

# Journal of the Road Transport History Association

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## Introduction

Rod Ashley, Chair

I hope that this edition of the Journal finds you and your loved ones well. The past year has been an unprecedented one in many ways for us all, across the UK and for every organisation. We do not yet know when 'normality' will return, except that it will be different from what we have previously experienced. This situation has affected our association also.

It was disappointing but the only prudent course of action to give early notification of the cancellation of our April AGM and conference. (You will find within the Journal a report of our AGM-by-proxy). Peter White has stepped down from being a director, David Holding stepped down from the role as Vice Chair and we thank them for their work to support and steer the RTHA over the years. We welcome Martin Higginson as a new Director.

Whilst we have provisionally set aside the date of Saturday 10 October as our next meeting (at the Coventry Museum of Transport), please note that we will **not** be in a position to confirm this for some time – please just set the date aside as a possibility. Likewise, our involvement in the high-profile activity *Wales on Wheels* has been cancelled for this May. We will, of course, advise in due course the date of its re-instatement.

*The Road Transport History Association, founded in 1992, promotes, encourages and co-ordinates the study of the history of roads, road passenger transport and the carriage of goods.*

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## Road Transport History Association Limited

*Honorary President:*

Dr Robert McCloy

*Chairman:*

Roderic Ashley

[roderic.ashley@gmail.com](mailto:roderic.ashley@gmail.com)

*Journal Editor:*

Peter White

13 Lingwood Gardens, Isleworth, TW7  
5LY

[peterwhite@gmail.com](mailto:peterwhite@gmail.com)

*Secretary:*

Philip Kirk

The Bus Archive, 8 De Salis Drive,  
Hampton Lovett, Droitwich Spa, WR9  
0QE

[philip.kirk@busarchive.org.uk](mailto:philip.kirk@busarchive.org.uk)

*Events Organiser:*

John Ashley

6 Cefn Glas, Tycoch, Swansea, SA2  
9GW

[john@globespinner.net](mailto:john@globespinner.net)

*Promotions Officer:*

Amy Graham

[213bus@gmail.com](mailto:213bus@gmail.com)

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The proceedings of the 2020  
Association AGM are on page 21

During lockdown, we know that both the RTHA website and the Journal will be ever more important conduits for communicating with members. To this end, I can advise that the website continues to feature some items of topical news relating to the impact on transport and transport systems during these challenging times. Thanks to John Ashley for keeping our website updated, continuing to digitise documents and for making them available on the website. There is also the opportunity on the website to keep your minds active during these lockdown days through some road transport-themed quizzes.

This edition of the Journal is, as you have noted, the 100<sup>th</sup> edition of the publication. This is indeed a cause for celebration, and we hope that its contents will create interest and indeed some light relief in these challenging times. As ever, thanks to Peter White for editing and progressing the publication. Ken Swallow has written a wonderful history of the association, of which he has been part since its inception. One of the highlights of the association's work was the publication of the Companion and Martin Higginson has given an enlightening account of key aspects of its production. (As a reminder to members who do not yet have a copy of this publication, copies are still available – please contact Martin for details.) John Ashley has created a montage of photographs highlighting exhibits from *Wales on Wheels* over the years since it was established in 2013. There is also a hint of summer normality with an article on the history of ice-cream vans. Thanks to Philip for organising the AGM-by-proxy and for his unstinting administration over the year.

We hope that you enjoy reading the journal and celebrate the work of all those who have worked to make it successful over the years. Thank you for your own support and we look forward to seeing you in person in due course. In the meantime, stay safe.

# **The Road Transport History Association - A Personal Perspective of its History**

Ken Swallow

## **Background**

When asked by the Chairman if I would write a brief history of the Association for the 100<sup>th</sup> issue of its *Journal* (and provide a bit of background to my humble career) I welcomed the opportunity as a way of passing some of the locked-down time presented by Covid-19. The task had surely been made easier, if not redundant, by the insertion in March of a copy of the first *Newsletter*, of November 1991, into members' copies of No.99? Perhaps the Chairman had overlooked the fact that on the Association's web site one could interrogate a scanned copy of no. 72 with Roger Atkinson's article on the *Origins of the RTHA*? But when I sat down with 99 issues of its *Journal* piled up on my desk, and its Editor not offering me a word count limit, I realised I had best take the request seriously after all, but with the caveat of adding the word 'Personal' to my heading.

I have no credentials as a historian. The opinion of Eric Smallpage, the history master at Liverpool's Holt High School, as we parted at the end of my final summer term, was that I had “developed no real aptitude for this subject” (which had at least been more charitable than his comment at the end of the previous term: “exam result was a disaster”). Needless to say, I failed GCE History – and I started work in September 1951 at Liverpool Corporation Transport as a junior clerk, where I could forget about the Napoleonic Wars and about Otto von Bismarck.

In 1949 with the first *Buses Illustrated*, price 1s 6d from my pocket money, and its Ian Allan companion, *Trains Illustrated*, I could begin to dig a little deeper into the history of this growing

transport interest, but with no academic desire. A subscription to the Omnibus Society in 1952 helped. Eventually, with the experience of a municipal transport management training scheme in the 1960s and ultimately, in 1986, into the Director General's chair at Merseyside PTE, I could start to realise there was much to learn from the cross-modal approach to transport history – which I was further to understand when in 1989 I was reorganised into the early retirement that was to take me into a newly created regional post in the Chartered Institute of Transport, as multi-modal as they come.

## **The Association's origin and evolution**

It was in the 1980s that discussions within the Railway & Canal Historical Society and an opinion survey of its members expressed a view that too much transport history concentrated exclusively on one particular transport mode, without considering its relationship to other modes. I suppose in business it would be called the silo effect. In November 1987 in pursuit of this, Professor John Hibbs invited to a meeting at the City of Birmingham Polytechnic those with varied interests and society affiliations. Where were the sources for information and research with which to share ideas and cultivate research?

This led after two more meetings to a conference in March 1991, this time at Coventry Polytechnic, attended by 78 delegates (of whom no fewer than 45 represented the Railway & Canal Historical Society itself and the Omnibus Society). I remember it well and, with my own interests in transport history maturing, was greatly encouraged by the outcome. What had been an informal committee was in the following year to be formally constituted as The Roads & Road Transport History Conference “to promote, encourage and co-ordinate the study of the history of roads, road passenger transport and the carriage of goods”. Full (corporate)

membership was to be open to transport museums, libraries etc as well as to societies – and “individuals will also be welcome to join as non-voting associate members”. This was a provision that over time was to come to affect the balance of its membership to one that now largely comprises ordinary voting members – an outcome I believe deserves some thought.

In March 1992 the Conference (changed in 2002 to Association) was formally constituted, founder members being Kithead Trust, Museum of British Road Transport, North British Traction Group, PSV Circle, Tramway Museum Society, London Transport Museum, National Motor Museum, Omnibus Society, Railway & Canal Historical Society (RCHS) and Transport Ticket Society. Founding President was Theo Barker, Professor of Economic History, University of London. Chairman was Professor John Hibbs, Secretary Gordon Knowles and Newsletter Editor Graham Boyes, both from the RCHS. Professor John Armstrong was to be its Academic Adviser. The Association was indeed well served by its founders. Hibbs later, in 2005, became President and was active in several roles until his death in 2014. Knowles remained Secretary until 2005. Boyes's editorship took him to 1995 and he became Chairman in 2007,

### Membership growth

Growth of membership was steady; and within a year the Secretary was able to report 11 corporates and 22 associates. By 1994 this had grown to 12 corporates and 32 associates. The reliance upon corporate membership seemed set to continue, reaching a total of 19 by June 2005. A recognition of this core value was evidenced the following year when, with an overall total of 115 members, a five-year target of 150-160 members with at least ten more corporates was to be the vision. However, a desire to strengthen the relationship with corporate members that

was expressed in May 2012 has not been given substance, and in fact the separate grades of corporate and associate membership have disappeared.

Conscious of its academic support the *Newsletter* was rightfully careful in its character to distinguish between book 'reviews' and book 'notices', but under whichever description is correct they remain an important and carefully noted part of its contents. However, where the present programme compilers settle for the use of the word 'conference', in the formative years there was an attempt to distinguish between those meetings that qualified as a 'symposium' and the less formal 'colloquium' – despite Professor Hibbs having persevered in 2001 with a 'colloquium' whilst admitting it was 'a term no longer in use'.

