

Journal of the Road Transport History Association

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An attempt to change 'Rule of the Road' in 1944?

Philip Kirk and Peter White

A curious document has emerged recently in the Bus Archive collection, in which a letter from the Ministry of War Transport (MoWT) to Wolverhampton Corporation sought to identify costs for trolleybus operations that might arise from changing the 'rule of the road' in Britain from left to right-hand working. Such changes have occurred in various countries, notably that in Sweden in 1967. The timing seems somewhat

strange – clearly, the threat of such a change being imposed by enemy invasion had receded by that date. Or was it perhaps part of a general move toward modernisation for the post-war period, as seen in developments in town planning around that time? Another possibility is that the MoWT was responding to a Parliamentary question, for which a Minister had asked information to be provided. Note that the MoWT was simply a temporary renaming of the Ministry of Transport for the duration of World War Two.

A letter from A.C.Trench (with no specific job title) of the MoWT to C. Owen Silvers, General Manager of Wolverhampton Corporation Transport, dated 20 March 1944 is reproduced below. The letter refers specifically to trolleybuses, of which Wolverhampton was a major operator. This applied both to wiring, and also the layout of the vehicles themselves, notably driver position, passenger entry/exit and staircases. It also worth recalling that costs of repositioning of trolleybus overhead to match one-way road schemes in the 1960s may have been a factor in premature closure of some systems.

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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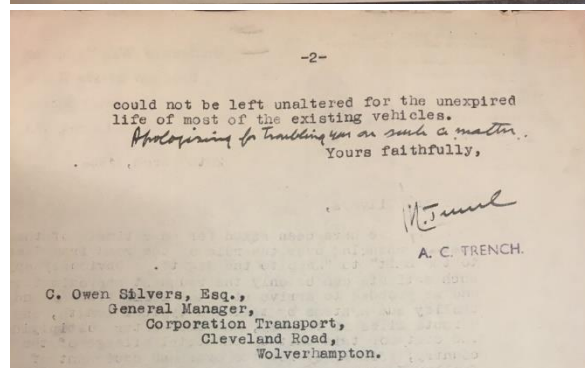
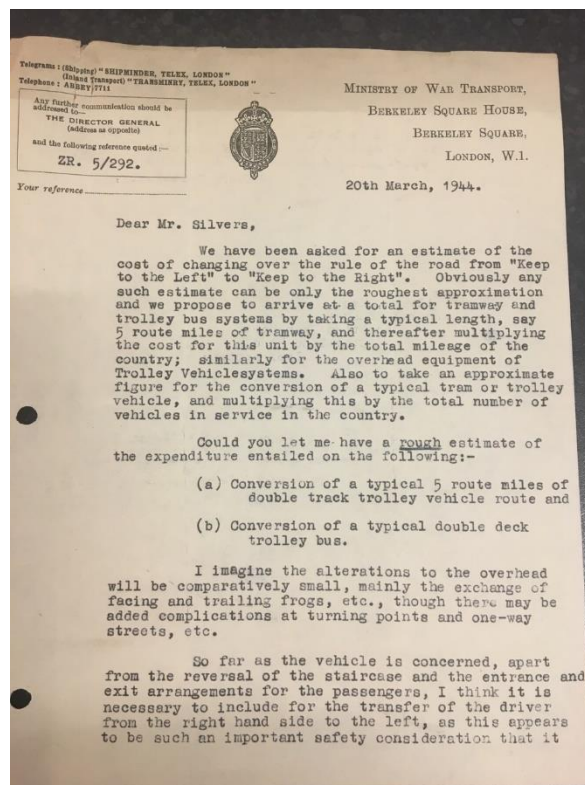
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The Editor is always interested in hearing from members and non-members who would like to write an original piece about transport history and/or research for inclusion in this journal or online.



