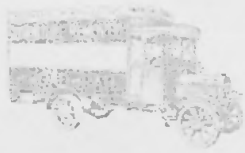

Autumn Colloquium
1 November 2003 - Moat House Hotel, Chester

A MEDLEY OF THOUGHTS

concerning Road Transport History

COLLOQUIUM PAPERS

Roads and Road Transport History Association

Founded in 1992 to support historical research

It is regretted that one paper presented at the Colloquium, "Road Vehicle Testing" by John Parsons, is unable to be included.

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The Perils and Pleasures of writing Business Histories with particular reference to Road Transport and Shipping

Nigel Watson

My talk this morning has the title of 'Perils & Pleasures'. It was John Armstrong who suggested I talk to you - you will know how persuasive he can be, having already got me to contribute in a small way to the Companion of Road Haulage History. So may I thank him as well as the Association for your kind invitation.

As it turned out, as I was considering what I was going to talk about, I began to feel that perhaps the only link between the title and my talk was that the peril lay in coming here at all while the only pleasure would be reaching the last full stop.
I was going to concentrate more generally on my work in the field of business histories but then I found myself looking at my previous work and discovered that I had actually had a greater involvement in businesses related to roads and road transport than I remembered. And then I began to consider how little we tend to hear about the many people who pioneered road transport in this country during the first half of the 20th century. So I hope I can stretch the meaning of the title of my talk - and sub-title it in line with the title of today's meeting as a 'A Medley of Pioneering Road Transport Personalities' - to encapsulate something of the perils endured and pleasures enjoyed by these pioneers during their working lives.

The first of my three sets of pioneers is Harold Swift. Harold founded the business which became Swift Transport Services, a business whose separate identity is now slowly being absorbed within its parent company, Christian Salvesen.

He began his business in Skegness on the Lincolnshire coast in 1928. By all accounts, he was typical of the road hauliers of his time. One local newspaper described him as a 'Rough Diamond - tough & rugged-looking, self-made man, no frills manner, natural good humour, heart of gold'. Leaving school at 13, he pursued a succession of jobs before selling his motorcycle for £7, borrowing 10s from his father and buying a second-hand Bedford lorry.

The story which I shall call 'Harold & The Lion' comes from Harold's early involvement with Billy Butlin who was building his first holiday camp in Skegness during Harold's first year in business.

At his holiday camps Billy Butlin established a number of small zoos. Harold was often asked to ferry animals from one zoo to the other. When Billy opened his zoo in Bognor in 1933, he asked Harold to bring down a lorryload of animals from Skegness. One of these was Rex the lion. Somehow Rex was never loaded, but when Harold arrived in Bognor without him, rumours started that Rex had escaped. The national press got hold of the story and, just like today, created out of very little a headline-grabbing story about a ferocious lion roaming the Sussex countryside. Rex, of course, had not the faintest idea how to be ferocious.

For Billy Butlin, it was a wonderful opportunity for free publicity. So he organised a lion hunt.

Things began to get a bit out of hand. A dead sheep was found, mauled to death, it was claimed, by poor old Rex. Local panic ensued - schools were closed, the Territorial Army was called out.

Billy, shrewd as ever, told Harold to fetch Rex down from Skegness overnight. In the morning he promptly announced the lion had been re-captured.

That was not quite the end of things. Billy, together with a local sheep farmer and a local journalist, was charged with causing a public nuisance. Harold testified on Billy's behalf. The farmer and the journalist, who had organised the so-called killing of the sheep, were found guilty but Billy got off. He telegrammed his mother 'Justice has been done'; his mother replied 'Appeal at once'.

Harold's business followed the pattern of many other similar businesses. Despite his work for Butlin and for the military during the Second World War, Harold's remained essentially a local business. And then one morning in August 1949 he opened his mail to discover the business he had built up to 15 vehicles was no longer his own.

Nationalisation of road haulage had been expected for some time but this did nothing to soften the blow for Harold Swift. He took a position with British Road Services, the new nationalised company, but hated every minute of it. He was not easily constrained by the change from employer to depot superintendent. So he had little hesitation in borrowing what was needed to buy back the business in May 1954. But 8 years later he had only rebuilt his business from the 7 vehicles to which it had shrunk under BRS to the 15 which he had sold to the state in the first place.

His big break came later in the 1950s when he heard that the local company contracted to carry spare parts for Ford in East Anglia was giving up the work. His success in winning the contract transformed the business which had never enjoyed long-term work on such a scale. Swift came to rely on Ford for 90% of the firm's work.

The progress of the business was steady rather than spectac-

ular during the 1950s and 1960s. Harold, like many small businessmen, was financially conservative and averse to borrowing money. In any case, until the 1968 Transport Act, additional 'A' licences were always hard to get.

And, after his earlier experience, Harold also liked to feel that he was in control of the business. There was no other management to speak of. Harold, known to his drivers as 'Swifty', took a personal interest in his men. He never gave them a job he would not do himself. Typically his reaction to hearing that one of his drivers had been found asleep in a lay-by was that he probably deserved a rest after a hard job. He started a sports & social club, organising Christmas dinner dances and children's outings when he would hand out a small brown packet with spending money to each child.

But when Harold fell seriously ill in the late 1960s, it was clear that the business either had to change or had to be sold. His teacher son, Rick, was persuaded to join the business and, to compensate for his inexperience, began to bring in experienced outside managers to help him run the business. It was these managers who would be principally responsible for turning the business into the £85 million business which was sold to Salvesen in 1993.

Ford is the link between Harold Swift and my second set of early pioneers, Tom Silcock and Harold Colling, who began the UK's first motor delivery agency, Silcock & Colling, in 1926. Both men worked at Ford's Trafford Park plant, Silcock as a sales clerk, Colling on the production line.
These were the days when the dealer was responsible for collecting the assembled cars from the factory. Tom Silcock dealt with enquiries from the dealers. They were frequently short of drivers to pick up the cars and he was always being asked if he could do anything to help.

Trying to be helpful, as well as seeing the chance of earning a bit more money, Tom talked things over with Harold Colling and they hit on the idea of delivering the cars, Model T Fords, in their spare time, roping in some of their friends as well.

It was hard work. Harold Colling, for example, would clock off his shift at the factory at 4.30pm, having started at 7.00am, and drive a Model T through the night to London. He then returned to Manchester by the 2.30am train from Euston in time to start his next shift.

One wonders howany of them ever had any energy to carry on working after putting in such hours but Silcock & Colling were more worried about being delayed by fog on the way down or missing the train on the way back.