### The 'Companions'

A major impact in the life of the Association, greatly raising its profile, was the appearance in 2003 of the *Companion to British Road Haulage History*, under the distinguished editorship of five of its members, headed by Professor Armstrong and with a panel of over 40 contributors and its publication by the Science Museum. It owed its inspiration to the highly successful *Oxford Companion to British Railway History* and to the realisation that there was a dearth of coverage of the history of motor road vehicles when it came to goods transport. The central focus was the carriage of goods by motor vehicle in the twentieth century, straying into the nineteenth century only to trace the roots of an essentially twentieth century phenomenon. Its concentration was on the operators rather than on the manufacturers, including all those in the road haulage industry that were quoted on the stock exchange, especially those that had grown in part by acquisition of others.



Encouraged by the success of the *Haulage Companion* another editorial group of the Association had taken up the challenge of producing a *Companion to Road Passenger Transport History*, a major work of reference to the industry, compilation of which was spread over some ten years and which was published in 2013 by the Association itself with the financial support of FirstGroup and Stagecoach. The idea of a complementary road passenger transport *Companion* had been that of archivist and transport historian Richard Storey, one of the members of the Editorial Group for the Road Haulage Companion and who first aired it at the Conference's AGM in February 2001. Richard provided valuable continuity between the Editorial Groups for the two Companions. The *Passenger Companion* was in 2016 awarded the Railway & Canal Historical Society road transport book of the year prize.

Meanwhile, recognising its growing role as a publisher of transport related historical material, two more imprints promoted the Association's name. In 2005 Geoffrey Jones LLB had presented a paper to its annual symposium on *75 Years of Traffic Commissioners* and this was published the following year with support from Department for Transport and the Freight Transport Association. In 2007 the Association published *The Story of May's Motors of Elstead* under the title *The Full Turn of the Wheel*, covering the 77 years of a family haulage and coach business and written by Peter May, the son of its founder.

Fired by the enthusiasm generated by the production of the *Passenger Companion* some work was done on a history of the Tilling Group but this remained a gleam in the eye.

### The Journal

The *Newsletter*, now *Journal*, published from the start as the main means of communication with members, assumed its present page size under

editor Ron Phillips, who had succeeded Graham Boyes in September 1995. Roger Atkinson, who in 2015 was to publish his own life story, *Blackout, Austerity and Pride*, took over from Ron in 2004 and produced 16 very full and professional issues, sometimes reaching to 24pp, up to no.53 in March 2008, with Roy Larkin following in his shoes to June 2011 and his handing the editor's chair to Peter White, now Emeritus Professor of Public Transport Systems at the University of Westminster, at no.67 in February 2012.

A vital role in the line-up of officers has long been that of Research Co-ordinator, filled with diligence first by Ian Yearsley, a transport journalist by profession, and then from 2005 by Tony Newman. The job title speaks for itself for within the Association's ranks exist many researchers of individual strands of road transport history whose efforts can be enhanced by the knowledge of others – a role that goes to the heart of the organisation's purpose. A contents listing that complements the scanning of the *Journal* is 'work in progress' for access via the web site. Allied to this needs to be a periodic listing of members' interests, most recently produced with *Journal* 84.

There had long been a casual geographical relationship with Coventry in the almost traditional use of its Transport Museum as a meetings venue. The start of a more recent connection with South Wales was an article across two *Journal* issues, 59 and 60, by Association member Dr Robert McCloy. This has led to a continuing and beneficial relationship with the University of Wales Trinity Saint David, first with Bob McCloy's chairmanship and from 2017 as President of the Association. The Association's 2013 AGM having been held in Coventry its Spring Conference that year was linked with 'Wales on Wheels' at Swansea via the Events Organiser, John Ashley, and 'Wales on Wheels' continued to be part of the Association's

programmes for the following years. The link with Swansea continues under its present Chairman, Rod (Roderic) Ashley, who has worked with many universities and other organisations across Wales.

The Association was converted into a Company Limited by Guarantee from January 2005, and in 2017 the trading name was shortened to 'Road Transport History Association'.

The Association's web site, originally hosted by the Transport Ticket Society, was renewed in 2005. The task of loading the *Journal* on to it is ongoing in the hands of John Ashley and at the time of writing in 2020 contains the issues from May 2012 to February 2017.

### The future

Having excused myself at the outset from any suggestion that this modest account of the Association is in any way an official version of its history let me end by expressing a personal view of its future. It will continue to justify its existence alongside other historical transport societies and media only if it identifies what the marketing folk would call its USP – its 'unique selling proposition'. Its origins addressed an avoidance of the 'silo' effect that would be confined to a narrow interest in one form of transport only. It has without doubt succeeded, as is shown by the content of its *Journal* and the variety of the subjects addressed by the speakers at its meetings – and will continue to succeed if that formula is recognised. Except that the Editor should be spared the need ever to say again "this page is intentionally blank" and should be able to rely upon a flow of members' contributions. Perhaps the RTHA should reflect on its origins as an association not only of individuals, whether professional or even failed historians like me, but also on its roots as an association of transport history related bodies, spreading and sharing

news of their collective output and invitations to their proceedings.

*I am grateful to Dr Martin Higginson, who in 1992 was one of the original Associate Members of the Conference, for his help in drafting this account.*

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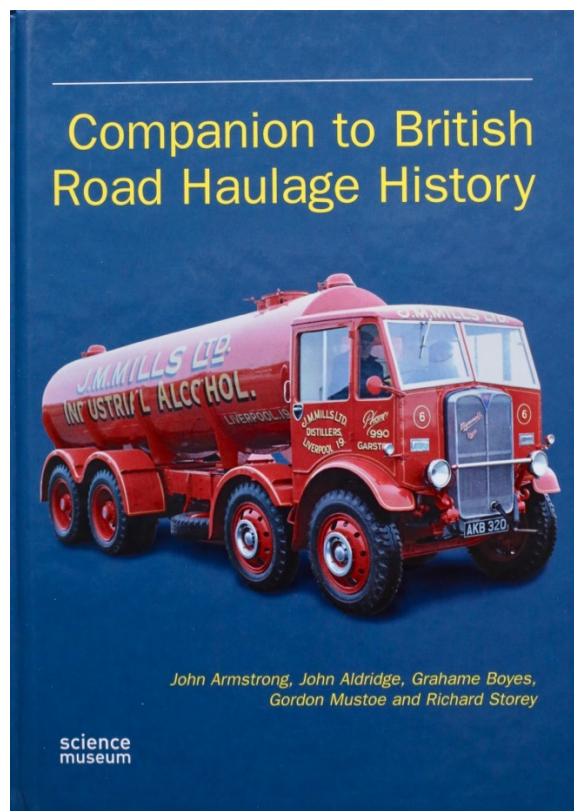
## The Companion to Road Passenger Transport History story Martin Higginson (Editor, 2008-13)

### Origins of the *Companion*

The concept of transport encyclopaedias has its genesis in railway and maritime works from the 1960s onwards. Two initial general works provided world coverage on railways. C. Hamilton Ellis, *Pictorial Encyclopaedia of Railways*, 1968, is a popular-style, photographic presentation in loosely chronological order. O.S. Nock, *Encyclopaedia of Railways*, 1977, comprises 'More detailed and comprehensive articles by a panel of authoritative writers'. Jack Simmons and Gordon Biddle saw the need for more detailed and comprehensive coverage of the British railway system, which led to their 1997 publication *The Oxford Companion to British Railway History*, comprising 1300 entries by 90 contributors, overseen by a 20-strong supervisory editorial group. Maritime transport is covered in *The Oxford Companion to Ships & the Sea*, 1976, edited by Peter Kemp.

The Roads & Road Transport History Association (RRTHA) was founded in 1992 as the Roads & Road Transport History Conference (RRTHC), becoming the *Association* in 2002. From 2017 the simpler working title of Road Transport History Association (RTHA) was adopted. At the 1996 AGM it was noted that there was no comprehensive history of road freight. A working party was set up that resulted in publication in 2003 by the Science Museum of the *Companion to British Road Haulage History*, comprising 600 entries from 44 contributing

authors under the guidance of a 5-member editorial group headed by Professor John Armstrong.