An internal costing was produced, based on labour costs only, giving remarkable detail, down to individual segments of overhead fittings, such as 'Fighting Cocks' at £4 0s 0d, up to 'Victoria Square' at £100 0s 0d. The total came to £750 for 41 miles of route, an average of £91 per five route miles to match the request in Trench's letter. The costing (by the 'Assistant Engineer') continues with that for vehicles, giving an average cost of £192 per vehicle (rounded to £200) for both material and labour (the latter costed at 2s per hour). The trolleybus fleet was then stated as 152, including "Bournemouth vehicles", giving a total of £30,000. However, the Assistant Engineer also accepts that estimates could vary by 50% either

way. He suggests that the driving position could remain unchanged, but to "...reconstruct the platform to have rear entrance." (the precise meaning of which is unclear).



Above: A view of the Bull Ring at Sedgley, with an early single-decker trolleybus. Reconstruction of the overhead here was costed at £8 0s 0d. [The Bus Archive]

A reply from Owen Silvers to 'Colonel A.C.Trench' dated 22 March 1944 (a remarkably quick response) appears to summarise these internal costings, quoting £200 per vehicle and £100 per five route miles. These assumed direct labour rather than contractors. He emphasised some of practical difficulties in timing, indicating that for a "considerable period... at least half the vehicles would not conform to the changed necessities of keeping to the right".

A presentation of this material will be given by Philip Kirk at the October meeting. Additional observations from members will be welcomed.

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

Reviews

Early independents in the Henley & Marlow area Paul Lacey. ISBN 978-0-9567832-4-0. A4, card covers, extensive b&w illustrations, 96pp. Published by the author at 17 Sparrow Close, Woosehill, Wokingham, Berks RG41 3HT, price £15.00. Available to RTHA members including postage at this price.

This book follows extensive earlier research in the Berkshire area undertaken and published by the author, including his history of the Thames Valley company, and most recently that of Smith's Coaches of Reading (reviewed in our May 2018 issue). It is in the same style, covering not only the details of vehicles and services operated, but of the families who ran the businesses and staff they employed. Extensive use is made of local newspaper archives and census records.

The area covered is broadly that along the Thames from Reading to Henley and Marlow, extending to High Wycombe, Maidenhead, Wokingham and other points served by networks focussed primarily on Henley and Marlow, with detailed coverage of the period leading up to the implementation of the Road Traffic Act 1930 and its effects. In addition to the large number of very small operators encountered two more sizeable businesses receive greater attention, namely Venn-Brown of Henley, and the Marlow & District company. Whilst larger regional companies fringed the area from an early stage, their impacts were initially more limited, comprising City of Oxford via Wallingford to Henley, and gradual expansion of BTA/Thames Valley Traction, the latter enjoying a harmonious relationship with the Marlow & District company, which was acquired in 1929, but whose separate identity was retained until 1933.

EARLY INDEPENDENTS OF THE HENLEY & MARLOW AREA

Written and published by Paul Lacey



R. Batting • Butler's Coaches • R. H. Cain • Marlow & District • Everest & Sheldrake • The Venture • C. Wise • The Stonor Bus • W. Herridge • Huntercombe Bus • Thackray's Way • R. Jackman • G. Tillion and the relevant activities of City of Oxford, House's and British/Thames Valley

Above: the cover, featuring two of the many Karriers operated by Marlow & District, Ramsden-bodied CL4s, outside the Huddersfield factory ready for the 200-mile journey to Marlow in 1929.



Above: an early open-top 'chara', named 'The Kingfisher', and operated by R.E.Batting of Marlow. A Daimler Y-type acquired in 1922., also used for a scheduled service.

A great deal of operator experimentation in patterns of service is evident, especially on lower-density routes. A more stable pattern emerged over interurban routes such as Reading - Henley – Marlow – Wycombe and Marlow – Maidenhead. Illustrations from operator timetables show good levels of service during evening and Sunday periods, reflecting the use of services for leisure purposes as well as those such as shopping. Extensive excursion operations were also evident from an early stage, often involving interworking by the same vehicles. The scheduled services were also extensively promoted as a means of local sight-seeing.



Above: Marlow & District PP8371, a Karrier CL4 with 20-seat bodywork delivered in 1922.

