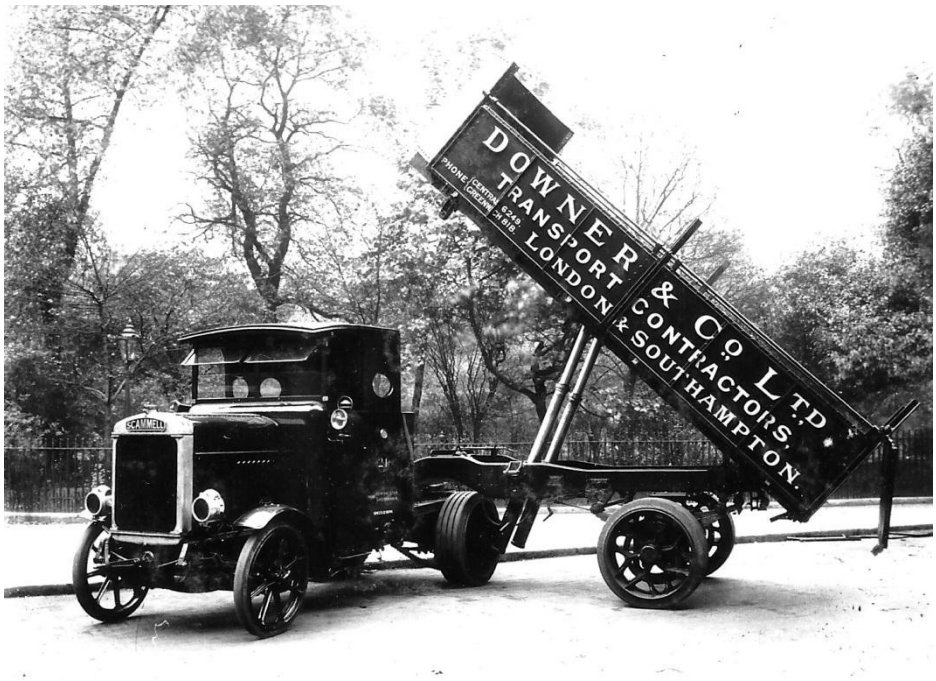
*(This article first appeared earlier this year in HCVS News.)*

Left: Scammell 6-Wheel 12-Tonner with shaft drive, though chain drive could be had as an alternative. Introduced in 1933 and cost £1

Below: Scammell 8-Tonner on pneumatics. Photographed at a favourite site just down the road from the Scammell factory in Tolpits lane Watford. Cost new in 1933 £1,150 complete with body

Below: Scammell 12-Tonner tipping its load. On trade plates undergoing a test. Cost new in 1922 £1,550.


Below: The Downer tipper with large capacity trailer and coach-built cab.



# ‘Find paths and use them rather than roads’: The representation of motor-touring in the English countryside by the Great Western Railway, 1918-39


## Robert MacKinnon


## Introduction

The influential Welsh architect and writer, Clough Williams-Ellis commented in 1928 that the age of the railway in Britain ‘was over’ and that the rise of the motor-car and charabanc represented a process of ‘revenge and reversal’ as ‘concrete, rubber and petrol...turn(ed) the tables on steam and steel[1]. The motor-car particularly has been, indeed still is, representative worldwide of a modernity expressed in individuality and flexibility, especially when compared with the moulded and timetabled journey of the railway. These symbolic qualities comprise a backdrop to which this article is set, a ‘discovery’ of ‘Rural England’ that for the all-round eccentric English philosopher, writer, broadcaster and backpacking rambler C.E.M Joad was to be at ‘the behest of the motorist’s (and charabancers’) capacity for ubiquitous penetration’[2], a countryside landscape that was to be laid open, surveyed and freely moved through.

With ‘concrete, rubber and petrol’ in the process of turning the tables on ‘steam and steel’ in Britain during the inter-war period, this article will specifically look at how the Great Western Railway (GWR), under pressure from the increasingly popular pastime that motor-touring brought, within its written publicity materials sought to counter this ‘turning’ within its leisure business sector. Whilst it is well known that the British railway companies including the GWR sought to promote the activity of countryside ‘rambling’ (medium distance walking, 2-10 miles) in the inter-war period, this article though looks at how the GWR actually sought to promote it as an ‘activity’ It will be shown in this article that through the GWR’s written publicity materials an encouragement of a particular way of ‘moving through’ and ‘being in’ landscape was actively narrated against the new ways of apprehending it that the increasingly popular pastime of motor-touring brought. In effect, this article will trace a ‘constructed’ anti-motoring and pro-rambling discourse within GWR written publicity materials ‘constructed’ by the GWR in the sense that motoring, of course, is by no means a banal experience, rather just bringing alternative forms of sensuality in our experiencing of countryside landscapes. Understanding the GWR’s written publicity materials, as ‘texts’, with the idea of ‘texts’ as being conducive canvases through which ideas and opinions can be shaped, this article will essentially seek to turn some attention to the representation of motoring and the road and in so doing highlight the culturally charged and politicised nature of representation.

