

# ROADS AND ROAD TRANSPORT

## HISTORY CONFERENCE COLLOQUIUM

3rd November 2001

Report of Proceedings

The 2001 Colloquium was held in the Garden Room of the Midland Hotel, Derby, on Saturday 3rd November 2001. Delegates were welcomed by the Chairman, Professor John Hibbs, who also welcomed our new President, Garry Turvey, who was attending his first R&RTHC event since he agreed to accept the Presidency.

John reminded us that despite the fact that one source told him that the word "colloquium" was "a term no longer in use", his dictionary said otherwise, and he hoped that delegates would illustrate the true meaning of the word by making their voices heard after each of the speakers' presentations.

The title of Colloquium 2001 was:

### **"The Preservation and Disposal of Personal Collections"**

**Ian Yearsley was the first speaker, and his theme was making a will, briefing executors and beneficiaries, and ensuring that items you value will be accessible to future historians.**

Ian began by warning against doing nothing. It was not an option. If then, making a will is essential, how should this be done? (Not making a will can result in all the estate being turned into money, and monies going to obscure relatives.)

Firstly, you should identify the items which you wish to see preserved. What are the things your family or friends might value? What are the things that a transport archive might value? Which items might nobody in particular value? How should these things be identified?

Secondly, having identified items as worthy of preservation, you should consider who would not only welcome them, but be able to look after them. It is necessary to ask questions, to do some research in advance, to find out which archive, library, society or institution would take your bequest and which has the facilities for taking care of it and allowing access by others to it. Find out, too, about the policy on the items which may be duplicated.....may they be sold for the benefit of the recipient?

Thirdly, one should find out whether the beneficiary is a registered charity.....the latter status gives some assurance of continuity and can be of benefit to the deceased's estate in that tax is not due on the value of items left to charity (It is necessary, however, to ascertain the charity's proper title, address and regis-

tered number, to quote in the will.)

Next, choose your executors wisely. It is best to choose people who live near you, who are younger than yourself. Tell them your wishes and get their agreement, and choose from people who understand the material they are asked to handle. For example, a recent estate for disposal involved papers and books to do with the family, with the travel trade, and with transport. And so three executors were appointed, one from the family, one with knowledge of the travel trade, and one with knowledge of transport matters.

It is best to show your chosen executors what you have and where it is stored. Items can be marked (with a colour coded spot). Give your executors a photocopy of your will, and an additional letter to clarify any points that may be doubtful. (For example, try to cover any "grey" areas where items may be seen to be of interest to more than one of the beneficiaries.)

Photographs and negatives (or other items) may involve copyright. You should specify that copyright is also part of the bequest.

When the will is drafted, even if it has been submitted to a solicitor to be put into legal language, remember that the solicitor is unlikely to understand everything about the collection. It may be best to ask if any of the societies, libraries etc. have a standard bequest form which may be incorporated in the will.

Indexing and cataloguing are essential with an extensive collection. Are such compatible with the systems likely to be used by others? In some cases, collections have been left with instructions that they be not broken up. Except in very special cases, this is an embarrassment to the recipient, and can hinder access to the material in the future.

Finally, some people not only leave archives and artifacts, but also leave money to ensure their continued care. However much material is welcome to the recipient, there will be a cost in keeping it. This should be kept in mind.

### **Subsequent discussion**

The ensuing discussion re-emphasised the following points. John Hibbs recalled that his own will involved separate executors with expertise in theology, economics and transport. Andrew Johnson emphasised the pitfalls of borderlines, and problems of valuation of such as copyright on photographs and intellectual copyright on published materials. John Howie spoke of the problems of cataloguing, and of

the incompatibility of "home-made" systems. Norman Bartlett reminded us that the present law is that **copyright expires seventy years after death**. Alan Cross took up this topic and reminded us that you cannot bequeath copyright of things to which you yourself do not own the copyright....for example any photographs in your possession which you own but did not take. Colin Billington emphasised the duty of the recipient to **keep to the law on copyright**.....the recipient cannot use material to which he has not been assigned the copyright.

