

The Road Transport History Association

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Report on the Spring 2017 Business Meeting

Following directly from the Association's Annual General Meeting (see page 5) we enjoyed presentations from John Ashley and Ian Read.

Swansea's Aviation Pioneers by John Ashley

John's presentation was on the theme of 'Spanners to Joysticks – Swansea's Aviation Pioneers'. As part of his extensive interests in local history of the Swansea area, John had encountered the fascinating story of Ernest (Ernie) Frank Sutton, proprietor of the Sutton Bros Garage (owned jointly with his brother) who, in addition to his motor trade activities, purchased an aircraft of the same type as that flown by Bleriot across the Channel in 1909.

Prior to this, the first recorded balloon flight in Swansea had been made on 15 October 1802, albeit of very limited duration, by one Frances Barrett, in a hydrogen-fuelled balloon. Although he leapt from the balloon early in its ascent, it floated for about four miles before landing in farmland. There was also a report of a 'balloon race' from Mumbles pier in 1881.

Ernie Sutton, born in 1884, dealt in a number of different types of car, as indicated in adverts in the local press. He also proposed a very early bus service in the area in 1908 (whether it ran is uncertain), and was involved in a number of patent applications. He also seems to have been an adventurous person, to judge from a number of press reports – for example, in August 1906 and September 1910 - of 'speeding' as a car

driver (albeit relative to the very modest speeds permitted at that time).



Above: An early advertisement for the vehicles supplied by Sutton Bros (from the Daily Post Pictorial Guide, Swansea & District 1908)

In 1910 he purchased an aircraft identical to the type flown by Bleriot across the Channel in the previous year, placing it on public display at the firm's premises in Castel Street, Swansea in December, for a charge of 3d. He made a pioneer flight from Oxwich beach in the Gower, using this Bleriot aircraft on 19 January 1911, described as the first flight in Glamorgan (and possibly, in Wales), duly reported in 'Flight'. He had to train himself in the absence of formal instruction. Despite a number of accidents, he survived to develop his expertise as a pilot. Further flights were made in June 1911. He subsequently attended the flying school at Hendon in September 1912, obtaining an 'Aviator's

Certificate'. However, his business ventures were less successful, Sutton Bros being declared bankrupt in May 1912, but Ernie was discharged from bankruptcy in 1916.



Above: A view of Ernie Sutton in September 1912, from his Royal Aero Club licence

He subsequently joined the Royal Flying Corps in 1916, albeit responsible for motor vehicle management rather than a pilot as such. In the post-war period he and his brother re-entered the motor business, trading in the London area. At the time of the presentation John was researching further aspects of Ernie Sutton's life.

[Research since the Coventry meeting, including meeting a gentleman who knew Ernie Sutton, has established that he prospered in the luxury car trade. In 1952 he was living in the very exclusive St George's Hill enclave in Surrey. Ernie ended his days in 1975 when living in a substantial house on Jersey. JA]

Early Motor Bus Services through Bushey by Ian Read

The second talk was by Ian Read, focussing on the village of Bushey, located in the south-west corner of Hertfordshire, bordering on the London Borough of Harrow to the south, and Watford just to the north. It is located on the West Coast Main Line, with a local station served by Overground Euston - Watford

services. Watford was major hub of the LT Country Bus Area, and is now served principally by Arriva the Shires. Before the establishment of LT in July 1933, it was served by a myriad of independent operators, and was also an early target of Green Line coach services.

Ian has strong connections with the area, being brought up in the village, and taking an early interest in bus, coach and rail services in the vicinity. All of this led to a professional career in transport. He took a Transport Business degree at City of London Polytechnic in London (Martin Higginson being a fellow student), and joined Freightliners Limited, the container train operator. From there he went to the London Borough of Hillingdon at Uxbridge and was responsible for Social Services and Education Department passenger transport and for Bus 128, the Hillingdon Local Service which was unique in the UK at the time, being a council-sponsored bus service operated by London Buses. He then joined Three Valleys Water, later Veolia Water, as Fleet Services Manager, eventually responsible for around 1,300 vehicles.

In retirement from work in the industry, he has maintained a strong interest in transport, including driving the London Transport Museum's B-type 'Battlebus' in its World War One form. His interest in local history and (particularly) local transport has led in retirement to more time to devote to research, writing and helping out at both the LT and Bushey Museums. Many of the illustrations shown in his talk came from the latter's collection, especially views along and around the High Street. Buses and coaches were not necessarily the main interest of the original photographers, hence many of the views illustrate the vehicles in a wider local setting, enabling links with broader social history to be made. Bushey became famous from around 1880 as the residence of choice for Professor Sir Hubert von Herkomer, the German-born artist who settled there. His fame and subsequent wealth enabled him to build a fantastic castle from Bavarian stone, a small part of which still exists.

Local bus services

Local road passenger transport has been split since the dawn of the motor bus era into stage carriage services (big operators such as LT, later succeeded by TfL; London Country North West, and now Arriva), and excursions and tours, and private hire/contract operations run by smaller outfits for coach hire and excursions – like Kirby's and Premier-Albanian. Usually the latter are or were family-run businesses.

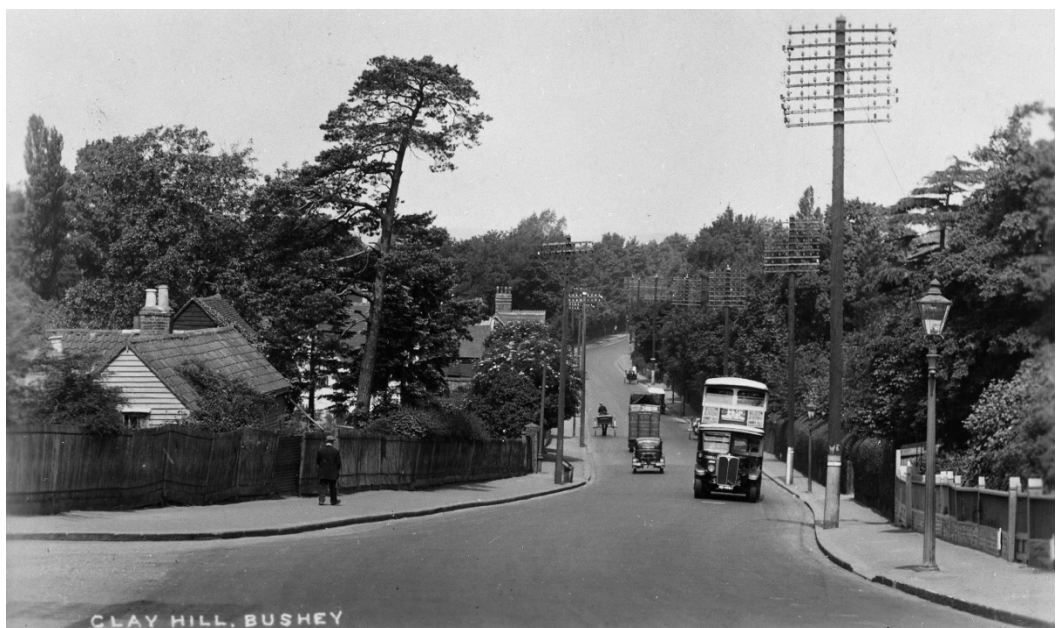
Most of the extensive illustrations shown were from the period from between 1906, when the first motor buses ran through Bushey, to 1933 when the London Passenger Transport Board was formed and took over all public bus services in a huge area, roughly in a 35-mile radius of Charing Cross. Although in Hertfordshire, Bushey's principal bus services continue to be those operated on behalf of Transport for London

- service 142 (Watford Junction – Bushey – Edgware – Brent Cross), and service 258 (Watford Junction - Bushey - South Harrow station), the red double-decker bus thus having been a familiar part of the local scene for one hundred years.