For many years, established regional operators (principally Arriva) have dominated the area, but competition has returned: indeed, wishing to travel from Henley to Maidenhead in August 2018 I found myself with a choice between Arriva and Go Ahead (City of Oxford).

The high quality of reproduction and very modest price make the publication excellent value for purchase.

Peter White

Perth's Trams and Early Buses *A.W. Brothie*
210 x 703 mm, portrait, softback. 80 pages.
Many illustrations, some in colour, and two
maps. Published by Stenlake Publishing Ltd,
54-58 Mill Square, Catrine, Ayrshire KA5
6RD. Cover price £16.95. ISBN: 978 1 84033
824 9

Back in 1965 the author had a brief study of
Perth's tramways published in "Tramways of the
Tay Valley". "Perth's Trams and Early Buses"
expands on this work to include bus services and
is in the style of many Stenlake publications with
prominence given to a fine selection of well
captioned photos. Some two thirds of the book is
given to illustrations and tables.

Perth's was the last new horse tramway opened
in Scotland in succession to an earlier omnibus
system, and was acquired, amicably, by Perth
Corporation (PCT) in 1903. With an electric car
fleet of 12 cars and 5.02 miles of route, the PCT
story might be thought of as a simple affair but
this would be a misjudgement. There was a
serious attempt by the city fathers to test petrol
traction prior to electrification and electrification
itself was not without difficulty. Pressure for
network expansion saw PCT introduce
motorbuses from 1911 and both modes then
served the city until the mid 1920s when private
bus operators entered the scene. Thereafter the
already deteriorated tramway was run down to
closure in 1929. In the meantime PCT acquired its
main competitor and expanded the route
network. This did not last, the Corporation
accepting an offer to sell from the ambitious W
Alexander of Falkirk bus empire which was flush
with funds from its railway shareholders.

From 1934 to 1961 Perth's city buses were run as
a separate unit by Alexander; only an outline of
this era is provided, although there is coverage of
the main independent bus operators running into

the city. There is also mention of the last electric
tramcar received in Perth – in 2010.

The illustrations give a wide geographic coverage
of the city and the well-crafted captions impart
the author's knowledge of the area and its
history, enhancing the narrative. However, it is
sometimes difficult to differentiate between
narrative and caption – and a bibliography and
map of the PCT bus routes at the takeover would
have been useful.

PCT was not unique in selling out to railway
funded bus operations and this volume can be
recommended to those seeking more background
to the circumstances attending such change.
Those with more general public transport
interests will find a well-presented account of a
small municipal transport enterprise which has
had minimal coverage to date.

Ian Souter

Parry Thomas – The First Driver To Be Killed In Pursuit Of The Land Speed Record. *Hugh Tours*. 2019. Pen & Sword Transport; 47 Church Street, Barnsley, S70 2AS. www.pen-and-sword.co.uk ISBN 978-1-52675-922-1. 180 pp, including some black and white illustrations. £19.99

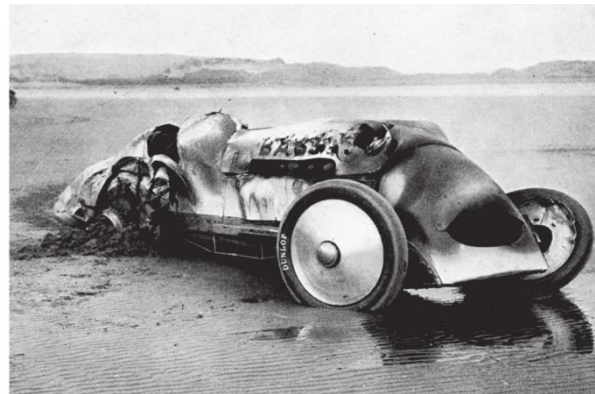
Initially published by BT Batsford in 1959 as *Parry Thomas: Designer-Driver*, this welcome re-publication outlines the achievements of one the pioneer drivers seeking speed records in the early 20th century. Other notable names mentioned, and linked to the achievements of Parry Thomas, are Segrave, Eyston, Malcolm Campbell, Railton and Cobb.