Apparently it was their slightly haphazard time-keeping which first alerted the factory's production manager to their moonlighting. He told them he appreciated that what they were doing was in the best interests of both the company and the dealers but they had to decide whether they wished to carry on working at the factory or run their own business. And so the partnership of Silcock & Colling came into being. It was not very long before these two Mancunians had to follow Ford south to the company's new plant at Dagenham which was opened in 1931. As economic conditions improved during the 1930s, so Silcock & Colling were joined by other delivery agents. By 1939 there were a dozen of them, all trying to beat each other to new business as another motor dealer opened up somewhere in the country.

The war saw the temporary merger of the Ford motor agents - Silcock & Colling, Toleman's, Wright's and Dagenham Delivery Services - for the delivery of military vehicles made by Ford to depots nationwide. Silcock & Colling were keen on formalising the merged business after the war. They reached agreement with Dagenham Deliveries in 1945. Toleman's and Wright's preferred to remain independent although all the Ford agents kept in touch through a newly created cartel, the Ford Collecting & Delivery Agents Association.

Harold Colling in particular became the recognised face of Silcock & Colling. It was Harold who dealt on a day-to-day basis with the Ford people at Dagenham; it was Harold who was often out on the road delivering cars and checking up on his drivers; it was Harold who was to be seen around the yard in Dagenham, parking up vehicles.

Silcock & Colling handled half of Ford's delivery business in the post-war years and by the late 1950s were employing more than 600 drivers.

This was the peak of the plate-driving era as a constant stream of drivers, red-and-white trade plates fixed to their vehicles, left the Dagenham compound day in, day out. There were three categories of plate-drivers - the regular long-distance drivers, the local delivery drivers and a handful liable to be sent anywhere. Tom Silcock and Harold Colling expected their drivers and the cars they delivered to be presentable at all times. Anyone caught exceeding the maximum running-in speed of 30 mph or incurring more than two accidents was given their cards.

The conditions under which vehicles were delivered were tough. The company was operated on the basis that the needs of the customer were paramount. Harold Colling would say 'Never tell the customers our problems. They are our problems. Tell me. Whatever the customer says, do it. If it's impossible, try it'. Cars had been delivered by Tom Silcock and Harold Colling in all weathers at all times of the day and night and that was how they continued to run their business. Such conditions were typical of the motor delivery industry but that did not make them any more endurable. In the post-war years heaters were usually an optional extra in cars and even then they were fitted by the dealer after delivery. Drivers wore their thickest overcoats and scarves and even wrapped brown paper around their legs in an attempt to keep warm. Without a heater or heated rear windows, the windows not only misted over, they froze. Drivers tried to keep the windscreen clear by propping open the bonnet to channel heat from the engine on to the screen. Otherwise they tried to keep the screen clear by breathing on it or rubbing it vigorously. But often this was not enough and frequent stops had to be made to clear the ice. Even the solitary wiper-blade fitted to many vehicles of the day would be frozen. Screen washers were unheard of and every driver had a bottle of water and a rag.

Given these conditions, low pay, no sick pay, limited holidays and unpaid unproductive time, it is scarcely surprising that a nine-day strike forced the company to recognise the trades union.

Silcock & Colling stuck to the plate-driver delivery system longer than their rivals. It was what they knew. The cost of investing in the new car transporters appalled them when their major item of recurring capital expenditure had been trade plates. The company acquired its first transporters in 1956 but others in the industry were already well ahead in developing their transporter fleets.

Times were changing for the motor delivery agents. Ford had invested in Cartics, double-deck wagons for delivering cars by rail, but they were not in the motor delivery business and expected their agents not only to take over Ford's Cartic fleet but also to invest in more.

And as more cars were being produced and more were being sold, motor vehicle delivery became a more urgent business. So Ford took over the responsibility for the delivery agents from the dealers, for the first time allocating regions to each agent and demanding that every vehicle should be delivered within a set number of days.

For Tom Silcock and Harold Colling, elderly, conservative, set in their ways, all these changes seemed revolutionary. Harold Colling's son, Garth, who had worked for Ford before joining Silcock & Colling, had few shares and little influence over the direction of the business. As with Swift, it would be left to others to take the business forward. In 1964 Tom Silcock and Harold Colling sold up. The business went through several different owners over the next 25 years and, just like Swift, ended up disappearing during the consolidation of the industry in the 1990s.

As chance would have it, Ford is also the link with my final set of pioneers, Arthur and John Watts. Watts of Lydney, a small market town between the Forest of Dean and the Severn, were one of the earliest Ford agents in the area and during the First World War members of the family, including Greta Watts, regularly travelled up to Trafford Park to bring back vehicles for customers.

The origin of the Watts business lay in a small village shop in the 1850s, which in turn became an ironmonger's, supplying the local farms and collieries, adding a cycle agency in the 1890s, and then the Ford agency in about 1912.
Josiah Watts was the ironmonger and cycle agent but it was his two eldest sons, Arthur, born in 1887, and John, born in 1890, who became fascinated with developing forms of transport. Arthur quickly showed an aptitude for engineering and a love for motor vehicles. His first purchase was a second-hand Rex motor-cycle, on which he was caught speeding through Chepstow at 12 mph; then in 1910 he and John bought their first motor car together, a 1900 single cylinder De Dion Bouton which had to be pushed up hills by passengers while the driver ran alongside.

While Arthur was the engineer, John showed more of an interest in the logistical side of transport. He was barely 20 when, in the days before the Post Office ran delivery vans, he won a mail delivery contract, moving from a horse-drawn van to a Model T Ford van.

While John was meeting the London to South Wales mail train every morning, Arthur was building up a motor accessories business around the Ford agency. The purchase day book for 1913-14 is filled with names of firms in the cycle, motor-cycle and motor-car trades, including BSA, Humber, Triumph, Daimler, Wolseley, and Studebaker. Dunlop, Michelin and Avon Rubber were supplying tyres, carbide was being sold for primitive headlamps and petrol was available in two-gallon cans.

Both men saw service during the First World War. John served in France with Motor Transport Division, delivering lorry loads of ammunition under shell fire; Arthur trained with the Royal Naval Air Service and joined the aero-engine instructional staff at Cranwell.

John sought for as long as possible to keep Arthur out of the war; he just did not want him to endure the hell he had been experiencing. The brothers were genuinely close. They were both very different men in terms of character and personality but they complemented rather than contrasted with each other. And they relied upon each other within their own diverging yet related business interests, linked by their common involvement in motor transport.

During the 1920s Arthur concentrated on the development of the Lydney business which at first consisted of two arms - a short-lived road haulage business and a motor garage with lorry sales.