Credit for the idea in 2001 of a complementary road passenger transport *Companion* rests with archivist and transport historian Richard Storey, who first aired the concept at the then RRTHC's AGM in February 2001. Richard has provided valuable continuity as a member of the editorial groups for both RRTHA Companions. Over the twelve years to publication the Editorial Group for the 'passenger' *Companion* had two Chairmen (Professor John Hibbs, 2001-06 and Ken Swallow, 2006-13), two Editors (Dr Corinne Mulley, 2002-08 and Dr Martin Higginson, 2008-13) and Assistant Editor & Project Manager Dr Simon Blainey, successor to the initial Project Manager Rosie Thacker, who worked alongside an Editorial Group of eight specialist experts.

### Authorship

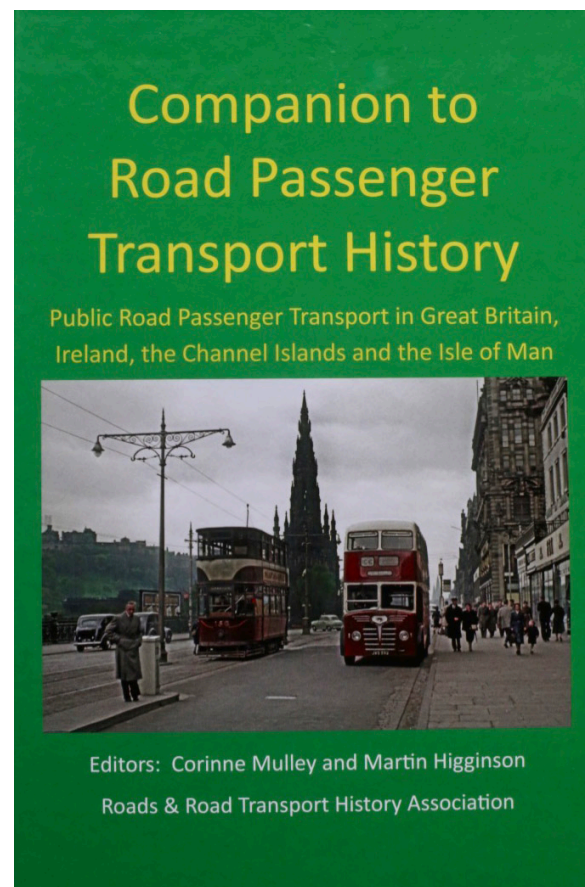
By early 2002 a summary of how to approach the project had been prepared, the composition of a working group identified, with John Hibbs as Chairman and Corinne Mulley as Editor, and the process of identifying topics for entries had

commenced. Members of the Working Group were chosen to reflect their respective areas of expertise and to give comprehensive regional coverage of the study area; there are, for example, 72 entries relating to North-West England.

The specialists group composition and deployment comprised:

- John Hibbs, Chairman 2002-06; National and local legislation; Publicity
- Ken Swallow, Chairman 2006-13; Passenger Transport Executives
- Corinne Mulley, Editor 2002-08; People
- Martin Higginson, Editor 2008-13; Introduction; Chronology
- Andy Axten, Preservation
- Cyril McIntyre, Ireland
- Alan Mills, Human Resource and Industrial Relations
- Ian Souter, Tramways; Scotland
- Richard Storey, Manufacturers
- Ian Yearsley, Finance and Investment

Composition of the Group changed slightly over the years, but its size remained similar throughout.



## Publication and Contents

The *Companion to Road Passenger Transport History: Public Road Passenger Transport in Great Britain, Ireland, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man* was published in 2013 by the RRTHA. It comprises 730 pages, 850 entries, by 150 contributing authors and 128 photographs. There is a Preface by Sir Moir Lockhead, First Group plc and a Foreword by Sir Brian Souter, Stagecoach plc, each of which companies made financial contributions to the *Companion* project.



Above: The Midland Railway ran a bus feeder service between Cambridge station and the Market Place using the Cambridge Motor Omnibus Co as its contractor. Note the very early design of the wheels of this Thorneycroft, with their wooden spokes. The service started in April 1905 but by 1907 it had been taken over by the more successful Ortona, the services of which displaced the Cambridge horse tramway in 1914. [The Bus Archive]

The scene is set in a Historical introduction that provides an overview of the evolution of road passenger transport from Turnpike Trusts to second generation light rail systems and hybrid technology. The period covered, and summarised in a Chronology of key dates, is from circa 1830 to the early 2000s. Almost every entry contains references for further reading and there is a comprehensive bibliography of sources: books, pamphlets, reference sources, legislation, government publications, journals, major series of articles and principal archives. Brief summaries to the *Companion* in French and German are provided.

Coverage embraces all forms of powered public passenger transport by road: buses, coaches, tramways, taxis and minor modes such as rickshaws and sedan chairs. Topics are approached from different perspectives:

- Manufacturers
- Principal operators: those attaining a fleet size of c.100+ vehicles
- Services and demand
- Design, technologies and technical evolution,
- Government, authorities, organisations and associations
- Legislation, regulation and polices
- Overarching themes such as *popular culture*
- Key individuals
- Terminology



Above: Midland Red (BMMO) manufactured its own chassis from 1923 to 1970. Large numbers of these were sold to member companies in the BET group pre-WW2. The vehicle designation was SOS in pre-war days, but individual companies, as shown here, 'customised' their radiators. This is a Trent IM4 with Short bodywork [Geoff Atkins]

## Method of working

The work of compiling the *Companion* was carried out by a mix of correspondence, mainly by exchanges of email, and face-to-face committee meetings; and took place against a background of meticulous planning and preparation. The preparation and classification of matrices included named proposed entries, possible sources of information and potential authorship of each entry. Nor were details left to chance; the proportion entries to be devoted to different topics was discussed and a style guide

prepared, covering such matters as punctuation, hyphenation, usage of trade names and referencing. After an extensive search for a publisher, self-publication by the Association was selected.



*Above: Road service licensing saw many independents continuing to co-exist alongside the 'area agreement' companies. One making a virtue out of such existence was Jones of Aberbeeg in South Wales, founded in 1921 and after the 1930 Act having through-ticketing arrangements. Jones sold out to the National Bus Company in 1969. The photograph dates from August 1961. [Ken Swallow]*

The authors for each entry were selected through individual discussions, following which they were briefed, for example as to the kind of material and the length of entry required. Each author is an expert in their subject. For practical reasons, the process of collecting and editing the eventual total of 850 entries was spread over a lengthy period, almost a decade, authors and working group members alike each working on a voluntary basis – a huge donation of time and effort without which the *Companion* would not have been published. The editorial process involved extensive reviewing to ensure factual accuracy and comprehensiveness. Upon receipt of a suitable batch of drafts, these were circulated among the Working Group for comment, after which any revisions thought necessary or requests for amplification or clarification were brought to meetings of the Group for final approval, a process that sometimes took several iterations. Meetings, typically at around two to three monthly intervals, were held at various locations in Birmingham, which city was found

to be the best location for access by the geographically dispersed Working Group members.

### Changes in team membership

Inevitably of such a long gestation period, there were changes from time to time in the personnel involved. John Hibbs' health became frail and in 2006 he relinquished chairmanship of the Working Group to Ken Swallow; but fortunately was well enough to attend the *Companion* launch in 2013. Corinne Mulley was appointed to a Chair at the University of Sydney and after a useful handover period passed the Editorship to Martin Higginson in 2008. As the quantity of material increased and the need for storage in an accessible and editable form grew, so did the value of Simon Blainey's project management skills. At the later pre-publication stages, entries were collated and circulated under 'Letter Groups' (entries whose subject titles began with A, B, C, etc) for approval. An example of seemingly minor, but actually quite complex, details to be resolved was how to present cross-references, with the use of dotted underlining eventually decided upon.

The writer of this article learnt a great deal about the publication process through his exposure as Editor of the *Companion*. An identical format to that of the *Road Haulage Companion* was chosen, to give the two works a recognisable house style. The search for a printer ended with Gomer Press, Llandysul, Ceredigion, for whom we have nothing but praise. They remained completely unfazed by our lack of experience of the process of turning our text and two photographic inserts into a 660-page hardback book, despite my inability to speak with them in Welsh. Such was their capability that, to my regret, I never met the Gomer team face to face, the whole process being undertaken remotely.

To give a flavour of the outcome of our labours, a selection of examples from the *Companion* follows, including the authors' recommendations for further reading.