Most famous among John Parry Thomas's endeavours are with the car he named Babs, to which we come later. Yet his earlier career also contributed to the heartfelt epithets accorded on his death – “the finest motor engineer” and “the greatest original thinker”. He was indeed a fine engineer, creating the Thomas electro-mechanical transmission – a design more successful in heavy trucks, buses and railcars produced by his employer Leyland Motors than in cars as originally conceived. Leyland was important in Parry Thomas's life, not only for the high regard in which he was held as chief engineer but also in providing the chassis and motive power for Babs. This is all the more remarkable from the photographs of its earlier versions, its outline lacking grace and aerodynamic form. The engineer's skill lay in producing sleeker versions to overcome its sheer bulk and weight.

Five of the ten chapters focus individually on the ‘Racing’ years between 1922-1926. As such, they risk becoming lists of final results and components rather than building on the strength of personality, engineering and driving skills which created these achievements. Indeed,

despite the brief opening chapter ‘The Personal Angle’, we learn little about the man himself. Nevertheless, some revealing views emerge – whipping out a slide-rule impetuously from his pocket during a theatre performance to do some calculations, his love of children, controversially acting as a volunteer bus driver during the 1926 General Strike and, as a weakness, his inability to delegate.

The final chapter ‘Disaster’ is intriguing, outlining graphically the preparations leading up to the final few runs in Babs on Pendine Beach in Carmarthenshire as he attempted to regain his own land speed record. The means of his death (a fatal head injury from a disintegrating chain-drive) appears to have been caused by a weak wheel spoke breaking free.



Above: The wrecked car

As a re-publication, there are some weaknesses. It is untrue that ‘Babs will never be disturbed’ – she was exhumed from the pristine sands controversially in 1969 and displayed in the Pendine Museum of Speed, then at Beaulieu. No footnote explains this. Likewise, there are sporadic italicised numbers in brackets, presumably referring to footnotes or endnotes missing from the final publication. Nevertheless, for devotees of motoring pioneers and fine engineering, this book is well worth reading.

Rod Ashley

Riding the buses with bus enthusiasts

Amy Graham

Update from Amy Graham, a RTHA Director, who is now halfway through her PhD in Critical Heritage Studies at Sheffield Hallam University. Note that this research is ongoing and comments here are speculative, prior to completion of the thesis.

This research investigates the relationship between heritage and everyday life by exploring how the bus and bus travelling experience become an object of heritage - something of value which we seek to pass down to future generations. Like most qualitative research, the project does not seek to find one answer or truth but is more exploratory or creative. This research adopts an 'interpretivist' approach and draws from a set of theories broadly referred to as 'non-representational' which propose that reality is constructed of both ideas and materials and is experienced in both cognitive and affective (embodied, sensory and emotional) ways.

The project comprises of a two-stage experiment involving visiting the London Transport Museum (Covent Garden) and riding on the London heritage route 15, completed by the researcher with one or two participants at a time.

The Museum is an independent charity, supported by Transport for London, which displays the history of London Transport from around 1800 and includes all modes and contemporary projects (e.g. Crossrail 2). In general, transport museums have been overlooked in academic literature and tend to have a different kind of relationship to conservation than other types of museum, in that vehicles are often preserved in working order and used, rather than kept in glass cases.

Part of the 15 route is operated using original Routemaster-type buses, which is still tendered

by Transport for London. The service has questionable practical utility, running only during summer weekends and Bank Holidays at 20-minute intervals, and only accepting Oyster Card payment. However, it raises several issues pertinent to the concept of heritage, particularly regarding the authenticity of the presented experience (the crew wear contemporary uniforms, and the vehicles are partially reverted to 1950s interior design whilst running using newer engines) and the politics involved in heritage conservation decisions (the route was introduced by Ken Livingstone when withdrawing the Routemasters from regular service in 2005).