First motor bus services in the area were those operated by the LNWR, as illustrated below. The service ceased in 1915. The LGOC (through its subsidiary the Metropolitan Electric Tramways) entered the area when it started its 105 Kilburn Park – Bushey - Watford service on 21 March 1913, which operated on Sundays/Bank Holidays using buses and crews normally employed on central London routes during the working week. By 1914 the LGOC had taken over its subsidiary MET and renumbered the Kilburn to Watford route as 142 on 29 March, the route thereafter being operated by the famous LGOC B-type buses. Route 158 was put on the road permanently in 1927 between Watford and South Harrow and has remained substantially unchanged ever since (although now numbered 258).



Above: The London and North Western Railway inaugurated its Watford-Bushey-Harrow service on 30 July 1906, probably the first regular use of double-deck buses outside London. This bus is at Harrow Station having just arrived from Watford. Note the driver's and conductor's uniforms, and the driver's identity badge. The well-dressed ladies and gentlemen denote the class of passenger who used these services. The service operated hourly Mondays to Saturdays. The bus is a Milnes-Daimler with 34 seats, is open-top, and has an open driver's compartment.



A triple braking system was fitted, with the fatal Handcross being highly topical and probably at the forefront of operators' and passengers' minds.

The S-type London General bus replaced the original B-type in 1923. It looked much the same but had the engine alongside the driver instead of in front of him, which allowed a higher seating capacity (increased from 34 to 46), and was in turn succeeded by the NS.

The LGOC had always looked further and further out from central London as the motor bus improved in reliability and acceptability. It looked at outlying towns around a roughly 35-mile radius from London and this included Watford. Rather than operate these 'country' routes itself it used an associated agent, the National Omnibus & Transport Company (NOTC). The LGOC supplied buses and garages, the NOTC supplied the crews and ran the services. It started routes radiating from Watford to such towns as St Albans, Hemel Hempstead, Rickmansworth, Chesham etc and to the outlying villages. Some of these routes ran through Bushey.



Above: A wonderful shot of Bushey High Street with just a few motor cars in view and a LGOC S-type bus on service 142 on its way to Watford from Kilburn around 1925/26. The very high telegraph poles featured in many of the illustrations from this period, although the reasons for their height are not wholly clear. Below: caption overleaf.

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Previous page: Newer buses came along. The S was replaced by the NS, and then the 1930 ST-type. This looked much like the traditional British double decker that remained in service until the demise of the Routemaster in 2005, i.e. front engine, half-cab, enclosed driver's cab with windscreen, roof to upper deck, rear open platform with conductor, seats for around 50 people. From this date the diesel engine began to replace petrol in the interests of a longer service life and better fuel economy. This one is struggling up Clay Hill in about 1932 with three other motor vehicles and three horse carts also visible (Bushey Museum collection)

Green Line

Rapidly developing technology and the indifferent attitude of the LMS Railway to local traffic from Bushey to London created strong potential for fast cheap road services into London. Early pioneers developed such services from 1929 and Bushey was in at the start. Bucks Express, Premier and the LGOC itself started services from Watford to London in that year and Bushey residents suddenly became the recipients of a service which would beat the slow and moribund railway into a cocked hat. From 1930 the LGOC commenced similar coach services from all points of the compass around London, partly to counter independent competition and partly to protect its own interests from new services, creating the Green Line network that continued in broadly similar form until the 1980s. Bushey, however, saw its last Green Line coach in 1991 when traffic congestion and the fast electric railway service into London finally finished it off.

Today, Bushey still continues to enjoy a high frequency of local bus services over the long-established routes inaugurated in the days of LGOC.

Both speakers were thanked for their exceptionally well-illustrated and comprehensive presentations.

'Pedestrians keep to the left'

The following item appeared in the *Railway Gazette* 16 November 1917, page 551, and has been drawn to our attention by Grahame Boyes. Do any members have evidence that this rule was adopted to any extent in practice?

"Keep to the Left."—The Home Secretary is being petitioned by the Municipal Tramways Association in favour of a reversal of the present rule of the footpath by which pedestrians "keep to the right," and the change is supported by a majority of the London Borough Councils and a large number of local authorities in the "Greater London" area. It is reported that Ayr has adopted the proposal, and that Glasgow, Manchester, Birmingham and other large provincial cities have it under consideration. The London "Safety First" Council, which a few months ago started a campaign in favour of the reform, says that the present practice is the cause of a large number of fatal street accidents in the Metropolis every year. The effect of the general adoption of a "Keep to the Left" rule would be that pedestrians and vehicular traffic would both follow parallel direction lines. Pedestrians would always face approaching traffic, and the accidents that ensue from the practice of stepping on to the road from the near side footway, in front of overtaking vehicles, would be reduced to a minimum. The old rule "Keep to the Right" appears to have no legislative sanction, but has become a partially observed custom with official approval. It is suggested that a bye-law might be framed to deal with the matter. Of the 28 London Borough Councils, 20 have expressed themselves in favour of the change, and, outside the county area, Barnes, Beckenham, Dartford, Ealing, East Ham, Hornsey, Leyton, Richmond, Surbiton, Walthamstow and Willesden are amongst the local authorities which would welcome official action on the lines suggested.

Annual General Meeting 2017

The AGM was held on 25th March in Coventry, with 21 members in attendance. Before the business session a minute's silence was observed in memory of Alan Mills of the Omnibus Society, and the Association's Academic Adviser Professor John Armstrong, whose obituary appears on page 12. Here are the main points of discussion and decision.

- The Directors Report and Accounts were approved.
- Thanks were expressed to the University of Wales Trinity St David for their ongoing support, particularly in respect of printing of the Journal.
- The trading name of the Association would now be "The Road Transport History Association" although for legal purposes the full name would be retained.
- Dr Robert McCloy stepped down as Chairman and was thanked for his five years' hard work leading the Association.
- Dr McCloy accepted the post of Honorary President of the Association.
- Roderic (Rod) Ashley was approved as the new Chair of the Association and a director.
- David Holding was approved as Vice-Chair of the Association.
- Philip Kirk was approved as Treasurer in addition to the post of Secretary.
- Peter White was approved as a director.

Introducing Rod Ashley, our new Chair



Rod is an education consultant based in Swansea. A graduate of Lampeter, Rod also studied at Leicester and Swansea universities.

Initially a teacher, then Head of Management & General Education in an FE college, Rod subsequently joined the Department of Education at Swansea University, becoming the university's Staff Development Officer before establishing his own consultancy. Through this, he worked with many universities and other organisations across Wales, England and Europe. He was External Examiner of several post-graduate programmes at both University of Glamorgan and University of Wales Trinity Saint David.