## Rural England

With inter-war Britain seeing the growth of paid holiday time, out-door activities such as, rambling and motoring were all the rage throughout Britain, rambling particularly being bound up with the aim of working towards a healthy ‘open-air body’. In England, the ‘doing’ of rambling and motoring often coalesced with a desire to ‘discover’ a ‘Rural England’ well away from the smoke and turmoil of the industrial towns and cities, a space instead of shaded byroads and footpaths, hay meadows and beech woods, manor houses, thatched cottages, village greens, ancient churches and ruined castles. Such a ‘discovery’ of ‘Rural England’ though did not just take place in the act of ‘doing it’, that is to say, within the countryside landscape, but was mediated by a diverse range of rural literatures, such as guidebooks, either stimulated by, or itself stimulative of an interest in ‘Rural England’.

To cater for the popularity in motor-touring so as to experience all the signifiers of a ‘Rural England’, many publishers turned to producing motor-tour guidebooks, a notable publisher was Shell Oil, which published some 10 county guidebooks during the 1930’s[3]. Meanwhile, Britain’s railway companies sought to capitalise on the popularity of rambling and produced many walking guidebooks and ‘rural’ guidebooks, the latter being shire-county-wide treatises aimed at a middle-class (and likely car-owning) readership, narrating places of

beauty and historic interest, very similar to 'coffee-table' rural literature today. Broadly speaking, 'Rural England' was a heavily 'textualised' space, the plethora of rural themed texts produced at the time actively sought to give shape and substance to a notion of 'Rural England' as a space with a clear meaning, one of stability and authenticity.

## Ways of 'moving through' landscape

Ever cheaper holiday season tickets were the GWR's most practical incentive to leave the motor-car behind, take the train and then walk in exploring the countryside landscapes of England. The railway and its station were presented as an ideal starting point for holiday or day excursions, for travelling by rail was to 'avoid tedious motoring over congested and uninteresting roads'[4]. Falling into line alongside holiday season tickets and flexible ticket options, the GWR published six walking guidebooks between 1931 and 1938 by Hugh Page[6] Secretary of the North Finchley Rambling Club. The walks, which he personally undertook, amounted to some twenty-five in each edition and were to start and finish at GWR stations. In particular, an issue of speed in 'moving through' the countryside on foot and by motor car became a subject of much discussion, both in Hugh Page's walking guidebooks, British railway walking guidebook literature more generally and other written publicity materials by the GWR. The London and North Eastern Railway (LNER) in one of its Pathfinder series of walking guide-books '*The Complete Rambler'* (1930) commented that

*The motorist enjoys the speed, doing 250 miles a day, he passed through some wonderful places but cursed the second for its narrow streets and sudden hills, what he had enjoyed was speed. The cyclist is nearer the heart of the matter but he has followed main roads to be sure of his route and he has seen principally motors, signposts, hedges, more motors, stone walls and petrol pumps, what he has enjoyed is finding his way. Walking will enable you to get more enjoyment from a few acres of the country than a motorists gets from the whole country he crosses in an hour.* [7]

For:

*normally our five senses are functioning best when we go at a natural walking pace, if we exceed this we are almost certain to have the keen edge of out enjoyment dulled. Speeding up produces mental indigestion, the eye cannot rightly take in impressions when you move fast, the wild flowers, the touch of the sun on the polished stone of a stile and the lunch eaten by the clear spring high up on the trackless moor are joys for those who go afoot and for no other*[8]

## References


1 Ellis-Williams, C. *England and the Octopus*, Geoffrey Bless/CPRE, London, 1926, p26.

2 Joad, C. *A charter for ramblers*, Hutchinson and Co, London, 1934, p.34

3 Shell Oil county guidebooks published in the period included; *Cornwall*, Shell, London, 1934; *Derbyshire*, 1935; *Kent*, 1935; *Wiltshire*, 1935; *Devon*, 1936; *Somerset*, 1936; *Oxon*, 1937; *Dorset*, 1937; *Durham*, 1937; *Northumberland*, 1937.

4 GWR, *Holiday Haunts 1935*, GWR, Paddington Station, 1935, p.926.

5 Richens, F. The charm of the West Country, *GWR Magazine*, 1935, 47(8), p.401.

6 The walking guidebooks that Page wrote for the GWR were; *Rambles in the Chiltern country*, GWR, Paddington Station 1931; *Rambles in South Devon*, 1932; *Rambles in Shakespearland*, 1933; *Rambles and walking tours in Somerset*, 1935; *Rambles around the Cambrian coast*, 1936; *Rambles in the Wye valley*, 1938.

7 London North Eastern Railway (LNER) *The Complete Rambler*, Frederick Warne and Co, London, 1930, p.1

8 See note 7, p.17.


**(to be concluded in the next issue)**