During the design of the research, it became apparent that the participant group to focus on would need to have a significant and special relationship with buses, i.e. that the research would become a study of bus enthusiasm. Participants were recruited via the RTHA, the Omnibus Society (London Historical Research Group) and through the volunteers and Friends of London Transport Museum. Twelve people volunteered including retired transport management professionals, former bus drivers and schedulers, and those with a purely personal and often life-long interest in buses. The individuals accepted their 'bus enthusiast' mantle with varying degrees of enthusiasm (!), but what is a bus enthusiast anyway?

Defining Bus Enthusiasm (some initial reflections)

Resources: not a resource heavy activity for children of the 1950s - they could stand at their front window, or ride around their local network for hours at minimal cost. Photography and more expensive aspects of the hobby were for families with more disposable income or a result of first jobs when they could afford to finance their own equipment.

Collecting practices: Publications such as ABC London (Ian Allan books publication) facilitated the 'collection' of bus routes and the vehicles servicing them. Specific notation practices including underlining or scoring through a bus fleet number when it was ridden on or observed. The collection of artefacts might include tickets, timetables, maps, magazines, matchbox toys and model buses. Many of these have been retained for 50+ years or shared with friends and passed on to children or professional contacts. Most often, bus model collections were related to significant route-numbers and bus-types from childhood or later life. Photography also facilitates a collection of sorts – for example, one participant had photographed every New Routemaster in London.

Riding the buses: Participants had preferred seats on the Routemasters, most notably, the upper deck, front right (directly above the driver) or lower desk, front left or right with the ability to observe what the driver was doing. Most participants had acquired a Public Service Vehicle License either professionally or on retirement from their 'proper' job and many are involved in the variety of running days and events across the UK.

Identity: Bus enthusiasm was not an uncommon hobby during childhood in the 1950s - particularly when school journeys and visits to grandparents took them on longer trips. Sharing information and knowledge about special routes and new vehicles was common playground chatter. For many participants, their enthusiasm has led to long term friendships and shared experiences at society conventions and running days. In a professional context within the transport industry, bus enthusiasm was often hidden (one might ask of a new colleague, 'were they a hairy?', meaning, did their interest in buses extend beyond the office). Their enthusiasm might take a back seat during years

of family development and come to the fore on retirement, which explains the membership demographic of the Omnibus Society (made up primarily of those under 25 and over 65). Several participants equated their bus enthusiasm with a passion for their local area or London, as a means to explore and 'know' the city.

Anecdotally, one of the most interesting encounters to happen during the research was with two young boys on the heritage 15 (probably around 12 years old). They had travelled from Stockport for a daytrip on London's buses, and one had memorised most of the central area bus network from the maps available online. He knew more about London and how to traverse it than most Londoners – and this was his first time in the city. He also shared that he had driven a web-based simulation of the No.11 bus route and was clearly an unashamed enthusiast.

It is hoped that a more substantial analysis of the field materials will be published in this journal at a later stage.

Further aspects of Zimbabwe bus history

Peter White

In issue 84 (May 2016) of this journal I provided an account of the development of the bus industry in Zimbabwe, drawing on work there in 1984 and 1994 which also provided the opportunity to gather some material on the earlier history of services. A subsequent note in the November 2016 issue covered aspects of operation in the capital in the late 1970s, notably on fare structure. At the time of writing my earlier piece I was unable to locate some other historical material I had gathered. However, I now have this, enabling some further aspects to be described.

As indicated in the May 2016 issue, the history of bus services prior to formal independence of Zimbabwe in 1980 was dominated by larger, British-owned companies (eventually within the United Transport Overseas Ltd., a subsidiary of BET) in the main urban areas, with a major role played by locally-owned independents in rural areas. Most development had occurred post-World War Two, with the growth in urban population and industrial activity, generating travel within the urban areas and long-distance commuting from rural regions.