John Dunabin raised the issue of **estate duty and valuation of copyright** etc. An executor is able to "take a view" on what is unclear, but it is always better for precise instructions to be left in these matters.

Roger de Boer enquired if it was absolutely necessary to quote registered numbers of charities in a will. It was suggested in reply, that such is best, and if a will had already been drawn up, a codicil could append the necessary details.

Grahame Boyes pointed out that the Public Record Office had recently published a guide to the **law on copyright**, and this included guidance on the questions raised by **electronic communications**. A booklet also exists that deals with photographic copyright: (see details at end.) **Unindexed photographic collections** are not welcomed or refused in some cases:

Ted Gadsby spoke on issues connected with the Omnibus Society Library. **Duplicate material** is passed to "Osmart", run by Derek Broadhurst, who will go out to collect materials and who sells them generally within the OS. Ted was first to mention that there are enthusiasts who are "loners" that have no membership of any formal or informal group. What happens to their collections. He mentioned how a chance remark in a newspaper obituary column led to the discovery of some important timetables.

John Edser asked if **donations to charities** (non taxable) can be sold off by the charities.

One "problem" to which there is no answer is that gifts may be accepted by institutions or others and kept, but then at a future date, the recipient may wish to raise money and see fit to sell the gifted items.

The second speaker was Richard Storey, formerly of the Warwick University Modern Records Centre, who in particular spoke of the collection of papers.

Richard began by pointing out that it was perhaps better to dispose of one's collection oneself, before death. If that course was not attractive, then a will should be seen as a simple instruction sheet.

One should look at one's papers critically. Is their value merely personal to the creator? Do they

have a value in cash? Of what value would they be to a future custodian? Do they have any intellectual property value? Are the materials of value to the collector, and would they be of value and relevance to the potential custodian (archivist or librarian)?

What form are they? Notebooks need not be kept if their contents have been transferred to other works or documents. Notes made from other published works are similar. Photographic collections may well have many examples of others' work, and may contain many of one's own pictures which have been widely disseminated. Correspondence with fellow enthusiasts may contain items worth preserving. Subject files may well be good for preservation, unless they represent the material gathered for a work that has been published. Drafts of unpublished works are important and should be kept.

Published books, journals etc. are best disposed of to commercial booksellers, unless they are clearly rare because of their age or content. Leaflets and other ephemera, so-called *grey literature*, and booklets of limited distribution are best preserved. (Such will probably not be lodged in copyright libraries) Press cuttings on a particular theme, although published material, are best kept because to re-create the file would take much searching and time. A well-ordered collection is a valuable asset.

Many papers lose much of their value if they are not properly ordered. If this is so, NOW is the time to put material in order. Young enthusiasts should be encouraged to think of the future and establish some order in their collections from the start.

Do not forget about the contents of your PC. It is best to keep hard copy of most of this, not only for posterity but as an insurance against malfunction of the machine. At least keep a list of what you have on electronic files.

One should look at a collection with a critical eye. What is unique in it? Are notes of observations, unpublished writings, *grey literature* gathered, rare or unique, or common or garden? If material appears to be rare or unique, to whom should it go? Is it material which you have finished with? Can it be passed on now? Libraries hate bequests of books, most of which they are likely to have already. If you are to make a gift of papers, has the intended repository the means to store the material? Why not help by purchasing archive boxes to house your valuable papers now and for the future?

You are the best person to know what is in the collection and what it all means. Remember to find out who would value what, label and annotate, pass on particular items to those who may currently be able to make best use of them. Remember that archives are always under pressure, with insufficient

resources of finance, time, staffing and space.

#### **Subsequent discussion**

David Harman and others spoke of the pitfalls of material held on computer. **Hard copy** was by far the best, as disks, programs and machines all become obsolete (many have done in the last 30 years). It did not seem a wise idea to keep old machines just to read certain files.