Rod was CEO of the Welsh Secondary Schools Association, acted as lead consultant for the Welsh Government on establishing Key Skills and has undertaken evaluation of learning provision for many bodies. Rod still regularly works in Brussels as an 'Expert' on people development programmes, acting as Vice-Chair in 2016. His chairing experience also includes that of the largest school governing body in Wales, several Welsh government working parties and Vice-Chair of RSA Wales, as well as Director of a not-for-profit housing committee.

Rod has published extensively – many books on education management and career management. His 31st book was a departure into popular history (*Wolfram Wars – Exposing the Secret Battle in Portugal*: Bennion Kearny May 2016).

Additionally, Rod is a keen motorist. He passed his advanced driving test 30 years ago, is Chair of the Swansea Bay group of the road safety charity IAM Roadsmart and is a regular contributor to *Good Motoring* magazine. He joined R&RTHA in 2015, made a presentation at the Autumn 2016 annual conference and contributed an article on motoring history in the February 2017 edition of the *Journal*.

Now semi-retired, Rod is looking forward to working with members in the role of Chair of R&RTHA, following on from the great strides made by Bob McCloy and the committee. He has particular interests in vehicle manufacturing history, autonomous vehicles, driver behaviour and the future of motoring.

We welcome Rod to his new role and wish him every success.

Recollections of Road Safety

Frances Evans, OBE

Just before my university finals, in 1974, I attended a Civil Service exam and interview in London. I didn't quite know what I wanted to do, but was sure that I wasn't interested in working for the profit motive, so the service seemed a reasonable way to go. I accepted a post in what was then the Department of the Environment and ended up being a Civil Servant in Westminster (with occasional trips around the country, and to Europe) for nearly 37 years. For all but two of those years I worked on a range of transport issues, from inland waterways to pedestrian road safety, from merchant shipping to the Channel Tunnel, from London Underground to vehicle safety.

Pedestrian Road Safety

Pedestrian road safety was the major subject of my second posting. It was quite grim in some ways – the casualty figures were fairly ghastly then – but we nonetheless had a lot of fun. The job involved a wide range of work. For instance we produced with the Central Office of Information a series of road safety films and adverts covering many aspects of road safety. During the course of such productions I got to meet such interesting characters as the comedy actress Irene Handl and Green Cross Man (actor and body-builder David Prowse, who played Darth Vader in the original Star Wars film). Green Cross Man's aim, of course, was to teach children how to cross roads safely, by means of the *Green Cross Code*. Irene Handl's advert was intended to advise pedestrians how to use the (then brand new) Pelican crossings. ('Pelican' standing for 'Pedestrian Light Controlled' despite the variation in spelling!) The Dad's Army team also did a pelican crossing advert for us, with Corporal Jones quavering his usual 'don't panic' catchphrase as the signals began to flash.



Above: The comedy actress Irene Handl, when appearing in a road safety film

Filming was fascinating in many ways but could involve some very early rising, a lot of standing around

in the cold and quite long periods of boredom too – waiting for the sun to come out to complete a shot, or having to hose down the roadway because previous scenes had been shot following a shower.

In other areas of the work many exciting new ideas were being mooted and explored, for instance the use of retro-reflective materials (hardly used at all in those days, but ubiquitous and invaluable now for road signs, high-viz. vests, lane markings, heavy vehicle markings and so on and so forth). New types of pedestrian crossing were under development, the use of electronics to improve road signs was being explored.

There were legal aspects: many requirements were enshrined in primary and secondary legislation, i.e. Acts of Parliament and Statutory Instruments (SIs). The vast and vital *Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions* S.I. was under review. In the course of that large undertaking, one of our colleagues – Roger Elkin – introduced the helpful, informative and now frequently seen brown road signs indicating places of interest such as castles and nature reserves. Other SIs were required for a number of issues, for example, to permit the annual road cycle race (known as the Milk Race), to introduce 'no parking' zig-zag markings to pedestrian crossings and to include provision allowing for 'marginal strips' where possible, to give some protection for pedestrians on roads without pedestrian pavements. Further detailed advice and information about road safety issues were also contained in the Highways Manual, not in itself a piece of legislation, but a repository of experience and pragmatism as well as a guide to the imperatives prescribed by law.

There were teams of engineers spending up to a week at a time studying individual sites (known as 'accident black spots') to pin-point features which could be improved so as to reduce accidents. They were highly successful although some of the changes implemented were on occasion surprisingly minor, e.g. at one site simple re-positioning of a pillar-box improved junction sight lines and reduced accidents significantly. There was liaison with local authorities and with organisations concerned with road safety. There was correspondence with the public and interaction with Ministers. It was a highly involving and satisfying job, with many knowledgeable, dedicated and committed colleagues. The best part was seeing the continuing reduction in road casualties and knowing that our efforts were contributing to that.

There were certainly a few oddities and anomalies about: it was strange, for instance, that our head of our division (responsible, amongst other things, for road safety advertising), though intelligent, informed and well-educated, neither owned a car nor a driving licence – and, indeed, did not possess a television. It was disconcerting, too, that two of the engineers we regularly consulted disagreed so strongly with each other (no-one knew why) that they could not be in the

same room together. They couldn't be invited to the same meeting, as when one walked in, the other would walk out.

Needs of people with disabilities

Much of my work involved people with disabilities – whether wheelchair-bound, blind, deaf or otherwise impaired. It was difficult to juggle the many differing needs; for example people in wheelchairs wanted dropped kerbs to help them cross the road. On the other hand, blind people with guide dogs wanted raised kerbs that guide dogs could recognise when they were assisting their masters. Blind people using white sticks also needed a kerb that they could 'feel' with their stick. There were very few quick or easy fixes. Totally dropped kerbs could lead to drainage problems for both the pavement and the road, but high kerbs were extremely dangerous for wheelchair users. However, a compromise using inch-high kerbs could – and in many cases did – provide a usable solution.

There was a lot of goodwill, ingenuity and experimentation. A representative of one of the organisations for the blind, for example, mentioned that tactile surfaces might be useful, citing the textured blocks once used for stableyard paving and (a novel way of explaining the idea) the chunky patterns displayed by some chocolate bars. This suggestion in due course resulted in the tactile pavement surfaces still employed today. The usefulness of sound as well as light signals was also raised, explored and exploited successfully for pelican crossings.

I recall one road safety meeting I went to in Birmingham, attended by many representatives of associations for people with disabilities - Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation (RADAR), Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB; now Royal National Institute of Blind People), Royal National Institute for the Deaf (RNID, now Action on Hearing Loss), National Federation of the Blind (NFB) etc. Returning to the railway station after the meeting, to catch my train back to London, I found myself somewhat lost. Before I could get my bearings, the person who happened to be with me told me not to worry, he knew where to go. I therefore had the slightly surreal experience of being led unerringly to the station and the correct platform by a blind person with a guide dog.

Voluntary work

After I was posted elsewhere I still kept in touch to some extent with road safety issues. When, in another job, I became involved with the Honours system, handling files about people who had not only had long and worthwhile careers, but had also done other things well over and above the call of duty, I felt inspired to start doing some voluntary work within the Department. My first foray, very much returning to my road safety interests, was helping at the 'Transport

Without Handicap' conference in 1981 at the QEII Centre opposite Westminster Abbey. The theme was how best to overcome transport problems faced by people with disabilities. I recall in particular one young delegate, a teenager who had been confined to a wheelchair for about ten years, following a road accident. He had a very lightweight high-tech self-propelled wheelchair in the use of which he demonstrated extraordinary proficiency. He could make the thing do everything but talk. Unlike many wheelchair users, raised kerbs held absolutely no terrors for him.