The brothers persuaded a group of prosperous businessmen within their close-knit local community to invest in the Lydney business. This small group of men provided not only the strategic view which the brothers often allowed to get lost in their entrepreneurial pursuits but also drew them back to the fundamentals of keeping the business afloat.

The story of how Arthur and John started selling lorries after the war illustrates just how entrepreneurial they were. They took advantage of the huge number of cheap war surplus vehicles available in the UK and from overseas. Firstly they brought back Leylands and Peerless from Cologne, Arras and - of all places - Slough. Later on, in 1924, Arthur discovered that 200 Albion 32 hp chain-driven three-ton lorries were lying around in Salonika (now Thessalonika) in Greece. They had been intended for sale to the Serbian Government but had never been paid for.

This was too good an opportunity for Arthur to miss. He calculated that each Albion, properly overhauled, could be sold for £250 in the UK. He estimated that buying them and bringing them back would cost £20,000 (equivalent today to some £500,000). If he could raise the money, he was looking at a healthy profit on each vehicle, even including the costs of overhauling them once they were back in Lydney. It seems too fantastic a story but this Gloucestershire engineer persuaded the bank to let him borrow the money, travelled by train across Europe, bought 200 rusting lorries, and chartered a Greek steamer to bring back the lorries, a quantity of spares and, as Arthur loved to recall, 'a large number of Greek rats'. The lorries were disembarked at Newport in South Wales and then either driven or towed to a field belonging to a local Lydney farmer who was also on the board of Arthur's business. In the meantime the brothers had bought an old aircraft hangar on Salisbury Plain which they dismantled and re-erected in Lydney. Here the lorries were overhauled, re-built or renovated. The brothers were inundated with enquiries from all over the country and the lorries were sold with ease. It was an incredibly successful venture.

Some of these Albions were kept for conversion into lorry-buses for John Watts' fledgling bus business. This was, of course, a period when bus companies were springing up all over the country and competition was cut-throat. John began his bus services in South Wales trading as the Valleys Motor Bus Services in 1922. On his first outing, the public were so enthusiastic that they had to be pushed off the running boards for their own safety.

His success in the Valleys led him to repeat the venture around the Lydney and he built up both businesses in parallel, in Wales, through Western Services Ltd and in Gloucestershire under the name of Gloster (Red & White) Services, after the livery of the buses.

John, a man of seemingly boundless energy, utilised charm and ruthlessness in equal measure to develop his business interests. Many operators fell under the spell of his charm and merged their operations with his and it was in this way that he recruited many able executives which sustained the pace at which the business grew. On the other hand, those who refused to co-operate with him were usually ground into oblivion. He forced one competitor out of business during a three year battle which cost him thousands of pounds. Competing buses sped along at speeds of up to 40 mph, twice the speed limit, as they fought to poach each other's passengers. At one point 36 buses were fighting on the same route for the trade of 12.

John employed his brother as de facto chief engineer of his growing bus business and used the Lydney garage as far as possible for maintaining all his buses. John enjoyed beneficial terms from his brother's business which tended to result in periods of excessive credit, often criticised by the Watts board. But this did lead to Watts taking a significant stake in John's expanding empire, part of which came about through the conversion of outstanding credit into shares.

John valued his brother's advice although he did not always take it. When John asked Arthur to help him assess a small Welsh bus firm in which he was interested, Arthur told him not to touch it with a barge-pole. 'Pity!', said John, 'because I've already bought it!'

By 1930 the bus services built up by John Watts through Red & White alone employed 1,000 staff, carried 10 million passengers and earned £400,000 in revenue. And that was just half of his operations!

Arthur, as well as advising his brother on engineering matters, was adding motor franchises to and expanding the spare parts business of the Lydney business. But his engineering flair - which often worried his fellow directors - would always distract him from the more mundane tasks of planning and administration he was expected to handle.

The project which obsessed him during the late 1920s was an attempt to devise an alternative to the petrol engine which was proving so thirsty for the lorries and buses maintained by the Lydney garage. He experimented with running petrol engines on vaporising oil, developing special carburettors, but abandoned this scheme in favour of developing a successful diesel engine in place of the noisy, smelly, smoky and costly versions being imported from the Continent. He even got as far as taking out a patent on an experimental diesel engine in 1929 before his board, alarmed at the escalating expenditure for a project whose returns seemed far distant, ordered a halt.

Thwarted again, Arthur turned his energies to seeking out the most suitable alternative engine available with which to convert existing petrol-driven vehicles. The alternative he found was the Gardner diesel engine which by the early 1930s was reaching a pre-eminent position. Watts became Gardner's regional agents and engine sales and conversion work formed a large part of the company's business during the 1930s. Particularly important was the conversion of the Red & White fleet, especially after the Lydney garage lost the Red & White maintenance contract. The first engine, fitted to bus No 116, Lydney, in 1930, was still running in 1938, having completed 350,000 miles.

Arthur sold many engines to customers on the basis that they could afford to pay for it from the savings they made. When one customer, who had also ordered new tankers from Watts, failed to keep up his payments, Watts not only repossessed the vehicles but also took over the customer's contract to carry milk for Wiltshire Creameries. Watts then transferred the contract to Red & White Services where John Watts set up a new company, Bulwark Transport Ltd, for the purpose in 1934. Here was another business venture of John Watts which grew rapidly. Based in Chippenham, Bulwark Transport had a fleet of 17 tankers by 1937, having succeeded in taking most of the local milk traffic away from the railways. By 1952 Bulwark was operating 130 vehicles and transporting liquids of all kinds, many on contract for major companies.

Bulwark's success encouraged John Watts and his colleagues to start up a general haulage business. In 1937 Red & White took over several haulage firms, combining them to form All British Carriers Ltd, based in Newport.

The skill of John Watts lay in creating networks to deliver services over a wider area through melding together an amalgam of disparate operators and utilising the best of their existing management. Western Services and Red & White were both an amalgam of numerous operators melded into two discrete units.

He applied this to long-distance coach services firstly through Red & White, with through ticketing, inter-connecting time-tables and more comfortable vehicles, and then, in 1934, through Associated Motorways. For example, where a passenger wishing to travel from Derby to Cheltenham previously used 12 services run by 7 operators, under Associated Motorways, whose members retained their separate identities, this was now covered by a single road service licence.

In 1937 Red & White United Transport Ltd became a public company which, from the following year, consisted of just two operating companies, Red & White Services and United Welsh Services. It was the UK's largest independent bus and coach operation with a fleet of 500 vehicles, carrying 18 million passengers over 13 million miles every year.