Alan Cross counselled acting in one's own lifetime, and not waiting for others to do it !

Unfortunately, our third speaker was unable to attend at the last minute. John Hibbs announced that Ian Yearsley, with his TMS background, had agreed to step in, to talk about the problems of preserving artifacts, including complete vehicles.

Ian began by telling us that he had insight into collection management from his work on various committees with the Tramway Museum Society. He pointed out that societies today who relied upon outside funding were under great pressure for "curatorial excellence" and scrutiny as to why they were doing what they were doing, and in donating items to them, your items would come under scrutiny and perhaps, unless you had checked beforehand, might be discarded. Another problem is that conserving records does not contribute towards income, so there is a conflict between conservation and operation of a museum. Ian also stressed the need for good labelling and pre-sorting of donated material. (Some artifacts have been difficult to identify).

In the case of vehicles, which are best seen in working order and in use, there is a dilemma facing the owner.....how far should one go in replacing defective parts and replacing items such as wiring which are not in line with today's safety standards ? For example, trams rebuilt at Crich receive new safety glass and wiring, and fire extinguishers. Defective parts removed were kept in some cases as samples of the original.

#### **Subsequent discussion**

Roger de Boer spoke on the theme of fitting replacement parts in regard to preserved buses. Ray Stanmore spoke of the problems in renewing wiring in preserved buildings. Brian Elliott spoke regarding steam railway locos, where two sets of rules for main line running and for running on private lines apply. Other difficulties are caused by the need to provide access for the disabled (a point raised by John Edsors)

Mrs. Pat Sutcliffe referred in detail to her husband's unique collection of restored vehicles. Such a collection could not have been put together without a single-minded input of time and money, and there seemed to be no obvious or satisfactory solution as to

what could be done with the vehicles in the long term. A trust did not seem to be the answer, as there was no obvious choice of trustees

The subject of **photography** was raised again, and the solution to the problem of old film stock and non-standard sizes being digitised. Charles Roberts and Ian Yearsley described how negatives of still and moving images may be digitised and the original material then kept in deep freeze. Alan Cross pointed out that digital prints are not yet of as high a quality as good photographic prints from negatives. Again the question of selection was raised...Charles Roberts making the point that digital manipulating is time consuming, and it is not worth while doing this for all the pictures in a collection.

Returning to the preservation of large objects, we were reminded that there are limits as to what can be stored. (.When is a Boeing 747 to be preserved ?) Alan Cross drew attention to the difference between an object stored in a well-funded museum, and one kept privately in an old barn. Many objects (vehicles) were kept purely for private sentiment and according to the owner's means.

**At this point that the meeting was adjourned for lunch. The first speaker in the afternoon was Brian Longworth of the Glasgow Transport Study Group, Glasgow, who spoke on the subject of setting up a self-help Group concerned with history and preservation.**

Brian told us that he had started off as a boy and young man with an interest in Glasgow's transport. Eventually he had the opportunity of working for Glasgow Corporation Transport as an accountant, and this led him to a "treasure trove" of documents in the basement of the offices. Over many years he extracted material from this source, and seized the opportunity, just before Deregulation in 1986, of rescuing many documents from destruction.

Storage of the material was a problem, there is so much he has yet to complete the task of evaluating it. Some material has been taken by the Glasgow Archives Department, other material went to TMS, and when the Sumerlee Museum with a working tramway was established this also became a suitable home for materials and artifacts. A visit to the library one day revealed that someone else had an interest in Glasgow tramways, and eventually a number of like-minded individuals came together informally as the GTSG. One stated aim is to document Glasgow Cpn. Transport in the same comprehensive way as Leeds and Liverpool have been done. The task is too large for any one person to do, and many of the members specialise in a particular field. (e.g. destination blinds, badges, fares etc.) It may not culminate in the publi-

cation of a series of detailed volumes, for which there is a limited market, but in several general books and a CD on which the finer detail will be stored. It is important to copy to this disk a list of all members material to avoid irretrievable loss on death. Several copies of the CD are kept for security. Brian in particular mentioned the fact that there are enthusiasts who pursue their transport studies in isolation, and their collections are often the ones to be lost. It is important to find these people and enlist their help.