Those who had attended the conference were afterwards invited to a reception at Lancaster House. We were transported in a fleet of brand new double-decker buses, all equipped with textured handrails for improved grip, and with equipment permitting the entrance step to dip a few inches to make access easier.

After the conference the Department of Transport produced a report, later discussed in Parliament (see Hansard for 26th May 1982). There was a long way to go: there were still many transport institutions which simply failed to provide for those who didn't have two arms and legs, or who couldn't use their limbs in the usual way. Nonetheless, the conference indicated that there were heartening developments going on. There were 'kneeling' buses and taxi ramps to enable wheelchairs to enter such vehicles, plus portable ramps for use by trains, the increasing availability of public toilets accessible by disabled people, the development of devices to enable people with disabilities to drive and many other ingenious ideas.



Above: The author sampling a wheelchair at the Mobility Roadshow

While working elsewhere I continued to take an interest in road safety and did further voluntary work for the Department, at several of the biennial Transport Research Laboratory (TRL) Mobility Road Shows, show-casing technologies for helping people with disabilities to travel. These ranged from specially adapted vehicles and associated products enabling those with special needs to drive, to rather more esoteric items, e.g. to allow them access to a hot air balloon or to participate in karting and other motor sports! Clay Reggazoni, a Formula 1 driver who had

suffered a terrible accident which confined him to a wheelchair, on occasion attended. He still raced (albeit no longer in Formula 1) and used his name to promote equipment to empower people with similar disabilities. One stand was run by a one-legged motorcyclist known as 'Mad Dog', on behalf of the National Association for Bikers with a Disability – the stand displayed three-wheeler motorbikes, showing keen motorcyclists who had suffered injuries how bikes could be amended to serve their needs.

One year my husband also came along, acting as one of the 'accompanying drivers' who went out with visitors wanting to test-drive specially adapted vehicles around the TRL road system. I remember that he was particularly impressed by one young girl (a victim of Thalidomide) who had hands but no arms. She whisked him round the roads extremely efficiently, making him feel decidedly unnecessary in the passenger seat. He found out afterwards that she was a member of the Institute of Advanced Motorists.

The site was so huge that many people, who expected to walk around it using sticks or crutches, couldn't manage to do so. I'd sign them out a powered or unpowered wheelchair, sometimes an NHS model, sometimes a high-tech example lent by a private company. I adjusted all these to fit as necessary and sometimes called in another volunteer to push a chair, so that visitors could see everything there was to see. One year we had torrential rain and I also ended up improvising rain capes from the plastic sheets in which the wheelchairs had been wrapped. On one occasion a customer confided that the high-tech wheelchair he had borrowed was so light and handy that he was loath to give it back. Another time I suspect that someone had actually succumbed to temptation: we lost a brand new NHS wheelchair, finding in its place a very ancient and tatty example.

For each Roadshow the organiser, Anne Frye of the Department's Disability Unit, managed to get some notable person to open the event. One year the guest of honour was to be Prince Charles. Sadly he was unable to turn up in the end as he suffered a fall while playing polo and injured his back. I seem to recall Anne saying something under her breath about playing polo at his age... However, he did indeed come along to open the next event and took a considerable interest in all that was on display. I knew that he would be taken round all the marquees and was careful to keep an eye on the main entrance while I was working at wheelchair loans.

However, while I was on my hands and knees adjusting wheelchair footrests for a customer (wielding a large adjustable spanner and wagging my behind in the air as I wrestled with a recalcitrant nut) the prince walked in through the side entrance, which was partially blocked at the time by (a) the wheelchair and (b) my rear end. Somewhat pink I leaped to my feet and dragged the chair out of his way. Not one of my better moments!

Over the following years I was involved in a considerable variety of transport matters, all highly interesting and valuable, but not concerned with road safety. Of course, as with any walk of life, not everything in the garden could be rosy. Not all colleagues, for instance, were all that might be wished: I recall in particular one who was notorious for wantonly reducing her staff to tears. That was, however, very much the exception rather than the rule.

On one occasion only I ended up away from transport aspects, when I was sent on secondment to the Lord Chancellor's Department, working on electoral issues. All very interesting, and of course vital in a democracy. However the electoral scene just didn't grab me in the way that transport did, so that, after two years, and for my final posting, I made my way back (with a sigh of thankfulness as if coming home) to transport.

My last transport post

For the first time in twenty-two years I again became involved with road safety. For the first time ever, this was on the vehicle side, and I started to learn about primary vehicle safety (all about designing vehicles so as to avoid accidents happening). This included things like effective and efficient braking, lighting and steering. Then there was secondary vehicle safety, about how best to mitigate the effects of any accidents: airbags, underrun bars, crumple zones, rollover protection. My word, in the noughties things had certainly changed in comparison with my memories of road safety in the 1970s. Sat Nav was making its presence felt, various safety devices (such as anti-lock braking) had proved themselves so valuable they had been enshrined in vehicle requirement law.

A whole gamut of other ideas – which would have seemed positively science fiction in the 1970s – were being developed and investigated. There were devices to warn a driver when the speed limit was being exceeded; others to brake the vehicle automatically when this occurred. There were sensors to warn of impending impacts – again, sometimes with automatic braking to mitigate or prevent such impacts. There were parking aids and lane departure warnings. There was discussion (and considerable controversy) about daytime running lights for vehicles and retro-reflective markings for heavy vehicles, before these were made mandatory.

At the 2006 'Intelligent Transport Systems Congress' in London I was able to try out some of the new devices. I liked the speed limit warning device which vibrated the accelerator pedal when I (purposely, so as to try out the device) exceeded the speed limit. I definitely did NOT like the device which automatically (and heavily) braked the car when I did so! On another occasion, at TRL, I was able to test an impact avoidance device. It was hard to continue accelerating towards an obstacle (even though I knew the obstacle was only a large, soft, inflated bag) and it seemed very strange to find the

vehicle braking itself automatically to avoid or at least mitigate the impending impact. I'm glad that it was for the engineers rather than myself to test and evaluate all these driver aids and for Ministers and politicians to decide whether to legislate on them, as I would have been entirely unable to establish definitively which would be helpful and which might in fact result in problems such as driver over-confidence (with possibly unfortunate results).

Given the ever-increasing population and also the ever-increasing number of vehicles on the road, it is only common sense to continue seeking new and better ways to ensure road safety. Will such innovations as driverless cars do the trick? I find it hard to get my mind around such things these days and feel relieved that I have now been retired for some years and must, perforce, leave others to develop and evaluate the next generation of road safety technology. I hope and expect that those working in the modern incarnation of my old department will have the same passion and dedication to the subject that I remember with pride from my years in the field.