Arthur remained Red & White's chief engineer until post-war nationalisation. As far as Watts of Lydney was concerned, he became increasingly conservative, having been scared by a non-transport related business disaster in the late 1930s. But his engineering flair could not be kept down and, alongside many other successful ventures, he took the business into remoulding tyres which ultimately led to the industrial tyre making business which forms the core activities of the company today, which is still family-owned and family-managed.

John was phlegmatic about nationalisation. He took his compensation and simply started all over again at the age of almost 60. But this time his horizons lay overseas. He transformed a small acquisition into the African Transport Company in 1950. This formed part of United Transport, established from the non-nationalised remnants of his transport interests, and by 1962 it possessed bus and road haulage operations stretching from Kenya to South Africa. He was still as sharp as ever. Visiting Dar Es Salaam, where his business was not represented, he enquired about the population. On being told it was 100,000, he exclaimed 'Then why aren't we here!' United was a private company and, to develop its interests in Africa and later in North America and the West Indies, it formed an alliance with BET in order to raise the necessary capital. In 1961 United floated on the stock market but this was the beginning of the end. John Watts remained chairman until his retirement in 1968 when he became president. But in the following year the directors, who still controlled more than half the business, decided to sell the business to BET.

I hope that the stories of Harold Swift, Tom Silcock, Harold Colling, Arthur and John Watts have given you just a glimpse of the variety of personalities among the many early pioneers of road transport and the varied ways in which they responded to the many opportunities which arose from the expansion of road transport during the first half of the twentieth century.

Dennis of Guildford
The Highs and Lows of a Century of Vehicle Manufacture

Gordon Knowles

The origins of the firm are strikingly similar to that of Morris in Oxford. John Dennis (1871-1939) served an apprenticeship with an ironmonger in his native Bideford in Devon. He then moved to Guildford taking up a post with Filmer & Mason in the High Street where he assembled and sold bicycles. He opened his own business, The Universal Athletic Store, in 1895 where he made and sold his *'Speed King* and *Speed Queen'* cycles assisted by his brother Raymond, later Sir Raymond, (1878-1939) who had joined him.

The brothers patented a pneumatic saddle and an improved frame design, exhibiting at the Crystal Palace in 1899. In July the same year a motorised tricycle was built, powered by a 3 1/2hp de Dion engine between the rear wheels, and with tiller steering. John Dennis drove up Guildford High Street at " a furious pace of 16mph", for which he was duly convicted by the local magistrates. The brothers turned this into a triumphant advertisement for their vehicle.

Next came the *'Quadricylce'* which Raymond raced successfully, bringing in orders. In 1900 a lease was taken out on the old Militia barracks in Friary Street and a year later the business moved again into a new purpose-built factory on the corner of Onslow St. and Bridge St. There in 1901 the first 'real' Dennis car was made. It had a front-mounted 8hp de Dion engine, a 3-speed gearbox with direct drive on top, and shaft drive. This famous building still stands, known as the 'Rodboro' Building after the Boot & Shoe company who took over the site when Dennis moved on in 1919. It has had a checkered life, and was empty in the 1990's after becoming derelict, until Guildford Council took it in hand making it safe and waterproof as part of their riverside development plans. Several proposals to renovate it did not materialise, demolition was threatened, saved by a Grade-2 listing.

One of the more appropriate adaptive re-use proposals was for offices for South East Arts on the upper floors with an industrial museum on the ground floor. It nearly became a supermarket, and finally in 2000 was realistically converted into a Wetherspoon pub. It retains many references to, and memorabilia of, Dennis. It is an internationally important building, considered to be the oldest extant purpose-built multi-storey motor vehicle factory in the world. There is an older building in Coventry, The Motor Mills, but it was converted from a textile mill in 1895 by The Horseless Carriage Company, soon to become Daimler. It was badly bombed during WWII but post-war surviving parts were use by Coventry Climax to assemble fork lift trucks and today is in multi-use . The Renault factory in Paris was a contender, but it was demolished in the late 1990's.

In July 1901 a private company, 'Dennis Brothers Limited', was formed, the brothers alternating as Chairman until 1913. The 1902 catalogue stressed their "unrivalled reputation for scientific design and technical innovation" as befitting "the Oldest Motor Makers in England". Dennis cars were almost unique at the time in having direct, geared drive, when virtually everyone else still used belt or chain drive. 8-hp and 10-hp models were offered at 280 and 320 guineas in addition to the Quadricycle at a mere 115 guineas. Soon larger Aster-engined 12/14 and 16/20hp models were offered and at least one 40hp "Gordon Bennett" type was built with a Simms engine. In 1904 the famous patented overhead worm drive was introduced.

The first commercial vehicle, a 25cwt van for Harrods, was built in 1904. It featured a separate subframe carrying the 2-cylinder de Dion engine, transmission and auxiliaries to minimise stress from torque. In 1905 an extension to the factory was built and a 31 acre site on Woodbridge Hill was bought. The first workshop there was a redundant mission hall, moved from Brixton, it stayed in use until 1985. Ten workshops were erected between 1910 and 1936, and a generating station in 1915. The Onslow Street site remained in use as offices and for servicing cars from 1911 to 1919 when it was sold.

In 1906 larger 30/35hp White and Poppe engines were fitted, soon becoming standardised. By 1907 the commercial range comprised 15 and 30cwt., 2, 3, 4 and 5-ton models, the latter being one of the largest on the market. The first fire engine was built in 1908 for the City of Bradford Fire Dept. Car production ceased in 1913 when a new 3 1/2 ton lorry was introduced, becoming one of the War Dept. 3-ton subvention models in 1914. Over 7,000 were built during WWI.

Meanwhile Dennis Bros. (1913)) Ltd. was floated as a public company, the brothers becoming joint Managing Directors. This was brought about through pressure from some of the shareholders and creditors of the private company, including the builder of the Rodboro building and was the first of several financial traumas which the business went through. John was the technical 'brains', whilst Raymond travelled the world as an effective salesman. More in the public eye than his brother he was knighted in 1920 following a world tour. He always said that the honour should have gone to John, for without his technical abilities there would have been no product for Raymond to sell.

In 1918 the company reverted to its previous name of Dennis Bros. Ltd. and several new developments took place after the war. The business diversified into lawnmowers and then into refuse vehicles. John had decided when pulling out of car production that they could not, and would not, try to

compete with the volume builders and would seek niche markets as we would call them today. In 1919 a new engine design was needed and John instigated a merger with White and Poppe, production was rationalised with engines, clutches and gear boxes being made in Coventry and shipped to Guildford for assembly. There was no flow assembly line, and little attempt to standardise products. The aim was to supply each customer with whatever individual features he wanted, and all lorries and fire engines were built to order, there was no building for stock. This was a strength, but later proved to be a weakness of the business.