**The opening entry**, appropriately from Richard Storey, originator of the *Passenger Companion*:



**Abbott, E D, Ltd** of Farnham, Surrey, was a builder of quality car bodies in the 1930s which diversified into psv bodies to provide extra income for the business: a variant of the post-WW2 move of Gurney Nutting from car to coach bodies. Abbott was founded in 1929 on the basis of the failed business of Page & Hunt by their former sales and coachwork manager. Psv production included some 15 coaches on Gilford chassis for Farnham Blue Coaches and buses for Aldershot & District. Wartime activity was devoted to Air Ministry sub-contract work. Car bodybuilding resumed, and the firm eventually specialised in estate car conversion. It was acquired by Giltspur Investments in 1970 and closed in 1972. **RAS**

John Mullins, 'E D Abbott, the South's finest?', *Classic & Sportscar* (Jun 1987), pp.87-91; A-ZBC

**Commencement of the entry on Merseyside PTE**, appropriately by Ken Swallow, a former Director General of MPTE and *Companion* Working Group Chairman from 2006:

The Merseyside Passenger Transport Executive was appointed by the Merseyside Passenger Transport Authority, (the PTA) which consisted of elected members of the constituent local authorities and, initially, two nominees of the then Minister of Transport. The PTA was constituted on 1 April 1969 and the members of its Executive were appointed by the PTA on vesting day, 1 December 1969. The PTE took over the 1,297 buses of the three former municipal passenger transport services within the area, Liverpool, Birkenhead and Wallasey, and the seven ferry vessels from the latter two.

Merseyside Passenger Transport Authority and Executive, *A Transport Plan for Merseyside* (Mar 1972); JB Horne & TB Maund, *Liverpool Transport* vol. 5 1957-1986 (Glossop: TPC, 1991); TB Maund, BUFO no. 19 (Summer 2001), p.22

**Extracts from the Chronology of Key Dates:**

**1832 STAGE CARRIAGE ACT:** Made omnibuses legal, classifying the vehicle as a hackney.

**1930 ROAD TRAFFIC ACT:** Town Police Clauses system replaced with area-wide licensing by Traffic Commissioners appointed by Government, including nominees from local authorities. Certificates of Fitness and type approval for public service vehicles. National licensing and safety regulation for all PSVs, drivers and conductors. De facto route monopolies given to holders of road service licences, with control of fares.

**1985 TRANSPORT ACT:** Ended road service licensing: local bus services must be registered with the Traffic Commissioners. NBC and SBG companies to be privatised within three years. Ownership of PTE and local authority fleets to be transferred to 'arms-length' companies with a view to sale. 'Network subsidy' forbidden. Bus operators removed from provisions of the Restrictive Practices Act, making territorial area agreements illegal.

**Opening lines to the last alphabetical entry**, from the pen of Ian Souter, the Working Group's Scotland expert:

**Young's Bus Service Ltd (YBS)** was the trading name from 1938 for the bus operations of a major independent bus and road haulage operator based in Paisley. The company's core territory was the Glasgow to Paisley corridor then westwards into Renfrewshire and to the North Ayrshire coast. The business was founded by William Young around 1884 as a livery stable with attendant cab, carriage and funeral undertaking activities. A horse bus service was provided in Paisley from 1889, supplemented from about 1920 by an Albion charabanc. **IAS**

RL Young, 'Youth at the helm', B&C vol. 7 (Apr 1935), pp.120-3; Neil MacDonald, *The Western Way* (Glossop: TPC, 1983); AW Brotchie & RL Grieves, *Paisley's Trams and Buses Twenties to Eighties* (Dundee: NB Traction, 1988); FH (Jun 2000)

### And finally, from the French Summary:

Le Companion est une introduction complète à l'histoire et à l'activité du transport routier de voyageurs sous toutes ses facettes

### Conclusions

What has the passenger transport *Companion* achieved? Successful team effort due to the competence and professionalism of the contributors, editorial team and project management has resulted in a sound information base that should stand the test of time and has not so far been overtaken by any fundamental developments such as comprehensive legislative change or overwhelming industrial restructuring,

When working on recent history, there is always a chance of being overtaken by un-noticed changes. We produced an entry for Mark Howarth's Western Greyhound, founded in 1997, but did not pick up on the expansion of Ben Colson's 'Norfolk Green' company, established 1996, whose innovative character should have been rewarded with a *Companion* entry. At the time of writing this article, Easter 2020, the regulatory structure for buses has remained unchanged since 1986, although evolution towards franchising and stronger public control were unrolling, with the creation of Transport for Cornwall and unified networks emerging in Greater Manchester and South Yorkshire. It is too early to say what the longer-term impact on road passenger transport of Corona Virus.

What has been the post-publication experience with the *Companion*? Very fortunately, no major changes to the road passenger transport industry took place after we went to press or in the years immediately after publication, although developments are occurring that would need to be reflected in any future second edition: disruptive technologies, a return to declining patronage, the growing use of alternative propulsion systems and a steady drip of mergers and takeovers. The greatest change since 2013 has perhaps been in the availability of new technologies, particularly electrification of buses and growing interest in future opportunities for autonomous guidance. The main industry

structure remained unchanged, with the principal changes being a continuing slow decline in the number of municipal companies, such as Thamesdown selling out to Go-Ahead in 2017 and Halton Transport closing in January 2020. Our meticulous checking and proof-reading appear to have been worthwhile; we have not so far discovered any glaring errors.

Sales of the *Road Passenger Companion* have been moderate, but we do not feel it has become well-known enough, or widely enough distributed to, for example, public reference and university libraries. Individual RTHA Members have done much to ensure distribution through associations and societies. MDS Books of Glossop, our sales agent, still have copies available at a reduced price of £30.

The *Companion's* greatest accolade has been to win the Railway & Canal Historical Society's 2016 award for the Best Road Transport Book of the Year.

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## Wales on Wheels

Wales on Wheels is the brainchild of Association director, **John Ashley**. It has become one of the major events in the calendar of the Association and of the National Museum of Wales. Here he gives a bit of background...

Wales on Wheels has been running in Swansea since 2013 and would have reached its eighth celebration this year. Due to the Covid-19 restrictions this is not possible, but we will be back bigger and brighter next year. WoW is run by the RTHA, The National Waterfront Museum (NWM, part of the National Museum of Wales), Swansea Bus Museum and Swansea Museum. The number of participants and visitors has grown every year, and a few years ago we overflowed from Dylan Thomas Square on the marina to the grassed areas between NWM and Swansea Museum, and into NWM's garden as well as indoors. With fingers firmly crossed and all wood in reach touched, the weather has been glorious every year. Photos and annual lists of participants are on the web site. We hope we will see some more of our members in Swansea in 2021, with or without vintage vehicles.

**Ian Smith** Senior Curator of Modern & Contemporary Industry for the National Museum of Wales gives his perspective.

At the National Waterfront Museum, we have many different events such as Chinese New Year, Local History Day and Dance Days to name but a few. But I can honestly say that Wales on Wheels is one of the most anticipated events of the year!

Our partnership with the Road Transport History Association has gone from strength to strength and is very much appreciated by the museum. As the event has grown, we have joined with Swansea Museum and Swansea Bus Museum to make it bigger and better. It also seems as if the weather gods have been smiling on us too, for every year since we began the (mostly outdoor) show, the weather has been sunny and warm.

One of the major factors of our success has to be that it is a free show - free to enter for the vehicle owners and free entry for visitors.

We have reached the stage now that when we see the vehicles arriving it is like greeting old friends, friends that we have met through this event. The Pink Cadillac and the Trabant; the Gilbern Club members who always bring six or seven cars and local Hell's Angels with their bikes are all regular attendees.

I think when John Ashley first suggested Wales on Wheels we thought it would be a one off. Its popularity proved us completely wrong. Long may the event continue as it brings so much joy to so many people of all ages and backgrounds.

**David Roberts** of the Swansea Bus Museum & Transport Heritage Centre:

The rich transport heritage of South Wales is something that Swansea Bus Museum & Transport Heritage Centre is proud to reflect. It is just as proud to be linked with the RTHA and the organisation of the fascinating collection of vehicles that arrives each year for the well attended Wales on Wheels. event.

It is always well organised and makes the most of its home at the National Waterfront Museum. Buses on display always pull the crowds and it is often possible to organise free runs for event visitors. The sight of such vehicles many of which worked locally is definitely a head turner.