Mersey Tunnel night buses

Ken Swallow

*A public ferry is a continuation of a common highway, by means of which passengers with their goods are entitled to be carried in return for tolls across a river, either from the termination of one highway to another or from town to town. There must be a right of way at each side as the public can have no claim to be landed on private soil.*¹

Some form of ferry across the River Mersey from Birkenhead to Liverpool was probably being provided by the monks of Birkenhead Priory on its foundation in 1150. In 1318 Edward II gave them the right to provide hospitality to cross-river passengers delayed by bad weather; and in 1330 the Charter of 1318 was confirmed by Edward III, with additionally the right to the monks to provide a ferry, as part of the reigning monarch's highway.

The Birkenhead ferry connected two King's highways, the 'rights of way' of the Chester road (now the A41) and the Prescot road (the A57). The history of the changes in its ownership is complex and beyond the scope of this piece, as is the introduction of further ferry crossings during the 19th century. Suffice to say that the Birkenhead Woodside ferry had passed in the 1840s into the hands of the Birkenhead Commissioners, and that they resolved to provide an hourly night service. It has been suggested² that a statutory duty to maintain a day and night service was effectively enshrined in a subsequent 1871 Agreement between the Commissioners and the Great Western and London &

North Western Railways in guaranteeing a service at least as efficient as that which was then being provided. Apart from that, any earlier statutory requirement that would require a night ferry service proves elusive. The Passenger Transport Executive (Merseytravel) are not aware of such a requirement but refer to a duty to provide one ferry crossing per year.

From the introduction of the first steam ferry in 1817, and then with the growth of the shipbuilding industry, Birkenhead expanded into an industrial town. The role of the ferries (eventually nine of them) changed from a link between highways on each side of the river, for travellers had still to take on today's meaning. In 1827, with the encouragement of land proprietors in Birkenhead, a Mersey tunnel was promulgated – and in the following year a Manchester firm produced a proposal for a bridge. But it was to be 1886 before the first tunnel, for the Mersey Railway, would be completed, and 1934 before the first road tunnel, Queensway, was opened, and when the Mersey Tunnel Joint Committee was made statutorily responsible for making good for 40 years any losses on the Birkenhead ferry.

Bus services through the Queensway tunnel

First to attempt to try to seize an opportunity to run a bus service through the Queensway tunnel was Crosville Motor Services, with a proposed extension to Liverpool of its Loggerheads – Mold - Birkenhead service. The Traffic Commissioners responded to the objections lodged by Liverpool and Birkenhead Corporations and the Tunnel Joint Committee by first deferring a decision, then by refusing the application, in order that a regionally based transport co-ordination scheme could be considered. A March 1936 joint application by Crosville and Ribble Motor Services for a Chester-Liverpool-Southport service met the same fate. The prospect of co-ordination was eventually to lead in 1939 to a proposal for a scheme that would include a trial cross-river bus service, but WW2 intervened and any form of co-ordination waited for the 1960s and the 1968 Transport Act.

Mounting post-war losses on the Birkenhead Woodside ferry focussed minds. Possible economies examined in a joint report of Birkenhead's Town Clerk, Treasurer, Transport Manager and Ferries Manager included abandonment of the night ferry service. The report suggested "there would be a moral obligation to provide some alternative means of travelling between Liverpool and Birkenhead, at least during the hours when the Mersey Railway was not running, 11.15pm to 6.00am". Note the word "moral" – were the authors unclear as to any statutory requirement? The Mersey Tunnel Joint Committee had powers to assume financial control of the ferry for 21 years from the date of the opening of the tunnel – and Birkenhead Corporation, under a 1933 Act, could serve notice on

the Committee requiring it to continue financial support for a further 21 years.

Birkenhead Corporation gave notice to the Tunnel Joint Committee that it wished it to continue to support the ferries after 18 July 1955. The Committee duly required that the night service be discontinued – and financial

inaugurated the Mersey Tunnel night service. It ran as a one-man bus as fares, 1s 0d from midnight to 0400 then 6d to 0630 and which included a 2d passenger toll, were paid at the toll booths. This bus and its sister, 370, were to be regular performers even after the formation of the Merseyside Passenger Transport Executive (MPTE), until replaced by the (then) new



Above: A Litherland-based bus that was a regular performer was Leyland Royal Tiger SL176, shown about to enter the tunnel on 25 October 1965. Arthur Tynan, known for his interest in model boats, is the driver. (Courtesy Brian Faragher/OnLine Transport Archive).

responsibility for a replacement bus service was assumed by the Committee. (Subsequently in 1965, when the second, Wallasey tunnel was in prospect, another Act limited the Committee's period of support to 40 years from the date of the opening of the first tunnel.)

Section 5(1) of the Mersey Tunnel Act 1955 gave power to the Joint Committee "to provide alternative transport when [the] night ferry service is suspended". It allowed it to provide, or arrange for the provision of, "such alternative means of transport between Kings Square in the borough [Birkenhead] and Kingsway in the city [Liverpool] as may be reasonably required by the carriage of persons from the time when any part of the night ferry service" is suspended. (Under current Mersey Tunnel bye-laws, except for specially defined occasions, foot passengers are not allowed to walk through either of the tunnels).

Thus it came to pass on the night of 13/14 May 1956 that Birkenhead Corporation Leyland PD2 371 (DCM 991)

Metro Scania (4001-8). The service acquired the number 94 from 18 October 1982 and was diverted temporarily via the Kingsway tunnel in September 1983. From July 1985 most journeys were re-routed outward via Kingsway returning via Queensway. Originally operated on a three-monthly rotation between Birkenhead and Liverpool (Litherland) garages this was changed to four-monthly from around 1973.

The Wallasey tunnel

After the first tube of the Wallasey tunnel (Kingsway) opened on 28 June 1971, blue MPTE Wirral Division buses began running into the city centre on daytime off-peak service 31 from New Brighton and its peak hour 32 variant from Liscard (after deregulation these became 431 and 432). Then on 10 December 1973 Crosville began its 418/419 from Heswall, non-stop from Pensby, using the M53, single-deckers being replaced by double-deckers in March 1975.

But from deregulation in 1986 no holds were to be barred. New services were added by Merseyside Transport and its successors, including by Arriva and First (and now Stagecoach), from Moreton, West Kirby, Bebington, New Ferry, Heswall, Neston and Parkgate, all taking numbers in the 400 series. Other services

were introduced from Ellesmere Port and Chester; and Crosville and North Western jointly, albeit briefly, tried a Chester to Southport route replicating what had been sought in March 1936. Thus every two minutes there is now, in 2017, a bus on a local service crossing the river when before 1973, discounting the modest usage of the Birkenhead and Wallasey ferries, the Merseyrail Electrics Wirral Line had the cross-river corridor to itself.

In recent times Arriva had added, commercially, late night week-end buses. But, once reasonably popular even if costly to operate, patronage declined significantly. Potential passengers were now tending to spread their exit from the pubs and clubs. It may be that the introduction of the 24-hour licensing laws, with the consequent loss of traditional 'drinking up time', had taken its toll. The last of these Arriva services were withdrawn after 26 July 2014 – the N23 to Moreton and N37 to West Kirby from Liverpool's Queen Square every half-hour from around 0030 until around 0400, and the N450 every 20 minutes between 1210 and 0500.