In 1923 2,000 heavy chassis were built and this level of production was maintained until the depression in the early thirties. In 1925 a new 30cwt model was introduced with either normal or forward control. It proved popular. The 'M' type of 1927, a forward control six-wheeler, was not a success. It was underpowered and overpriced. Bus chassis were becoming an important part of the business, both the London General and the Aldershot & District being almost completely Dennis equipped. In 1928 the first 'H' type double-decker, fitted with a fully enclosed top deck, appeared with a 5.7litre engine. Many were fitted with a 52 seat aluminium body by Shorts of Rochester, who had diversified when aircraft orders fell. Aldershot & District bodies were generally made by Hall & Lewis.

Between 1930 and 1932 850 'GL' Light Duty buses were made. The *'Lancet'* Fire engine was popular and a large order for Argentina was obtained in 1931. A Diesel engine was introduced the same year and a major extension was added to the factory to accommodate the production of White & Poppe engines which was transferred from Coventry and that business shut down. 'Dennisville' was created, where 102 houses were built on a site close to the factory. These were in addition to 121 houses already owned by the company. Seven patents were applied for in 1932 and several Royal Warrants were awarded.

In 1932 Surbiton Urban District Council ordered one of the new 250-400 gallons per minute motor pumps, with hose reel equipment and a 35 foot extension ladder. It had chrome finished metal parts, rather than the usual brass, and was the first of many to be ordered by British local authorities. One of the undoubted successes of the thirties was the 40/45cwt *'Ace'* of 1935. It had the engine mounted ahead of the front axle, giving rise to the nickname of 'flying pig'. It was fitted with a variety of lorry, bus, coach, fire engine and refuse and gully emptier bodies. The *'Big Four'* and *'Light Six'* fire engine chassis were well received and usually were fitted with an extension ladder and a large capacity water tank. In 1937 the *'Max'* 12ton six-wheel chassis and a 5 ton four-wheeler were introduced.

Both Dennis brothers died in harness within a few months of each other in 1939, severing the family connection. They were fine examples of spectacular engineering and commercial success on a basis of a minimum of engineering training. John's son Royston had joined the board in 1929 but he had resigned in 1928 and went to live in South Africa but returned when war broke out in 1939 and joined up. Raymond never married and had no heirs.

During WWII all production was for the war effort, consisting of lorries - some 3,000 WD 'Max' 6/8tonners were built - agricultural vehicles, Churchill tanks, fire pumps, infantry carriers and bombs. After the war there was an insatiable demand for vehicles of all types and 1945 to 1951 were the best years for the company, with improvements in bus chassis design, new refuse collection vehicles and a new series of fire engines.

Lightweight *'Stork'* and *'Heron'* trucks were built in the 1950's as well as the very successful *'Pax'* with an ohv 6-cylinder 80bhp petrol engine. The *'Lance'* double-decker bus was introduced in 1950 and a large fleet was supplied to the Aldershot & District Bus Co. The *'Lancet'* single-decker came in 1951 and in 1953 a 'one-off' underfloor Lancet was built for the Aldershot company. 1958 saw the *'Lo-Line'* successor to the Lance, being a version of the Bristol 'Lodekka'. Again Aldershot & District was a major buyer.

22ton *'Pax'* V trucks with Perkins engines were introduced in the mid-sixties, and developed into the less successful *'Maxi'* tractor in 1968. The *'Paxit'* refuse vehicle of the same year had compression and ram-ejection equipment. In 1962 the Fire Appliance section of Alfred Miles was acquired as was in 1964 the Mercury Truck & Tractor Co., who specialised in airfield vehicles. A programme of modernisation was underway in 1965 but there was a large trading loss that year, productivity being inferior to that of major competitors. Recovery was assisted in 1967 by a huge contract to re-equip the frontline fire appliance fleet for the London Fire Brigade. A potential merger with Seddon came to nothing in 1969. Further re-organisation of the business and production facilities between 1969 to 1972 did not succeed in keeping the firm solvent, in spite of a virtually full order book. In 1969 the successful DB 15.5ton tipper truck had an edge over other 16ton gross competitors by saving on excise duty. During the 1960's a popular coach design was the *'Lancet Alize'* Highline Midi Coach fitted with a 150hp Perkins engine and a German ZF gearbox.

In 1972 the company was taken over by the Hestair Group and renamed Dennis Motors Ltd., and the next year, Hestair Dennis. The Mercury business was sold off, as was the mower diversification, the latter to Qualcast with the right to use the Dennis name. The refuse vehicle business was transferred to Hestair's own plant in Warwick, where they continued to be built under the Dennis badge. Dennis commercial vehicle production was reduced to a single model, the *'Delta'*, with a 16ton payload and either a Perkins or Gardner diesel engine. Some 40 six-wheeled *'Condor'* and *'Dragon'* long wheelbase double-decked buses had been built for the Kowloon Motor Bus Co. and the China Motor Bus Co. in Hong Kong by 1984. Repeat orders have since followed. These buses can seat 170 passengers and had bodies by Duple, who were part of the Hestair Group, and Gardner engines.

In 1984 the business was in more financial trouble and was sold to Trinity Holdings who renamed the company Dennis Specialist Vehicles. In 1985 there was a massive re-organisation involving redundancies and the selling off of most of the Woodbridge site for re-development. The site was completely closed down in 1990, the business moving to a new purpose-built plant on the Slyfield industrial estate in Guildford. Commercial vehicle production ceased at this time, the firm concentrating solely on fire engine, bus and coach chassis.

In 1998 the business changed hands once again, amid speculation that it was to be closed down. There was a very public and acrimonious tussle between Mayflower and Henlys for control. The eventual new owners, Mayflower, who owned Alexander bodybuilders in Scotland, pushed ahead with development of new models, standardising on British built, but US designed, Cummins engines. There was yet another management change in 2000 when the two protagonists, Mayflower and Henlys, decided to sink their differences and merge the Dennis and Alexander businesses of Mayflower with the Plaxton and Duple bodybuilding businesses of Henlys. Henlys also own Blue Bird, an American schoolbus manufacturer, and have a share in a co-operative business in Hungary. They are 10% owned by Volvo. Recent press speculation has inferred that Blue Bird is to be sold off.