As one of the partners in the event, SBM is always keen to add something and gives support with advertising and publicity. When the event resumes hopefully in 2021 it is likely that there will be bus rides linking WoW and the bus museum site, giving visitors a taste of what they can experience there.

Hopefully with all the constituent organisations working together the future of the transport history of the region and beyond will be assured.

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# WoW 2013 - 2019





# WoW 2013 - 2019





# WoW 2013 - 2019





# WoW 2013 - 2019



**Wales  
on  
Wheels**

**Saturday  
18 May 2019  
11am-4pm**

**FREE entry  
Stalls  
Heritage  
Bus rides**

Back for a seventh year!

WoW is held in and around the National Waterfront Museum and Dylan Thomas Square, Swansea

Organised jointly by the Road Transport History Association, National Waterfront Museum, Swansea Museum and Swansea Bus Museum.

[rrtha.org.uk/wales-on-wheels](http://rrtha.org.uk/wales-on-wheels)

The preceding four pages present a range of images from Wales on Wheels from 2013 to 2019 inclusive

Page 13 highlights bus and coach exhibits from the 2013 event. In the top row from left to right are a South Wales Transport AEC Regent V in BET colours, a South Wales Bristol VRT (in NBC colours), a Bristol VRT open-top, and a Plaxton-bodied Volvo of Morris Bros Swansea in British Coachways colours of the early 1980s. The Leyland PS1 single-decker in the bottom row (also shown on page 16 with crew), restored to the colours of Lynfi Motors, comes from Swansea Museum. The middle row shows Sir Peter Hendy and Alan Kreppel alongside the Regent V (as already published in our issue 73), a VRT, the Regent V, and open-top VRT. The blue truck with the Swansea Museum markings is a Ford Thames.

Page 14 features exhibits from The American Car Club (upper right), now resident at Swansea Bus Museum. The World War One horses and encampment were presented by Yeoman Living History. The locomotive is a replica of that at Penydarren, the world's first steam locomotive, owned and operated by the National Museum of Wales with 'Mr Trevithick' himself in attendance. Further detail may be found at <https://museum.wales/swansea/whatson/9979/Penydarren-Steam-Loco/>. In 2019 it had an all-female crew for the first time. The little bakery van is a tribute copy of the Wallace & Gromit Austin A35 van, featured in the film A Matter of Loaf & Death. The owner Mike Pranker talks about it on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YkLqgWjzWMs>

On page 15, the white 'hot rod' won the Concours d'Elegance prize at the 2019 show, which Rod Ashley presented to the exhibitor. Although it is meant to look a bit like a Model T

Ford, it had a Chevrolet engine. The police vehicle and 'prisoner' come from the Glamorgan Constabulary Police Re-enactment Group 1889-1952.

The **major exhibitors** are listed below. Many individuals also turn up on the day with an assortment of vehicles of many shapes and sizes:

Alvis Owner Club; Babs world speed record holder; Barry Museum; BikeAbility Wales; Bryngold Books; Camper and Beach Gifts; Classic Vehicle Enthusiasts Group; Doctor Who Bus; ERF and Scania classic lorries; Falcon History - WW2 US Marines re-enactment; Friends of Swansea Slip Bridge; Garden train; Gilbern Club; Glamorgan Classic Cars; Glamorgan Police Re-enactment Group; Harley-Davidson Club; Huw Morris Classic Car Runs; Institute of Advanced Motorists; Leading Technology Developments Ltd (prototype hydrogen car); London Bus Museum; MG sports cars; Mouse Shell Mileage Marathon world record holder; Neath Port Talbot College - rocket cars; Oxfam book store; Pontarddulais Car Club; Roads Transport History Association; Ryland Classics; Seamark Trust (pilot boat); Skewen Motor Club; Squeezebox - roving musicians; Swansea Bus Museum; Swansea Community Boat Trust; Swansea Fire Service; Swansea Historic Vehicle Register; Swansea Motorcycle Club; Swansea Museum; Swansea Railway Modellers Group; Swansea University electric monocycle; Swansea University racing car simulator; Swansea Vintage Engine Club; The Omnibus Society; Tom Verney - VW camper vans; Tony Paultyn transport paintings; Tools for Self Reliance - hand tools recycled for third world countries; Towy Valley Vintage Club; Traveline Cymru; University of Wales Trinity St David School of Applied Design - racing cars and motorbikes; Wallace and Gromit; Wheelwrights cycling; Yeoman Living History.



# A sprinkle of particulates on your ice-cream? A brief history of the UK's ice-cream vans and how they are evolving

Rod Ashley

## The start of the mobile Ice Age

“Can I have a bleeding ice-cream?” pleaded my excited three-year-old daughter in front of the neighbours, as the ice-cream van chimed Greensleeves along our road. For reasons best known to Wearsiders, the red sauce on ice cream is known locally as ‘monkeys’ blood’ and Louise had confused her request with the name her Geordie gran always used.

The sounds of the British summer – the lazy splashing of oars, the squawk of gulls and the tinkling chimes from a mobile ice-cream vendor. The ice-cream van is part of our national summer heritage – but how did it all start?



*A Wall's ice-cream trike (introduced in 1923) at the National Motor Museum in Beaulieu, advertising the various goods sold.*

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Wall%27s\\_Ice\\_Cream\\_trike\\_\(5963484746\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Wall%27s_Ice_Cream_trike_(5963484746).jpg)

The Roman Emperor Nero was rumoured to have sent runners into the mountains to collect fresh snow and flavour it with fruit juices, but ice-cream itself came to prominence for a mass market in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the early days of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, stock was limited to the ‘penny lick’ – a scoop of ice-cream served in a

conical, re-useable glass dish. Purchasers would lick the glass clean before returning it to the vendor for re-use. Pre-dating motorised vans, the first mobile ice-cream sellers rode tricycles with the goods contained in an insulated box slung between the two front wheels. Such ice-cream vending with a potential drizzle of cholera and a sprinkling of tuberculosis ended, not surprisingly, with a parliamentary Act outlawing the practice – fortunately, just as waffle wafers were superseding the dish.

‘Stop me and buy one!’ was the slogan devised by Wall's. Still visible at museums, at corporate events or children's parties, these iconic trikes were replaced by motorised vans which could carry more stock, cover a wider area and had on-board generators to power the refrigeration.

## Going soft

The biggest innovation in mobile sales and van development was the departure from hard scoops of Wall's ice cream and the emergence of Mister Softee and Mr. Whippy (note the deliberately different spellings and layout). This involved soft ice-cream expertly extruded from on-board Carpigiani machines. Mister Softee was launched in Philadelphia in 1956 and brought to the UK in 1959, where it became absorbed into



*A typical Mr Whippy Karrier van. As a sister company to Commer, Karrier often manufactured brewers' drays or civic vehicles for the public sector. They used smaller wheels than their Commer counterparts to allow a lower cargo loading height or a lower body height to facilitate street cleaning. This example uses standard size wheels.*

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:MR\\_WHIPPY\\_KARRIER\\_ICE\\_CREAM\\_VAN\\_AT\\_THE\\_ALBERT\\_DOCK\\_LIVERPOOL\\_MAY\\_2\\_013\\_\(8720161190\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:MR_WHIPPY_KARRIER_ICE_CREAM_VAN_AT_THE_ALBERT_DOCK_LIVERPOOL_MAY_2_013_(8720161190).jpg)

the Lyons Maid food empire. A few years earlier a young research chemist employed by Lyons had been experimenting with perfecting the blowing of air into domestic ice-cream to make it easier to scoop and thus also maximise profits.



*A 1950s split windscreen Bedford CA still operating at the Biggin Hill Airshow in 2009. For many people, this model was the archetypal British ice-cream van.*

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bedford\\_ice\\_cream\\_van\\_\(3678838974\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bedford_ice_cream_van_(3678838974).jpg)

Her name was Margaret Thatcher and, as a future politician, the epithet of the 'Iron Lady of Soft-Scoop' was to stick – although in reality, Mister Softee had already been invented. Arch-competitor, Mr. Whippy, was founded in Birmingham in 1958 by Dominic Faccino who had seen the potential of Mister Softee on trips to the USA. His fledgling British company was, in turn, bought by Wall's. Not surprisingly, these two companies contributed significantly to the heyday of British ice-cream vans in the 1950s and 60s, when it was estimated that 30,000 adorned our roads.