Early independent operators

The first motor services in rural regions were probably those of the Road Motor Services (RMS) of the national railways, commencing in June 1927. A photograph in the National Archives shows the first motor operations of the Post Office in the following year. The first bus operations probably appeared in the 1930s, but there is no firm documentation. One of the first

locally-owned businesses was that of F. Pullen in the Lupane area (North Matabeleland, a mid-way point on the main road between Bulawayo and Hwange) around 1946 with a Chevrolet, which developed into the business of F. Pullen and Son, running 36 buses at 1984. In 1947 African Matabeleland Bus Services of Bulawayo began, and also the operations of Mr J. Ruredzo, who by 1967 had built up to a staff of 100¹. Other large, locally-based firms began in the 1950s – P. Hall and Sons of Bulawayo in 1956, and Matambanadzo in 1958. The Hall fleet built up to almost 100 vehicles, establishing a major depot at Bulawayo, and remained one of the largest local operators (if not the largest) at the time of my first visit in 1984, although with slightly smaller fleet by then.

Service regulation

The 1930s saw restrictive quantity licensing systems introduced in many countries, such as the Road Traffic Act of 1930 in Britain. These represented a reaction to the economic depression of that era, seeking to safeguard existing operators and protect the railways. Safety was also a major concern (although this is better dealt with through quality regulation).

Despite the very limited development of motor transport at that time, the government established a similar form of regulation in the Road Motor Transport [RMT] Act of 1936. Bus and road haulage operators were required to obtain permits for each vehicle and each service operated, thus protecting the railways (i.e. each vehicle had a permit specific to a certain service, still in effect in 1984). It became possible to 'buy' permits by taking over existing operators. Both the United group and some larger local firms expanded on this way outside the main urban areas, but a large number of operators continued

¹ Chikerema, Charles 'Rural Buses: too many for too few.....' *The Herald* (Harare) 11 April 1984

in being, with no monopolies developing. The RMT Act was re-enacted in similar form in 1972, the previous Board being replaced by a 'Controller' and two Assistants. Despite this restrictive legislation, the industry continued to grow, although not competing directly with the main rail passenger services.

As mentioned in my previous paper, the larger urban areas were subject to a form of exclusive franchise arrangement. In 1956 a report on transport services in Greater Salisbury and Greater Bulawayo, commonly known as the 'Beadle report', was published². A four-man commission carried out extensive enquiries into the two urban transport systems, including private and public road transport. The possibility of a suburban rail service was examined briefly by the Commission, but no immediate proposals were put forward. The monopoly bus franchise system in both cities was endorsed, despite objections by local operators who argued for competition.

The commission comprised three Europeans and Mr Joshua Nkomo, more widely known as the leader of ZAPU (Zimbabwe African People's Union) who was eventually ousted by Robert Mugabe of ZANU (Zimbabwe African National Union) after formal independence. His role on the commission may at first sight seem surprising, but may also reflect a more open approach found prior to the regime of Ian Smith from 1965. Coltart³ refers to Joshua Nkomo as a 'veteran nationalist' in 1961, when a revised Constitution was being considered: at that time he was leader of the National Democratic Party (NDP).

² Report of Commission of Inquiry into The Transport Services of Greater Salisbury and Greater Bulawayo [The 'Beadle Report'], Salisbury [Harare], November 1956.

³ David Coltart, *The Struggle Continues: 50 Years of Tyranny in Zimbabwe*. Jacana Media (Pty) Ltd., South

Further aspects of urban operations and regulation

As described in my previous article, a municipal bus operation was set up in Salisbury, albeit on a small scale. On my first visit to Zimbabwe in 1984 I became acquainted (through the Institute of Transport) with Richard Cartwright, then a Member of Parliament for the Highfield district within Harare, and sitting as an independent. He had been involved in both bus and road haulage operations from the early 1950s, as recalled in his paper to the Institute of Transport in Salisbury [Harare] in 1977⁴.