The new holding company is called Transbus International and is 70% owned by Mayflower and 30% by Henlys reflecting the relative sizes of the two businesses. The managing Director is John Fleming, a joint Managing Director of Mayflower. The new firm has some 35-40% of the British bus building market and sales of £469 million annually. Transbus Dennis offer the *'Javelin'* a high payload, low weight coach chassis with either a 240 or 290bhp turbo-charged Cummins engine and ZF powered steering and a 6-speed gearbox. The *'Lance'* is a low-floor design allowing for easy disabled wheelchair access and has a similar technical specification to the Javelin. The *'Dart'* midi-bus is the most common bus on British roads today and is available in a range of versions, 8.5m, 9m & 9.5m long with a range of body width options giving seating for up to 60 passengers. All bus and coach chassis are welded in fixtures. The far east market is still strong, with locally built bodies on Dennis chassis fitted in both Singapore and Hong Kong.

The fire engine market is highly competitive from Scania and Volvo in Sweden and MAN and Mercedes in Germany. There had been much local criticism back in the 1990's when Surrey County Council Fire Department renewed their fleet with Volvo and Mercedes units rather than supporting the local firm. Fire engine chassis are still of bolted construction and are fitted with engines from Cummins, ZF gearboxes and steering units from Germany, Allison transmissions from the US and other components from elsewhere including Sweden and Spain. Again the far east is still a strong market with a repeat order from Singapore currently going through the factory. Overseas customers seem to prefer staying with a product they know and trust.

There is a rolling road facility in the factory and no longer do we see body-less vehicles out in all weathers clocking up test mileage on the roads around Guildford. There is no fire engine bodybuilder in the present group structure, but John Dennis Coachbuilders, which is also on the Slyfield site are builders and repairers. John is the son of Royston and thus grandson of the first John. He runs his own completely separate business and owns a roadworthy 1904 Dennis car which he drives from time to time on the November London to Brighton Emancipation Commemorative run.

The engineering ingenuity and high quality of the product has always been the hallmark of Dennis vehicles, the latter gradually working against them post WWII when in-built obsolescence seemed to be the norm. An examination of the range of patents taken out by the British Motor Industry over the years shows the place of Dennis in history. The first patent in 1904 for worm drive and gearing was the first of many, mostly taken out in the name of John Dennis. Transbus Dennis are currently on a 'high' following several recent 'lows' and the future of the business now seems secure, or as much as anything can be in these times of permanent change. I hope that it may long continue.

Producing the "Companion to British Road Haulage History"

Richard Storey

I am presenting a personal view in this short paper, as one of five principal contributors, or 'contributing editors', as we came to describe ourselves. I hope nothing I intend to say will seem to be a criticism of my colleagues, or rather, my friends, or of the Science Museum, our publisher. I also hope that by giving this presentation, rather than leaving it to the editor, Professor John Armstrong, I am relieving him of a small chore, though I am conscious that this is but a small repayment for all the effort he found himself putting in over a long period of time. The length of the process makes it difficult in some ways to put this paper together, the events of months and years merge into one long blur of research and writing which eventually produced the 'Companion". I have therefore given myself a number of headings under which to analyse the process : Why ? When ? Who ? What ? How ? and What ? for a second time. I list these questions in a kind of logical order, with the most difficult to address at the end of the sequence.

'Why ?" is strangely perhaps the easiest question to answer : In June 1996 the Conference (as it then was) held an interesting and successful Colloquium at the British Commercial Vehicle Trust Archives at Chorley on the theme 'What do we need to know about road freight transport?'. Amongst the needs identified in the afternoon session were : a good popular history of freight transport by road, a 'grand history' of the subject, and a work in the format of the 'Oxford Companion to Railway History". Here, then, is the germ of the project, which was presented as a possible way forward by John Armstrong in his summing-up of the discussion. A digression at this point : amongst those present was Thomas Gibson, who was seeking support and a publisher for a text which he had prepared on the first forty years of road haulage in Britain. The Conference was not in a position to be of practical assistance at that stage, and Mr Gibson went ahead by himself, the result of his arduous work being published in 2001 by Ashgate Publishing as 'Road Haulage by Motor in Britain. The first Forty Years ". Based on thorough reading of the 'Commercial Motor" and government reports, it is a commendable work, although neither a 'popular' nor a 'grand' history, and it did not meet the objectives which were beginning to emerge around the concept of a Companion volume. This concept was taken forward to the autumn 1996 business meeting of the Conference, which brings us to the 'When ?" heading. - We can take 1996 as the start year for the project, as a small group at the meeting, in the face of generally expressed scepticism, identified themselves as being willing to explore possibilities in a practical way. I can hardly say that they decided to pick up the ball and run with it, as initial progress was slow, partly reflected in the long production period, which finally came to an end in the Spring of 2003. Against that comment, which might be regarded as self-criticism, has to be set the reality of the situation in which we were working : we soon found that there was no scope for a separate bibliographical volume on the lines of George Ottley's railway bibliography - hard work over several years was needed to draw up the eight double-column pages published in the Companion. Assuming that we were quite thorough in our searches, this means that we were in many ways pioneers in our aims and research, although there was a large periodical literature to draw on, evidenced in the sources which accompanied each entry. This comment is, I realise, trespassing on the What ? and How ? topics, but it is an essential part of the explanation of the length of the process.

'Who" were involved in this process ? I am tempted to say it was a 'dream team', in that, as we worked together, we found that we complemented each other, sometimes in a most effective way, perhaps all the more remarkable in that we were self-selected, in other words, each one of us felt that we could bring the Companion into being. To use modern jargon, we had a 'vision'. One of the few shortcomings of the finished Companion, to my mind, is the lack of a half-page profiling the contributing editors, each in two or three lines. This not a question of boasting, but of giving our credentials to a wider world, to those who will consult the Companion over the years. I have in mind something on these lines :

Professor John Armstrong, the Editor, was already well-known as a leading transport historian, and editor of the 'Journal of Transport History"

John Aldridge had a lifetime of experience as a professional road transport journalist and as a semi-retired writer was well placed to make a significant contribution

Grahame Boyes had retired from railway management, but was prominent and very active in the multi-modal historical activities of the Railway & Canal Historical Society

Gordon Mustoe brought a life-long involvement with road transport and the bibliographical knowledge of a retired librarian, as well as the experience of a road haulage author

Richard Storey had a record of contributions to the 'Dictionary of Business Biography", the forthcoming 'New DNB" and numerous professional and other publications over three decades. - As well, of course, as a deep interest in road transport. As an archivist, he brought knowledge of original sources to the process.