In the USA, ice-cream trucks were usually adapted panel vans with powerful engines and a strong chassis to take the weight of the soft-scoop machinery and refrigeration equipment. One was featured famously in the Columbo TV detective episode 'The Most Crucial Game' where the murderer commandeers a 'Ding-a-Ling' truck to reach his victim's house. When soft-scoop came to the UK, Mister Softee and Mr. Whippy vans were synonymous with Commer or sister-brand Karrier trucks, each of which was larger than the

compact Morris Z Types favoured by independent hard-ice cream vendors. At 3½ tons fully-loaded, the Rootes Group Commer/Karrier Bantam was tough and well-suited for the GRP ice-cream van bodyshell, offering plenty of standing room, space for ice-cream machines and able to carry the weight of a large generator at the rear. Over time, the twin-barrelled machines were dropped in favour of a lighter single extrusion machine and the Tractor Vaporising Oil (TVO) generator was replaced when leading UK ice-cream van manufacturer Whitby Morrison devised a system using the engine's power via an additional double pulley off the crank. Two drive belts would then align on to a double pulley clutch system. This technique is still used today ("The Direct Drive System") and explains the rise in engine note when the cone is being extruded.

This development allowed a shorter wheelbase to be used, although for many independent operators during this heyday, the Commer or Karrier van was too large, too heavy on fuel and more difficult to park up. As independent vendors did not need the bulky soft-scoop dispenser but merely had to reach down into a



*A typical post-war Morris Z type, although some had a higher roofline.*

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Morris\\_ice\\_cream\\_van\\_\(3940846889\)\\_2.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Morris_ice_cream_van_(3940846889)_2.jpg)

chest freezer to extract scoops of hard ice-cream or lollies, a smaller vehicle such as the Bedford CA (and later the Bedford CF) sufficed. With the demise of Bedford in the 1970s (that's another





A Ford Transit-based ice-cream van by the Festival Pier in London.

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ice\\_Cream\\_by\\_the\\_Festival\\_Pier,\\_London\\_-\\_geograph.org.uk\\_-\\_1766581.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ice_Cream_by_the_Festival_Pier,_London_-_geograph.org.uk_-_1766581.jpg)

story), the default ice-cream van became the Ford Transit, whether for hard or soft ice-cream.

### Meeting today's challenges



A Whitby Morrison Mercedes e-Sprinter on the Ceredigion coast.

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ice\\_cream\\_van,\\_Ynyslas,\\_Ceredigion\\_\(20603592976\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ice_cream_van,_Ynyslas,_Ceredigion_(20603592976).jpg)

Today there are about 5,000 ice-cream vans in the UK, the significant drop being due to the fact that most households now have domestic freezers. For many people, ice-cream is no longer the preserve of a day at the seaside. Additionally, ice-cream vendors have faced various challenging restrictions regulating where and when they can chime, and for how long. No longer can they chime after 7pm, outside schools or near places of worship when services are taking place. Vendors complain that it is almost impossible to make a mobile living and that it is more profitable to be

static at an event – be it a concert, fair, fete or sports venue.

Additionally, concern about diesel fumes mixing with the dispensed ice-cream have prompted some councils, like Camden, to ban ice cream vans operating in their areas. Consequently, Whitby Morrison has devised an electric-based van on the Mercedes e-Sprinter platform, whose batteries can cope with dispensing up to 1,000 cones a day and still have power left for the jingle. Some London councils are considering electric hook-ups in parks so that van engines no longer need to run whilst stationary.

As a further prototype, Nissan has been working with Scottish ice-cream manufacturer Mackie's on a prototype e-NV200 electric van, fitted with solar panels on the roof. The vendor stands outside the small van to serve from a side hatch. The payment system deters children because it uses contactless bank card and smartphone payments via a 'tap-to-pay' panel mounted on the side. Most notably, instead of a speaker playing a jingle to attract customers, the prototype has a smart button generating a tweet of the van's precise location using the emerging global addressing service What3Words. Using a Vehicle-to-Grid charger, the battery can store surplus energy from the national grid and then feed it back to the grid when needed. Not only does this technology help to balance out the peaks in national energy demands, but can also provide EV owners with additional revenue from their vehicle when it's not being driven.

The real challenge is whether, with changing attitudes to healthy food, fossil fuels and disposable income, traditional iconic vehicles can continue to be part of the British summer landscape.

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## Annual General Meeting

It was not practicable to hold the AGM as a physical event at Coventry on 4 April as originally announced in the previous issue of the Journal. It was therefore held by telephone on 30 April 2020 at 1000. In attendance by telephone were Rod Ashley (Chair), and Philip Kirk (Secretary). Proxy forms had been received from: John Ashley, Andrew Axten, Reg Davies, Maurice Doggett, John Edser, Simon Douglas Lane, Ted Gadsby, Mike Greenwood, David Holding, John Howie, Paul Jefford, Alan Lambert, Alan Kreppel, Bob McCloy, Ian Read, Ian Souter, Bob Smith, David Starkie, Richard Storey, Ken Swallow, Peter White, Ian Yearsley (a total of 22).

### Introduction

The Chair declared that the meeting was quorate.

The Chair stated that due to the Government restrictions on movements imposed by the Covid-19 health emergency, the directors had decided to conduct the Annual General Meeting by proxy vote, which is allowed for in the company's Articles of Association.

This decision was communicated by email to members on 18 March and for those without email by post shortly thereafter. In each case a set of papers for the AGM was sent, comprising:

1. The notice and agenda of the Annual General Meeting
2. Minutes of the 2019 AGM
3. Draft accounts for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> December 2019
4. A form of proxy to vote at the AGM

The Secretary confirmed that 22 forms had been returned, and along with the votes of the two members attending by telephone, this made 24 available votes in total.

The Chair stated that it had been made clear to members that the AGM would be restricted to the statutory requirements with reference to the election of directors and the approval of the annual accounts. Any comments or remarks which did not pertain to the statutory elements of the meeting would be held over until the next Business Meeting.

### Formal business

1. Approval of the Minutes of the last AGM:  
For 24, Against 0
2. Approval of the nomination of Roderic Ashley to serve as director for a further three years:  
For 24, Against 0
3. Approval of the nomination of Martin Higginson as a director of the company for a period of three years:  
For 24, Against 0

4. Approval of the accounts for the year ended  
31<sup>st</sup> December 2019: For 24, Against 0

The chair thanked the Secretary for his work in preparing for the Annual General Meeting.

The chair thanked Ms Helen Fowweather for her work in preparing the annual accounts.

Peter White, who was standing down as a director, was thanked by the chair for his work. It was noted that Peter would continue as Journal Editor. David Holding, who was standing down as Vice Chair, was thanked by the chair for his work. It was noted that David would continue as a director.

#### **Any Other Business**

The Secretary reported that Ian Souter has requested that the Annual Report include reference to the reciprocal arrangement made between the Association and the National Association of Road Transport Museums. Other comments made by members did not concern the statutory business of the AGM and were more appropriately for discussion in open forum and so these would be held over until the next Business Meeting.

#### **Closing Remarks**

The date and time of the 2021 Annual General Meeting would be advised to members in due course.

The chair closed the meeting at 1015.

(Signed)

Roderic Ashley

Chairman

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## **Letters to the Editor**

A recent phone call with someone more senior in years to myself touched upon an account that had been given to him many years ago by his late grandfather. The account was of an unusual road traffic incident he had come upon in the 1890s.

In the company of a friend, grandfather had been walking from Turriff to Maud in Aberdeenshire – its only about 15 miles – at a time of year when the countryside was encased in snow and ice. He was passed at one stage by a horse bus in service, the horse bus bodywork being on runners, not wheels. A little farther along the road they came upon the horse bus in a ditch; there was no mention of any injuries of note, and they duly helped extricate the passengers.

Does anyone know of other instances of a public conveyance being adapted with runners in lieu of wheels? The horse tramway company in Aberdeen is known to have used horse drawn sledges when their tracks were buried in snow and such expedients could also be found in Scandinavia.

Ian Souter  
Bridge of Allan.