He noted that the municipality had small fleet of Daimlers. Urban operations were also established by Transrhodes, running a mixed fleet ranging from a Ford V8 to Seddons and Leylands. In 1952 he had been involved in bringing five Guy double-deckers purchased from London Transport (for £157 each) via Durban, driving overland from there (I have a photocopy of a 'contact' size print of this he lent me in 1984, but unfortunately the quality is too poor to reproduce). The municipal operation, with 18 vehicles, was taken over by the Salisbury Omnibus Co (subsequently part of United) in 1953, along with Transrhodes, then running 38. In 1954 it was granted a franchise giving a monopoly within a 26 km radius of the city, initially for 21 year period running to 1975, then renewed for 12 years to 1987. One local operator, Bernard Vito, was allowed to continue running as an exception to this until taken over by United in 1956².

Cartwright's paper also includes views on the

Africa, 2016, 647pp [the '50 years' may be seen as dating from the coming to power of Ian Smith's Rhodesia Front in 1965]

⁴ R.Cartwright, MCIT, MP 'A paper on 25 years of road transport development in Rhodesia', delivered to the Salisbury [Harare] Branch of the Institute of Transport on 7 February 1977, 6pp

regulatory system under the RMT Act (above). A 'Road Service Board' functioned in a straightforward manner, with a core staff of three, and a board membership of about seven. Both applicants and objectors were able to present their cases, and decisions were given on the spot. However, following a complex case in 1954/55, the process became much more legalistic, with lawyers representing both sides, and far more prolonged, under the 'Department of Motor Transportation'.

An early description of traffic light technology

In issue 85 (August 2016) of this journal we featured a paper by Alistair Gollop on the history of traffic signals. In this he noted that the first manually-operated traffic lights were introduced in London in 1925, and automatically-controlled lights in Wolverhampton in 1927.

An interesting early description of their operation in Britain can be found in a short article by R.S.Lyons in 'The Golden Gift Book', a volume clearly aimed at children, with mix of fiction extracts and factual articles, reprinted by Odhams Press of London in 1948. The factual content includes a series 'How it works' by R.S.Lyons, number VII being 'The secret of the traffic lights'. Much of this consists of a description of the electro-mechanical internal mechanism by which the lights operated, with two diagrams, rather than the overall purpose of the lights.

The example discussed is described as "...one of the popular, hand-controlled, systems... in that the policeman on traffic duty near the apparatus is enabled to stop the mechanism in the small hours, when traffic is reduced to almost nothing...". The policeman on duty was also able to set cycle times of one minute, a minute and a half, or two minutes.

The first aspect has parallels with recent thinking that traffic lights need not be operated for the whole 24-hour period (effectively reviving an earlier practice?). The second is not dissimilar to fixed cycle settings today, or upper limits that apply to automatically-controlled systems.

PRW

**Road Transport History Association
Meeting Saturday 19 October 2019**

Date: 19th October 2019, 1000 to 1530

Venue: Coventry Transport Museum, Millennium Place, Hales Street, Coventry, CV1 1JD

Programme:

From 1000 Coffee and tea

1100 David Starkie 'Early motorways and the Road Haulage Industry: was it fit for purpose?'

1130 John Edser 'Parcels Distribution Networks in the 1980s'

1220 Philip Kirk 'The rule of the road'

Members' open forum. Bring along your pet project for an informal presentation and discussion.

1300 Lunch

1400 Membership and other issues

1430 David Greenwood 'Electric Vehicles – Myths, Truths and the Way Ahead'

David Greenwood is Professor of Advanced Propulsion Systems and Director of Energy at WMG, The University of Warwick. His research spans batteries, electric motors, power electronics, and the integration and control of these for propulsion and energy applications. He leads a team of over 250 researchers and engineers across these fields, working on projects in cars, trucks, boats, diggers, aircraft and motorcycles

1530 Close

Payment details: £18 members, £20 non-members. Booking fee includes buffet lunch.

EITHER by bank transfer to: 40-52-40 00031614 CAF Bank and an email to <roadshistoryassoc@outlook.com> clearly stating the name(s) of those attending.

OR By sending a cheque to: R&RTHA, c/o The Bus Archive, 8 De Salis Drive, Hampton Lovett, Droitwich Spa, Worcs, WR9 0QE including a note clearly stating the name(s) of those attending.

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