Continuation of the original service

Meanwhile the original all-night tunnel service continued, now numbered 150 and contracted by Merseytravel to various operators on tenders that were either let on a short term basis or became short lived through a turnover of tendered operators. However, on 2 August 2014, Ace Travel began running it commercially, and so this quasi-municipal (latterly Merseytravel) operation for a while passed into private hands with no local authority involvement. Ace Travel's services 500 and 501, usually operated by Alexander Dennis Enviro 200 Darts, taken together provided a seven-days-a-week night service from Liverpool's Queen Square to Birkenhead's Hamilton Square and vice versa, using the Kingsway tunnel on Wirral-bound journeys and the Queensway tunnel on the return. There was a flat fare of £2 and Merseytravel pre-paid tickets and ENCTS concessionary passes were valid.

Ace Travel, which had commenced its operations in Merseyside in March 2005 and had been active not only in the tendered market but also in running several commercial routes, went into liquidation over the last weekend of February 2015 after an offer to clear an outstanding tax liability had been rejected by HMRC. Merseytravel let contracts for temporary replacements for its supported services to allow time for arrangements to be made for services to be run on a more permanent supported basis for 12 months from April. A temporary tender was let to Stagecoach for the 500 and 501. But the bids for all the former Ace services came back at a significantly higher cumulative cost and a decision was made not to continue the cross-river night services. There were, on average, fewer than four passengers per service during the week and fewer than six at weekends, meaning it was costing Merseytravel around £7 per passenger. Permanent contracts were

awarded for most of the rest of the former Ace Travel services from 19 April. But a facility that had maintained a link that had been important to both the night-time economy and the demands of the pleasure seekers was now, for the time being at least, finished.

Late-night tunnel buses made a brief reappearance at the end of 2015 when Stagecoach, on Saturday nights in the lead-up to Christmas (from 28 November to 19 December), added to its Liverpool - Chester service three round trips numbered N1 at 0005, 0135 and 0305. This turned out to be a foretaste of things to come as a revised September 2016 timetable on the Liverpool - Chester services, introduced by Stagecoach when its quality partnership arrangement on those services with Arriva ended, included the reintroduction on a 3-month trial basis of late-night N1 journeys through the tunnel, the last buses again leaving at 0305 but this time on Friday nights as well as Saturdays. At the end of the trial period the late Friday/Saturday service was declared 'permanent' and the N1 journeys were numbered into the main service 1 series from 29 December, now simply numbered 1.

The word 'permanent' perhaps offers a hostage to fortune. The Liverpool City Region Combined Authority has formulated an 'alliance' with Merseyside's two major operators, Arriva and Stagecoach. Its success will influence whether a new elected mayor decides to pursue bus franchising, the powers for which are incorporated in the Bus Services Bill. For the moment, however, the late-night time facility to cross the Mersey by bus is limited to Fridays and Saturdays: such a facility by Merseyrail has never been on offer.

Author's notes

A lingering feeling had persisted over the years that there is some statutory requirement for a cross-river over-night public transport facility to be provided. We have not found it. It must be presumed that Merseytravel in advising the Combined Authority were not aware of it when Ace Travel collapsed.

The assistance of David Thomas in the preparation of this article is gratefully acknowledged.

References:

- ¹R Stewart-Brown: Birkenhead Priory and the Mersey Ferry (Liverpool: State Assurance Co, 1925)
- ²T B Maund: Mersey Ferries Vol 1, Woodside to Eastham (Glossop: Transport Publishing Co, 1991)

Professor John Armstrong

The R&RTHA regrets to report the death on 12 February in London of Professor John Armstrong, for many years Academic Advisor to the Association, following a period of ill health. The following obituary has been written by Grahame Boyes.

A defining moment for John Armstrong was when, in the early 1970s, Professor Philip Bagwell, who was then writing his history of *The Transport Revolution from 1770*, appointed John, his former student, as his research assistant, a position he held for three years. Bagwell suggested that John might focus on the history of Britain's coastal shipping, extending the work of Professor T. S. Willan in *The English Coastal Trade 1600–1750* (1967), since the later period had been largely ignored by transport historians. It was published by Batsford in 1974 with John's contribution duly acknowledged.

He went on to make the subject his own, with some 40 academic papers on coastal ships and shipping to his name. After 2000 his interest turned to the early history of steam boats and ships, which inspired another dozen papers, in this case authored jointly with David M. Williams of the University of Leicester. The International Maritime Economic History Association, which John served as vice-president in 2004–2008, published collections of these two sets of papers, the first as *The vital spark: the British coastal trade 1700–1930* (2009) and the second as *The impact of technological change: the early steamship in Britain* (2011). For over ten years John also ran the British Commission for Maritime History seminars at the Department of War Studies, King's College, London.

But these maritime subjects did not confine him. In 1972 John had been appointed as a lecturer – later senior lecturer – in modern economic history at the Ealing College of Higher Education, where he soon became actively involved in the emerging academic field of business history. He continued to teach at Ealing for some 40 years, being appointed Professor of Business History when it was transformed into the Polytechnic of West London in 1990 and later Thames Valley University. From 1984 to 1988 he edited *Business Archives*, the journal of the Business Archive Council. During these years he also compiled for the BAC a *Directory of Corporate Archives* (1985) and co-authored with Stephanie Jones *Business documents: their origins, sources and uses in historical research* (1987).

By then John was becoming involved in transport history more generally. In 1989 he took over for the next 12 years the editorship of the *Journal of Transport History*. In 1987, at the instigation of Professor Theo Barker, who was keen to widen the Railway & Canal Historical Society's vision to embrace other modes of transport with which railways and canals co-operated and competed, John joined the Society. Theo's period of office also led to the formation in 1991 of the Roads & Road Transport History Conference (later Association) with the RCHS as a founding corporate member and John as an individual member. Here his legacy is the *Companion to British Road Haulage History*, compiled by an editorial team brought together by the Association under John's leadership and published by the Science Museum in 2003.

There is more that could be said of John's achievements, but it will already be apparent that he was above all a team-player, always willing to share his knowledge and expertise and to employ them for the benefit of all those who shared his interests. He also recognised the advantages to be gained from bringing academic and serious amateur historians together.

Bratislava Transport Museum

A recent visit to Bratislava, capital of the Slovak Republic, provided an opportunity to visit the transport museum (Múzeum Dopravný), sited close to the main railway station (Hlavná stanica), open daily except Mondays, admission 3.30 euros. Sited in the first passenger rail station (parallels with the Liverpool & Manchester can be noted) it contains a mix of rail and road-related equipment. The rail side includes a number of full-sized locomotives on adjacent tracks, whilst inside the building there is a related rail display, with strong focus on signalling and telecommunications. The road exhibits include a good range of cars and motorcycles, from the early 20th century to recent times. It is noteworthy many of the cars and motorcycles are not dissimilar to those found for equivalent periods in, for example, the Coventry Transport Museum, notably Skoda designs. Even those from the communist era in the 1960s and 1970s have exterior styling not totally unlike western European vehicles of the same period, albeit somewhat more utilitarian, especially in interior fittings. There are no buses or lorries on display, although a number of lorries outside the museum building might be in line for restoration work.

PRW

Reviews

BET Group bus fleets: The final years Jim Blake. ISBN 978 1 47385 726 1. 144 pages hardbound. February 2017.