To give a brief, personal view of our respective contributions, John Armstrong cheerfully held the team together, always holding contributors to a rigorous examination of when? and why? including why should we be concerned with a particular topic. John Aldridge, apart from his encyclopedic knowledge, could always be relied to produce exactly the right form of words to make the obscure clear or the lengthy concise. Grahame Boyes brought a multi-modal outlook, a commitment to and experience of research and computing skills. Gordon Mustoe's encyclopedic knowledge proved particularly helpful in making connections between topics and providing a context, based on a unique mix of personal experience and extensive reading. It is difficult to comment objectively on oneself, but John Armstrong had once, in the context of the journal 'Business Archives", described me as the 'master of the short run', that is, adept at putting together succinct pieces accurately and readably, and perhaps that is no bad contribution to the making of a Companion.

To some extent, looking at the Who goes some way towards describing the 'How ", which is also closely linked to the 'What". As I have explained, we reached agreement at an early stage that our product was to be a Companion volume. What did we envisage by this ? An A-Z arrangement of short entries on significant topics, each one attributed and sourced. Use of the Companion would be made easier by a liberal inclusion of cross-references and a bibliography would assist those who wished to pursue the big theme further. The whole thing to be set in context by a scholarly introduction. The phrase 'significant topics' of course begs many questions - what topics, how to decide on them ? The first task was to draw up a list of sector headings : profiles of haulage firms, of vehicle marques, of bodybuilders, of organisations, such as the RHA and FTA, of individuals; analyses of vehicle and body types, of types of traffic, of legislation, including the nationalisation/ denationalisation process; the examination of social and cultural aspects of road haulage and some consideration of the roads themselves. This sector mapping was an important prerequisite of action, but to my mind the important task in a work of this kind is to begin the alphabetical file of entries, from Abnormal loads to Yorkshire Patent Steam Wagon, which from the outset serves as a check on progress and a stimulus to the identification of new and related topics, cross-referencing and, as work progressed, the merging or separating of topics. Thinking out of the box and lateral thinking play a big part in a work of this kind, as does the interplay of different knowledge banks, experience and outlook, which a close-knit team provides. In the later stages of the work we were meeting once a month in London for a day's work on the text; at earlier stages less frequently, but always with the full or partial circulation of drafts and ideas by mail or e-mail or even 'phone in the intervening periods.

At an early stage we realised that, with no funds at our disposal, we were not in a position to request contributions from professional writers, unless personal contact made an approach feasible. At the same time, we accepted the need for such outside specialists as we could co-opt for one or more entries, and I am pleased to be able to take this opportunity to make public our thanks for their contribution to the Companion. One problem which never left us was the extent of the coverage of individual firms - given the structure of the industry to the present day, the volume could have been totally unwieldy, with entry after entry on firms large and small, each with its own interest and place in the history of road freight. Such an approach was not possible - even a listing of names, with location and dates would have been beyond the scope we had necessarily to accept. So we settled on coverage of the big names, supplemented by some lesser profiles to give a flavour of different eras, areas, and traffics. Every reader, and the compilers, will regret some particular omission.

An important concept in a project of this kind, and a difficult word to say and spell, is 'serendipity", coined by Horace Walpole in 1754. Its dictionary definition is 'the occurrence and development of events by chance in a happy or beneficiary way'. It is often used in connection with intellectual pursuits. What it means in practice is that when looking for one thing one often comes across another, relevant in the same or perhaps a totally different context. My contention would be that more than chance or good luck is involved, in two ways. Firstly, one has to be looking in the right area to start with, and this is usually a matter of informed choice; then secondly, one has to be able to recognise the significance of what has been found by 'chance'. Maybe my colleagues were better organised and informed than I was, but in my experience serendipity played an important role in the preparation of contributions to the Companion.

I referred at the beginning of this talk to our publisher, but when I was 'walking back the cat' on the writing of the Companion in order to speak this afternoon, I was surprised to find how long we worked without a formal contract : it was not until late 1999 that we signed a formal contract with the Science Museum, although talks had, of course, been taking place before then. Even so, we were working 'in faith', as it were, that our draft entries would one day see the light of day; in that context it was perhaps fortunate that, having retired in mid-1997, I was in a position to build up a stock of entries, especially on manufacturers' histories, so that even during that contract-less period we were working, albeit slowly, towards 'critical mass', though this was a long way from achievement by the beginning of 1998. One real disadvantage of being without a contract is that one is reluctant to approach even the most friendly of potential 'outside' contributors until one can give assurance that the work they are being asked to produce gratis will see the light of day. We counted ourselves fortunate to have the support and the prestige of the Science Museum behind the Companion. Lessons were learned by both sides during the process, the greatest problem, at the eleventh hour, being to reduce the length of the Companion, a 'necessity' which could probably have been avoided, with all the hard work involved, by a decision on a smaller font size. Be that as it may, the final product gives me, and I suspect my fellow contributors, a warm glow, as well as a kind of sense of bereavement, as the days of collaboration are past.

So much for How ? Now for 'What ? " for a second time : What does one regret about the Companion as it appeared ? What about the future ? My comments about the need to cut back at a late stage point to one cause for regret, the omission of whole entries and of lovingly crafted additions to drafts, and the removal of subtleties of composition due to the necessity to cut as little as a single line from an individual entry. - A single line might seem neither here nor there, but its effect on a finely honed short piece could be harmful. - More hauliers' histories would have been an obvious enrichment; as would an overview of military transport and logistics, especially in the light of recent 'privatisation' moves. The commercial movement of waster materials , although mentioned in various contexts, would have merited an entry in its own right. The list of nicknames could have been longer; at least one very relevant popular culture reference didn't get in; and one or two more marque histories. And of course one regrets those errors which have crept in... What about the future ? I don't want to depress sales by suggesting that a second edition will follow, but it would be good to think so, and as prudent people the contributing editors have opened a file on new developments, corrections and possible reinstatements of last-minute removals. Finally what about companion Companions ? Some drafts are already on file towards a Companion on public passenger transport by road, covering buses, trams, trolleybuses and taxis. It hasn't travelled far from the depot yet, and lacks the impetus of a publisher, but as its originator (though not its editor) I have hopes. I also have hopes that a Companion on the History of Cycles and Cycling in the UK will take to the road. - Of making many Companions there is no end .....

Buses and Coaches - A Neglected Industry

John Hibbs

Part One - Government and the industry The various modes of transport have a definite ranking order in the mind of the British public, and equally in the minds of the politicians and administrators who manage the nation in today's world of 'state autonomy'. Railways rank very high - the status and activities of our associate, the Railway and Canal Historical Society, outrank us as road transport historians. I am not thinking here of the attitudes of enthusiasts; just 'the plain people of England'. Railways have a sentimental attraction for very many people, perhaps arising from the train sets that they played with (girls as well as boys) in the childhood. Model buses don't have the same market. Air transport is the symbol of progress, as railways were in the 19th century. Shipping ranks low - for a supposedly maritime nation, it has virtually no symbolic status now. Road freight transport is probably neutral in the attitude of the public, even though it is more important than rail for the health of the economy. Even the private car has lost its superior image, since it is no longer a middle-class status item, though it does attract the hatred and contempt of some environmentalists. Coaches may still rank higher than buses, but the bus - isn't it just about rock bottom in public interest and concern?