John Edser has responded to Rod Ashley's comments on government funding HS2 and bus services in the March issue (page 6) as follows:

With the belated and far more expensive 'go ahead' for HS2, it is important to put it into perspective. The problem with the existing franchise system is that bids were usually won on a 'more/longer/faster' trains basis, with no thought for freight, and also that the professional railway operators were given little, or no, chance to comment on whether the routes could actually cope with the increase. There was certainly very

little thought for additional freight services, and the West Coast Main Line (WCML) was one that suffered the most from this lack of consultation. The new head of Network Rail, Andrew Haines, has made it very clear that the operators will have a far more important role to play in the future. It will also be interesting to see what the imminent Williams review proposes.

As a relief to the WCML, HS2 is important. As someone who, for 13 years, was a senior Current Operations Shift Manager for the old BR London Midland Region and still use it, I know the route very well. It is a case of HS2 giving the WCML more capacity rather than the concentration on faster journeys. Living 7 miles east of Crewe - with a 90 min journey to Euston - I am closer in 'time distance' to meetings in London than colleagues who live in the South and South East of England. Even with a major increase in passenger train frequency since the late 1990s, when I go home in the mid-late afternoon I often see 8 -12 southbound freights on the move and others stabled waiting a path: the WCML is the major north - south artery. This is without an ever-increasing number of freight trains from the massive Thames Gateway complex, which can only run via cross-London routes to the WCML and other major routes. There is also an increase in container trains from Felixstowe joining the WCML at Nuneaton.

There are also moves to increase the frequency of local and semi-fast expresses on the WCML once HS2 comes into operation. I would only support this if it leaves room for a major increase in freight paths throughout the day.

The government's announcements for both the Northern Powerhouse and the £5 billion for improved bus services and cycling are both welcome. However, we still have to see the fine detail before we can judge any success.

I hope that the promised increase in bus services will be concentrated outside the major conurbations/cities. It is something that can be implemented relatively quickly so that vital rural bus services throughout the country are restored where they are so desperately needed to improve the quality of life for people of all ages. This could be of particular value to rural Mid and North Wales, the Pennines, North West Norfolk etc, connecting them to both their local shopping/medical centres and giving access to the few railway lines in those areas.

The Northern Powerhouse is lucky in that it has several very strong 'city mayors' who are constantly increasing pressure on Central Government to give them the powers to develop and run their regional transport networks rather than have things decided in Whitehall. While this is partly linked to HS2 it can be developed independently but whatever happens, it will take time.

[This comment was written prior to the effects of Covid-19 on rail and bus services from late March]

Viewpoints and opinions expressed by contributors to this Journal should be seen as the personal views of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Association

## How far can parallels be drawn between effects of Covid-19 in 2020 and those of World War Two on public transport?

Peter White

The immediate consequences of the Covid-19 virus epidemic on the public transport systems are very evident. Following the 'lockdown' from late March, operators made severe service cuts, often followed by further cuts a few weeks later. The main express coach networks – National Express and Megabus – were closed down from 6 April (although a network within Scotland continued). At the time of writing (10 May) local bus services are running at about 40% of previous frequencies, but only about 10% of previous passenger numbers (with wide variations). Load factors – already low outside London - have fallen further. The need to ensure safe spacing between passengers, even as demand revives, poor load factors will continue.

At the same time, many have observed a resilience among the population in the light of drastic changes experienced, and some revival of community spirit, as in wartime. Public transport operators at that time encountered difficulties in maintaining services due to effects of the blackout, bombing, and fuel shortage. In some areas, such as seaside resorts, there was a decline in traffic, reflected in the loan of some trolleybuses from Bournemouth to Wolverhampton for the duration of the War, as noted in this journal recently. However, a fairly comprehensive network was maintained in most areas. How far can parallels be drawn?

## Car Ownership

A very large contrast applies in the case of car ownership. This showed a marked decline from a modest initial level during World War Two, but public transport vehicles increased. Past editions of 'Transport Statistics Great Britain' (TSGB)<sup>1</sup> included a table showing motor vehicles currently licensed from 1901. The series is only continuous on an annual basis from 1951, but some years are given before then. In 1939 the total number of private cars and light goods vehicles was 2.034m, which fell to 1.770m in 1946. From 1950, these categories are shown separately, cars in being 1.979m and light goods 0.439m. Assuming a similar ratio applied in earlier years (probably an overestimate for cars), i.e. 82%, cars in 1939 would have been 1.665m, and in 1946 1.451m. The same table shows public transport vehicles rising from 90,000 in 1939 to 105,000 in 1946, but this includes trams and taxis as well as buses, trolleybuses, and coaches.

Taking a UK population of 50m in 1946<sup>2</sup> one can infer that car ownership per head was then 0.03 (the TSGB table probably excludes vehicles in Northern Ireland, whose population is included in the UK population total, hence for GB the rate would be very marginally higher). The 2018 rate for UK was 0.48, i.e. about sixteen times the level of 1946.

## Rapid growth in ridership

In contrast to the current situation, bus, trolleybus, and tram ridership rose rapidly. For example, from my own research in Lincolnshire, trips on Grimsby Corporation Transport rose from 17.6m in 1939/40 to 28.0m in 1944/45 (i.e. 59%)<sup>3</sup> and on Lincoln City Transport from 9.7m

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<sup>1</sup> Transport Statistics Great Britain (TSGB) 1992 edition, table 9.5.

<sup>2</sup> Derived from Office for National Statistics 'Our population – where are we? How did we get here? Where we going?' March 2020

<sup>3</sup> White, Peter chapter 'Roads replace Railways' in Mills, Dennis R. (ed) Twentieth Century Lincolnshire, History of Lincolnshire Committee, Lincoln, 1989

in 1939 to 16.3m in 1945 (68%)<sup>4</sup>. Equivalent data are not available for the Lincolnshire Road Car Company services in rural areas and smaller towns, but it is known to have grown rapidly, creating problems for the company in meeting demand<sup>5</sup>.

Examples may also be drawn from other areas. Robert McCloy's work on south Wales operators shows that South Wales Transport carried 46 million passenger trips in 1939, rising to 57 million in 1942 (i.e. a growth of 24%), albeit falling to 53 million in 1944: at a national level many bus operators carried between 30 and 50% more passengers in 1941 than 1938<sup>6</sup>.

Factors behind such growth nationally probably included:

- Restrictions on *car use* as well as ownership, due to fuel rationing
- Growth in economic activity as full employment resumed with industrial production, especially some areas which had been badly hit during the depression. Lincoln (an engineering centre as well as Cathedral City) was an example of this.
- Despite men being called up for military service, many women entered paid employment
- The role of munitions factories – see, for example, services to the Royal Ordnance Factory at Hayes described by Roger Atkinson in our February 2012 issue
- Movements to and from military bases (such as RAF stations in Lincolnshire)
- As well as journeys to work other trip purposes also expanded – for example, the large audience for cinemas (no television,

which in any case had only served a small number of viewers in London area).

Hence in 1946 the problem facing the bus industry was not a lack of demand, but catering for high levels of demand with an ageing and inadequate fleet. Note the large numbers of new vehicles placed in service up to 1950 from AEC, Leyland, etc. Many of these were double-deckers of about 56 seats, in some cases replacing smaller pre-war vehicles (Lincs Road Car had only about half a dozen double deckers in the fleet at 1939).

### Post war Growth

Growth in bus use continued to about 1950, when car ownership reached about 1.969m<sup>1</sup>. For the BET Group as a whole, bus trips rose from 1481m in 1938 to 2094m in 1948<sup>7</sup>. Lincoln ridership rose to a peak of 19.8m in 1952<sup>4</sup> (but the majority of growth from 1939 occurred during the wartime period). In 1952 bus and coaches represented 41% of all person-miles travelled, compared with about 28% by cars and vans<sup>8</sup> – shares were approximately equal in 1955, and car grew rapidly thereafter.

Very little similarity thus exists between today and the wartime period. The slogan 'Is your journey really necessary' probably referred to overcrowding, especially on the rail system, and journeys of over 50 miles<sup>9</sup> rather than restraint of public transport use for health reasons.