Pen & Sword Books Ltd., 47 Church Street, Barnsley, South Yorkshire S70 2AS. www.pen-and-sword.co.uk £25.00

This book is essentially a collection of photographs taken by the author in the later years of BET Group bus operations in England and Wales prior to their sale to the Transport Holding Company in late 1967. A number of vehicle types were familiar to the reviewer, notably those from the Ribble and North Western fleets. A notable feature is the lack of standardisation in BET fleets, apart from the limited adoption of a modernised front end design for single-deckers in the early 1960s. Not only were vehicles acquired from a mix of small independent fleets, but even those ordered directly by the main operators differed widely in design and appearance, in contrast to the state-owned highly standardised Bristol/ECW fleets of the same era. Did BET leave vehicle purchase solely to individual managers rather than aim for economies of a scale through group purchase?

At two views per A4 page, there is plenty of room for detail, although in some cases quality of reproduction (or perhaps the original image) varies. All are in black and white, apart from the cover illustrations. Coverage is fairly comprehensive, although with a notable emphasis on south eastern fleets such as East Kent, and absence of East Yorkshire.

PRW

Samuel Eynon and Sons – The “Hero”. Vernon Morgan. ISBN 978-0-9574045-3-3. 239 pages, extensively illustrated with many in colour. A5 size, soft covers. Privately published and available from MDS Booksales, Amazon and the author at Trimsarn, Carmarthenshire (www.vernonmorgan.com) £19:50.

The Gwendraeth valleys (Fach and Fawr) in south Carmarthenshire are the most westerly of the South Wales mining valleys. Their coal is anthracite, of higher value, their miners were better paid, and their pits remained open longer than most. Carmarthenshire generally, both its rural north and semi-industrial south, is strongly Welsh-speaking and of nationalist inclinations. It also has a long and continuing history of independent bus operation which has perhaps not been recognised in the same way as other areas such as Durham and West Suffolk.

Eynon’s was a typical small family business, founded in 1917, which developed from local bus work into all the main areas of PSV operation – private hire, tours, works and local authority contracts, and latterly express. It prospered into the 1950s and in the short term it gained from the retrenchment of local National Bus subsidiaries in the 1970s, picking up new services either commercially or with local authority subsidy. From the late 1970s it was struggling financially and was twice rescued by a mystery benefactor, who provided the capital needed to buy new coaches for the requirements of tour operator clients. The business eventually failed in 1988 and was sold to another old-established firm, Davies Bros of Pencader; however, Davies themselves, though highly regarded, collapsed under competitive pressures in 1999.

It can be argued that Eynon’s was the victim of two major events – the miners’ strike of 1984/5 and its impacts, and post-deregulation competition from 1986 onwards; yet there are signs of a management that became progressively less professional. There had always been a strong reliance on family members and a belief in salvation through low fares. The business remained a partnership throughout and never acquired limited status. In the 1980s the signs of a struggling operation were in the purchase of old vehicles for very short lives; short-lived contracts with local travel agents; and visibly shabbier buses appeared in service with either no destination display or a hand-written piece of cardboard in the windscreen.

The book’s major strength is its insight into the idiosyncratic ways of a family business which would not have understood the concept of a business plan. The author, a mining engineer who joined Eynon’s after closure of his local colliery, describes the relationships with neighbouring operators, where a “competitor” might provide a vehicle to help out in a crisis.

The most remarkable example is a highly unconventional relationship with the firm’s own fleet engineer, who owned his own coaches which were leased to Eynon’s (we suspect for reasons of capital shortage), ran on Eynon’s Operator’s licence and were kept at the Trimsaran depot. This enterprising individual then developed a relationship with a major bus and coach dealer, under which vehicles owned by the dealer would be taken to Eynon’s workshop, re-certified and returned. When VOSA expressed unhappiness about this on grounds that, as a dealer, no Operator’s Licence was held, the engineer reacted by obtaining his own “O” Licence and securing local

authority contracts in competition with his employer. A parting of the ways was then inevitable.

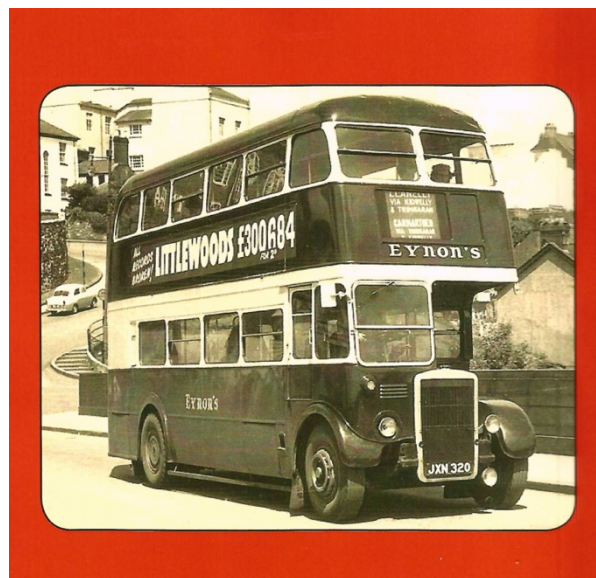
The book is particularly comprehensive in giving vehicle details in the text, in tabular form and the photographs which must show nearly every vehicle ever owned. Details of all licences held, and changes to them, are also listed.

Mr Morgan discusses the New Bus Grants available under the Transport Act 1968 (though see below). While Eynon's themselves took advantage of the Grant, he is critical of its effect, arguing that it led operators to over-reach themselves and buy new vehicles they could not afford. This, he says, "caused the downfall of many operators nationwide". While there were certainly one or two examples of this in the author's own area, there is no evidence that it was widespread.

The book's major weakness is one common to private publication, the lack of a "critical friend" who can sub-edit, correct errors and comment on style generally. Thus he refers to the "Road Traffic Acts" of 1968, 1980 and 1985 which were all Transport Acts. He credits Richard Marsh MP with introducing the 1968 Act; while Marsh was the Minister responsible for implementation, its creator and inspiration were, by common consent, Barbara Castle. Referring to the 1948 nationalisation programme, he says Eynon's were grateful that the BTC had "passed them by" – it was not as simple as that!

Mr Morgan did well in using his relationship with the family to obtain a good selection of early photographs which might not otherwise have been publicly available. When it comes to more recent times, however, the many colour shots are often lacking in sharpness and some have distorted colour. Most if not all of these were taken by himself but while many are credited as such, some are not. In his introduction he thanks Alan Cross and others for supplying photographs, but these are not identified by source, and attribution is patchy at best.

A final comment is that Mr Morgan might have done more to mention developments at neighbouring firms as they happened, for example the merger of J James of Ammanford into South Wales Transport in 1962. He has previously written a history of the James business, which is mentioned in the text, but more on other local operators, particularly Rees & Williams and West Wales Motors of Tycroes, would be welcome. Is there an opportunity here for Mr Morgan's next work? **DH**



Above: From the back cover of the book, this photograph shows JXN320 (RTL8), one of the many ex-London Transport RTLs and RTs to join the Eynon's fleet. The RTLs could be seen regularly working the main service, Llanelli to Carmarthen via Trimsaran, here crossing the bridge over the River Towy at Carmarthen in 1959.

Victoria Coach Station 1932 – 2017: The first 85 years in pictures Thames Valley and Great Western Omnibus Trust. Price £7.50 through the Trust's website at www.tvagwot.org.uk using PayPal, or by cheque payable to 'TV&GWOT', at Ledger Farm, Forest Green Road, Fifield, Maidenhead SL6 2NR.