#### Subsequent discussion

Brian's last point was illustrated by reference to a collection now in safe keeping of over 1000 photographs of the trams and buses of Exeter Corporation taken by one person. Paul Jefford (LVVS) said that he found vehicle restorers and record keepers are two distinct breeds. He felt that the use of data bases was one way of avoiding the break-up of particular collections.

Ron Phillips stated he felt publication and dissemination were often the best way of preserving material. He felt some enthusiasts were too possessive and unwilling to share their knowledge. John Hibbs spoke of a recent project of his own - he had conducted taped interviews with twenty-five former NBC managers in which they spoke frankly. These recordings were now deposited with the Kithead Archive under the 30 year rule.

Alan Cross referred to research he was conducting into gas bus trailers - he felt it was the last chance to document this as the generation that had used and knew the wartime gas buses was dying out.

Roger Atkinson introduced the subject of the "hidden historians" who needed to be identified. Brian Longworth referred to one of the GTSG members who had never been a member of any other society in his life, and referred again to the CD which contained a cross-referenced list of all members' "bits & pieces"

Ian Yearsley emphasised the importance of the GTSG's work, as Glasgow Tramways had been a leading organisation of its kind, and its methods had been widely copied. The issue of the destruction of official records was raised by John Hibbs (who urged vigilance when transport enterprises are seen to be on the brink of closing down) and Mervyn Ashton who recounted how Liverpool and Merseyside PTE records had been rescued, but unfortunately and not for want of trying, those of Merseybus had not. He thought that there was good co-ordination of efforts between the various societies in the North West, but felt that there was a need for better organisation in other parts of the country.

The final speaker was Andrew Johnson of the PSV Circle, who outlined the idea of "Trustee Rescuers" to save the destruction of collections.

Andrew advised individuals to think about their collections and act appropriately, neither too soon nor too late. All transport societies should get together, and perhaps the "major" ones (he thought there were at least ten) could fund a scheme with, say, £100 each. This would allow collections to be retrieved, sorted and disposed of appropriately, with some benefit to the family of the deceased. A problem was timing, when should a family be approached, but the real answer to this lay with the deceased making arrangements before death. He quoted some recent retrievals of documents he had made in South Africa, and of another in this country which he felt had been "too late".

#### Subsequent Discussion

The opening speakers raised the problem of finding bodies prepared to receive and store documents, which is not seen to be an income generating activity. Roger de Boer opined that many museums were administered by people who had little enthusiasm for nor knowledge of what they were being asked to keep.

John Hibbs outlined how he saw the R&RTHC acting as "an umbrella organisation" to facilitate co-ordination between its member societies. John Edsall said he would like to see a published list of "which society held what" in its archives. Grahame Boyes spoke of places where items might be sent (Record Offices, major local libraries etc.) and suggested that Conference could play a role in placing refused items. Richard Storey referred once again to the pressure on space in Museums which often will only keep archives relevant to the items which they hold

#### Conclusion

John Hibbs (Chairman of the R&RTHC) made the plea that the status of transport history be raised.

Roger Atkinson (Treasurer of the R&RTHC) thanked the speakers and delegates for their attendance and contributions, and reiterated that the R&RTHC wants to take forward many of the points raised. He welcomed new members and pointed out that the outcome of the 2001 Colloquium will be discussed at the AGM and Business Meeting on 9th February 2002 at the Museum of British Road Transport Coventry.

Gordon Knowles (Secretary of the R&RTHC) concluded by saying that if we are going to take on extra functions, then we need people to help to do it, people willing to devote time additionally to the five who at present constitute the Officers of the Conference.

*These notes, with some additional material, will appear in the February 2002 edition of the R&RTHC Newsletter. There is an attached annexe of useful addresses etc. supplied herewith.*