### The London exception

A somewhat different outcome applied in London. Ridership (bus, trolleybus and tram combined) fell from 3310m in 1938-39 to 3115m in 1945 (-6%), but then grew strongly to 3869m in

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<sup>4</sup> Peter R White Passenger Transport in Lincoln, Omnibus Society 1974

<sup>5</sup> Graham Wise Road Car at 75, NBC Books 2003, pp 23-29

<sup>6</sup> Robert McCloy Travels in The Valleys, Historical Association, Swansea Branch, 2012, pp 57, 67, 69, 74 and 75

<sup>7</sup> McCloy, op cit, page 90

<sup>8</sup> TSGB 1992, table 9.1

<sup>9</sup> Adrian Room Brewer's Dictionary of Modern Phrase and Fable [i.e. an update] Cassell & Co, London, 2000, p354

1951<sup>10</sup>. However, it should be borne in mind that London did not experience depression in the 1930s. Bombing and evacuation probably had greater effects than elsewhere. The population declined from a peak of over 8 million in 1939 (not regained until recently).

### **Express Coach services**

Having said this, a limited parallel may be drawn with coach services. These were suspended for much of WW2, as they have been since early April, and hence a network will have to be recreated. However, the underlying context is very different: a large pent-up demand for holidays and visiting friends and relatives existed from 1945, and given very low car ownership public transport had a captive market. Traditional seaside holiday patterns resumed. Today, the tourist market is very different. Furthermore, National Express obtains over a quarter of its passenger trips from airport services, whose revival depends the air travel market.

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## **Mail and Stagecoaches in Cheshire**

John Edser

Postal services in Britain have a long history, as far back as the Roman 'cursus publicus', the network of messengers and station-houses that ensured Imperial Edicts could move around the Empire swiftly and efficiently. The oldest letters found in Britain were thin black tablets unearthed at Vindolanda just south of Hadrian's Wall.

Medieval monarchs had royal messengers who carried edicts and ordinances to county sheriffs and officials, and they possessed the right to

commandeer local horses if needed. A formal service was set up by Henry VIII, who appointed Sir Brian Tuke as Master of Posts and by 1528 the first post office had been set up near Lombard St in the City of London to deal with an ever-increasing volume of correspondence. However, it was only for the use of the Crown and its servants. Charles I was responsible for opening up the service to the general public in 1635. Charges were distance-based. The system was 'farmed out' in its early stages but it was taken back into central control in 1655 under John Thurloe, Oliver Cromwell's spymaster; a very convenient way to have access to any subversive letters. Charles II appointed the first Postmaster General with a specific remit to run the whole network of mail routes which were opening up.

### **Post roads in 1713**

George Willdey's 1713 Map of the Post Roads of England showed new local routes that had been opened up, cutting the cost by them not having to travel via London. Those passing through Cheshire were :-

- from Stone in Staffordshire via Stapleford, Woore, Nantwich and Tarporley to Chester
- from Stone via Newcastle-under-Lyme, Talke, Brereton, Holmes Chapel and Lostock Gralam to Warrington (there is nothing shown for Knutsford or Northwich: Stone formed the junction for these two from the London - St. Albans - Stony Stratford - Daventry - Coventry - Lichfield - Stone route that continued from Warrington to Wigan - Preston and Carlisle)
- from Shrewsbury via Wem, Whitchurch and Farndon to Chester
- from Wrexham via Gresford and Pulford to Chester
- from Chester to the Welsh border, Denbigh, Conway, Beaumaris, and Holyhead

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<sup>10</sup> T.C.Barker and R.M.Robbins A history of London Transport, Vol Two – The Twentieth Century from to 1970, Allen & Unwin, London, 1974, pp 307 and 350

- from Chester to Frodsham, Warrington, Cadishead, Eccles and Manchester

The 1756 map of the 'Great Roads and Principal Cross Roads' showed roads having daily postal services from London - except Sunday - and repeated the 1713 route from Stone through Cheshire, with one addition, namely from Stone via Congleton and Macclesfield to Stockport. Manchester was served, but not six days a week, by a connection from Warrington. There was also another connection from Warrington to Liverpool which did not exist on the 1713 map.

### **The 'Golden Age'**

The Regency period was probably the 'Golden Age' of coaching. In 1789 the Royal Mail coach left the White Lion, Chester for London. It took 28 hours and carried 6 passengers in addition to the mail -four 'inside' at £3-3-0 each and two 'outside' at £1-11-6d. Mail was distributed from the major routes by 'post-boys', who wore uniforms and often served the same routes for years. The post was a great temptation for robbers and in 1796 a post-boy carrying the Warrington mail was robbed and tied to a tree at Dunham-on-the-Hill between Chester and Frodsham. He eventually freed himself and ran back to Chester. The robbers were caught and executed. In 1819 a £50 reward was offered by the General Post Office after mail bags were stolen from the Chester Mail while changing horses at Wrexham.

In 1820 there was a Radical Movement in the north that threatened the normal pace of life. As a result, a military escort was provided for the mail coach from Macclesfield to Stockport. However, the soldiers' flags frightened the horses and the coach upset on a bridge over the River Bollin and fell 20ft into the river. A soldier was badly injured and the mail guard broke a leg.

About 1830 Chester lost a major route when the London to Holyhead mail was diverted to the present-day A5 via Llangollen over the newly completed Telford road. The mail coaches were timed to the limit at stops - 10mins for breakfast and 20mins for dinner - and the quality of food varied considerably. On one occasion at Altrincham - roast beef and potatoes; cold pigeon pie; cheesecakes and gooseberry pie - but at Macclesfield in 1790 boiled bull's buttocks !

The mail coaches were the 'internet of the age' as they carried all the letters and news of events - Trafalgar, Waterloo etc. Lady Jane Stanley at Knutsford loved to keep up-to-date and discover the freshest gossip before anyone else in the town. She paid the guard of the mail coach which regularly passed Brook House a 5/- reward to fire off a pistol when there was any hot news as the coach passed the house. A manservant was hurriedly dispatched to the inn where horses were changed; the guard was paid and the servant rushed back to Lady Jane with the latest tit-bit or a newspaper hot off the press.

### **The peak in 1830**

1830 was the peak of both the mail and stagecoach era as their great competitor, the railway, had appeared. Mail bags were carried between Liverpool and Manchester in the early 1830s. In 1837 Birmingham - Warrington mails were carried via Crewe and in the following year a London - Birmingham - Crewe - Warrington - Preston route had been established. The railway's hold on mails was also cemented by the law requiring railway operators to guarantee the passage of mail by rail. Crewe eventually became one of the greatest Travelling Post Office centres with trains from many parts of the country making key connections there. Coach journeys, if not by private coach, were either 'posting' (travelling non-stop) or 'day coaching' (resting overnight) and there are lists of

all the coach routes and calling points for Cheshire. A selection of detailed journeys was also listed - all starting on Monday to show the comparative times, e.g. :

Macclesfield to London: posting 1130 by Royal Mail, arrival 0700 Tuesday.

Day coach 0930 - overnight Birmingham – arriving 2015 Tuesday

Nantwich – Edinburgh: posting 0930 - arrival Manchester 1615 - 1645 Royal Mail to Carlisle arr 0645 Tuesday.

0700 Royal Mail to Edinburgh - arrival 0100 Wednesday

Day coach 0930 - arrival Manchester 1615 and overnight; depart 0445 Tuesday - arrival Carlisle 2000 and overnight. 0700 Wednesday by Royal Mail to Selkirk arr 1700 and overnight and leave 0800 Thursday, arrival Edinburgh 1800

It was even possible to travel from Chester to Paris - posting 0800 Royal Mail to London - arrival 0730 Tuesday - 0830 to Dover arrival 1930 - overnight boat to Calais -arrival early Wed am - 'Mailleposter' from Calais - arrival Paris Thurs am

### Sources

1713 Map of the Post Roads of England by George Willdey, from The History of Britain in Maps by Philip Parker (Collins 2018, ISBN 978-00-797614-0)

1756 Map of the Great Roads and Principal Cross Roads - showing daily Postal Services from London (except Sunday) - found on the internet under 'pinterest.co.uk'

Regency Cheshire by Sue Wilkes (Robert Hale 2009)

A detailed list of Cheshire coach services, stopping places and times, on 'www.carlscam.com'

1836 Directory of Stage Coach Services compiled by Alan Bates (Augustus M. Kelly, New York 1969, ISBN 9780-715343791)

The Railway Travelling Post Office by Peter Jackson (Ian Allan 1985, ISBN 0-7110-1459-0)

This is a temporary version of Journal 100, produced under the conditions imposed by the health emergency. A 'proper' version will be posted to you once conditions allow.

Our printer has switched activities to the production of Personal Protection Equipment and we salute their efforts.

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