To mark the 85th anniversary of Victoria Coach Station, the Thames Valley and Great Western Omnibus Trust, in conjunction with Transport for London, arranged a display of historic vehicles at the coach station itself over the weekend of 10-12 March, for which this very comprehensively-illustrated publication was produced. It covers the period from earlier coach terminals through the construction work, the 1930s, wartime, the post-war coaching boom, to deregulation in 1980, and the early 2000s. Very informative captions are provided. Many of the illustrations have been drawn from the archives of the Kithead Trust. In addition to vehicles themselves, views depict passengers of the period, special events such as coronations, and 'behind the scenes' locations such as the chart room. Highly recommended. **PRW**

(A photograph of pre-VCS days, with the coach station in Lupus Street is reproduced on the back page, courtesy of The London Coastal Coaches collection at The Kithead Trust).

Journal Archive 2 with John Ashley

This issue's From the Archive will strike many a chord in this era of regulation. It is from Journal no 39. Perhaps the editor will run a limerick competition?

A contents list of the Journals from issue 1 can be found at www.rhtha.org.uk/journal-contents. Ideas for articles you would like to see reprinted are welcome. Please contact John Ashley at the address on page 4.

Contributions are also welcome from the archives of other road transport organisations, of course with their permission and acknowledged.

Comfy Cars

*From St. Albans and Luton, the Comfy Car goes,
At half-past each hour as everyone knows,
Harpenden people, please memorise this –
At 10 to the hour, no Car can you miss,
There are buses and taxis, lorries and cars,
But nothing so Comfy as those that are ours.*

Comfy Cars timetable ~ c.July 1924

The proprietors of Comfy Cars of Harpenden were unlikely to have won any poetry prizes, but they certainly knew their onions when it came to promoting the business.

First, a few basic facts (from *London's Buses - Volume Two*, K C Blacker, R S Lunn, R G Westgate, HJ Publications, 1983). The firm had been started in 1924 by two brothers, Capt. A P and P B Morgan, who both came from south-east London. They saw potential on the St Albans-Luton route, even though it was already being worked by Road Motors Ltd. After acquiring the necessary licences, they began running in February of that year, and this might have been the start of a reasonable network, but for an unusual reason it was not to be. When it came to motor-bus licensing, the St. Albans Council had an enlightened or repressive policy, depending on your point of view. From the mid-twenties they insisted on co-ordination of timings between operators. They also refused to licence buses for use on routes they considered already adequately served – an early manifestation of the dreaded R-word – Regulation!

Expansion beyond the route to Luton was therefore difficult, and it remained Comfy Cars' main bus service, albeit a good one. But, helped by sensible diversification, and good publicity, the business prospered. When the inevitable happened in 1934 (compulsory acquisition by the LPTB), Alfred and Philip Morgan received the tidy sum of £15,500 for the four buses and goodwill.

But, back to 1924/5. As well as Comfy and Road Motors on the Luton road, there was also Arthur Blowers' Express Motor Service. Things then got hotter. Road Motors was bought-out in April 1925 by a formidable competitor, the "National" (National Omnibus & Transport Co.). Notwithstanding the Council's desire for peace and harmony among all bus operators, Comfy clearly had to do its best to get as much of the trade as possible, without treading on anyone's (not even Arthur's) toes.

Some surviving ephemera give clues as to how they managed to go about this so successfully.

The little timetable booklet was given away free, no doubt paid for by advertising. As well as the bus times (on the half-hour from Luton/St Albans; ten to the hour from Harpenden, in case you've forgotten), it contained cricket club fixtures for the three towns, London theatre matinee times, plus the Comfy char-à-banc excursion programme. There was also the limerick above, and the offer of 10/- and 5/- cash prizes to anyone who could better it.

Thus, the times of the Comfy Cars (but not those of the National or Arthur's buses) were drummed-in by the verse, and also by the backs of the tickets, an idea not unknown elsewhere. Passengers might be forgiven for thinking that these were the only times at which buses ran between Luton and St Albans (which, of course *was* the general idea). And, it didn't stop there, for you might tuck the booklet behind the clock on the mantelpiece for future reference. A week or a month later, when you came to check the date of the next

Comfy Car Service

If you can suggest any improvement in our Service, please do so. Our Job is to PLEASE YOU.

TIME TABLE.

TO	FROM	TO	FROM	TO	FROM	TO	FROM
10.40	12.40	2.40	4.40	6.40	8.40		
11.5	1.0	3.5	5.5	7.5	10.5		
11.25		3.25	5.25	7.25	10.25		

"COMFY" CAR DEPARTURE TIMES.

LUTON - Half past every hour from 9.30 a.m. - 9.30 p.m.

ST. ALBANS - Half past every hour from 9.30 a.m. - 9.30 p.m.

HARPENDEN TO ST. ALBANS - 5 minutes to every hour from 6.35 a.m. - 8.55 p.m.

HARPENDEN TO LUTON - 10 minutes to every hour from 6.50 a.m. - 8.50 p.m.

For WEDNESDAY, SATURDAY & SUNDAY ADDITIONAL TIMES must also for Season Ticket rates please enquire from Conductor.

Harpenden Cricket Club match, or the matinee times at Maskelyne's Theatre, the Gaiety or the Alhambra, guess whose bus times you were reminded of?

As well as the bus service, Comfy promoted its "Weekly Pleasure Programme", offering " ... Big Car Comfort without the Expense ...". Here the competition was not only the National, Arthur etc., but the LMS and LNER.

"BE INDEPENDENT of the railway; taste the joys of the open road with the hedgerows slipping past, and the everchanging view around. To enjoy this independence one must have a ... COMFY CAR. These are not camouflaged lorries but first-class touring cars, capable of carrying 20 passengers anywhere in deep-cushioned ease ... MAKE UP A PARTY ... if you get 20, it will be as cheap as the 3rd class railway fare – and what a difference! ..."

One nice touch here, was that if you lived on the Luton route, you could travel free on the bus to the excursion pick-up point in St. Albans. Thus, at a stroke, Comfy enlarged its catchment area for excursions. Did competing chara' firms in Luton or the railways ever realise how they did it?

There was, however, one service advertised in the timetable which did not make a penny – the carriage of parcels. Blacker, Lunn & Westgate say the crews were allowed to keep all the proceeds from this. Perhaps, this helps explain why the three drivers who joined Comfy in 1924, and the three conductors, all taken on as boys, were still faithfully working for the firm when the LPTB took over.

All in all, seventy years on, you can't help thinking that with imaginative ideas like these, Comfy Cars could teach present-day firms a thing or two.

*David Harman
timetables and tickets courtesy of John Shelbourn*



New Association Name

A motion was carried at the AGM to alter the 'trading' name of the Association. It was felt that the full title, whilst being fully descriptive of its activities, was rather cumbersome for communications.

The new 'trading' title is therefore "The Road Transport History Association" and is used for the first time on the front cover of this Journal.

The full name of the company will remain in use for official and legal purposes.

The Journal of the Road Transport History Association is produced with the support of The University of Wales Trinity St Davids. The membership is extremely grateful for this support

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

The next issue will be no. 89, August 2017. Copy date is 6 July. Contributions should be sent to the editor at the address shown on page 4.