You may want to debate this argument later, but for now let us examine the consequences of the attitude in terms of the history of the industry.

It is open to question whether the bus or the coach, as we know them now, appeared first. Possibly the distinction was not very important in the early days. After the first motor buses started running in 1898, development was patchy to say the least up to the first world war, though telling in London, where the last horse-bus services closed in August 1914. Financial interests appeared early, and came to dominate the industry by 1939, while municipal councils which had invested in electric tramways resisted the bus for a decade or more after 1919. Generally free from restrictive control, the industry grew rapidly, creating its own demand, and by 1939 it was established and successful, but little recognised and poorly understood. Coaching grew alongside bus operation, finding a niche for express services and catering for the established demand for party trips and outings. Even while express services were developed by some bus companies, the coaching trade remained the concern of small firms, largely out of sight of the policy-makers of the day.

Setting aside the developments prior to 1914, we may observes that the industry came to prominence at the same time as the future of the railway was a matter for political contention. It also coincided with the creation of the Ministry of Transport, in 1914, with a remit to consider inland transport as a whole. Nationalisation was an issue of the day. Churchill recalled later that it was an open question whether to nationalise the railway companies, leave them alone, or reorganise them into the 'four main lines'. In his speech at the second reading of the Ministry of Transport Bill (yes, in 1919 it was necessary for parliament to approve the creation of a Ministry), Sir Eric Geddes, the first minister said "if the House decides that the era of competition is gone, it must logically put every means of transport under the one control".

The House did not so decide, and the powers of compulsory purchase were deleted from the Bill. The Ministry's first job was to prepare what became the Railways Act 1921. It also turned to the future of buses and trams, and here we find the influence of Sir Henry Maybury, the only one of the Ministry's five top civil servants not to be a railwayman. I examined the subsequent developments in policy at greater length in my book *The Bus & Coach Industry - its Economics and Organization* (J M Dent 1975), and it was interesting to see how Maybury, himself a civil engineer, was biassed in favour of rail

Maybury's policy can be seen to have been based on two assumptions; one, that road transport should serve railways, not compete with them, and two, that established firms should be favoured over smaller competitors. It is an attitude that has been alive politically ever since; currently in terms of light rail. It appeared very soon after the appearance of 'pirate' buses in London in 1922, leading to the London Traffic Act 1924, itself a forerunner of the relevant Sections of the Road Traffic Act 1930. We may ask how far a balance was achieved in the report of the Royal Commission on Transport 1928-1930, before which there was no representation of the smaller, competitive bus operators (or of the passengers).

The Commission was dominated by the establishment, including the trade unions, and pressure was brought to ensure that its conclusions for the bus industry were published in an interim report in 1929. Parliament took little interest in it, though, and the licensing provisions of the Road Traffic Act 1930 were not debated. I think we may recognise that the nature and importance of the bus industry was little recognised or understood, and it is this neglect that is my first conclusion today. Bus and coach services were seen to be of secondary importance to railways, and to some extent also to trams, and the idea of the bus as an industry in competition with the car was too far into the future to be

imagined. It was perhaps fortunate that the coaching trade was similarly neglected, left free of the monopolistic route licensing for bus services, and subject only to the necessary safety regulations as a whole.

What the 1930 Act did was to give statutory force to the area agreement system that had been devised by Sidney Garcke and Walter Wolsey in 1916, and this permitted the investment by the railway companies of some £6,000,000 in the bus industry itself, a very large sum at the time. This was largely used in the purchase of smaller firms which now had saleable monopoly rights, though I doubt whether the Bill had been designed in the light of a Commons Committee report of 1853, on the railways, which said:

> "...it is natural for traders to compete where the opportunity is unlimited for new rivals to enter the field. It is quite as natural for traders to combine so soon as the whole number of possible competitors may be ascertained and limited".

The inter-war period was one of protectionism at home and abroad, so I suppose it would be asking too much of hindsight to criticise the decisions of the administration; but it is my contention here that the bus industry was felt to be just another problem, and that its real importance and contribution was neglected and misunderstood. Perhaps we should conclude that the status of the industry then was very much what it is today, but there remains the question of how this has come about.

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What I want to look at next is the disturbing neglect and misunderstanding of the economics of the industry - and also of the railways - that was to lead to such serious mistakes on the part of management in both industries during the post-war period. I would first pay tribute, as I should, being a former railwayman, to the achievement of the British Transport Costing Service by the 1950s, whereby the understanding of railway economics came to be radically changed, and for the better. Sadly, the management of the nationalised bus industry refused to allow the Costing Service to extend its analysis to road transport, and it is my contention that the neglect of traffic costing in the bus industry became a prime cause of its decay and loss of custom over some 40 years following the second world war, in the face of the analysis of the problem by Ponsonby and others in the 1950s and 1960s.

Whilst the management of the industry at the time cannot be criticised too much for its inability to understand certain basic costing principles, it was the Traffic Commissioners, whose powers originated from the 1930 Act, that failed to appreciate the economic consequences of their own policy, Faced with applications for serious fare increases after the sharp increase in fuel tax by the budgets of 1951 and 1952, they imposed a standard rate per mile that was to apply to each area company (and varied from one to another), and that was to be enforced on smaller firms unless they had 'grandfather rights' dating from before 1931. These rates, similar in effect to those applied to the railway companies under the 1921 Act, were designed to achieve a 'standard rate of return', in the interest of 'fairness'. This appears to have been related in some way to the average cost per vehicle mile of the leading companies, and the management of the industry is equally to be condemned for neglecting to foresee the economic consequences that were to follow.

In the outcome, the companies took the average cost as a benchmark against which they set average revenue, and concluded that any mileage earning less than average cost was being operated 'at a loss'. By thus neglecting contributory revenue above escapable cost they blinded themselves to rational economics, and by cutting out 'loss-making' mileage they spread fixed costs over a smaller base, which *increased* average costs. Then the next year they cut some more; passengers were turned away; and the industry sunk into decline just as car competition developed. This dismal story is still not fully realised by those who seek greater interference in bus service pricing today.

Part Two - Historians and the industry I have tried to ensure that the criticism made above is in the public sector, not least in the book whose title I quote above. If there is one principle that is central to the purpose of our Association it is that there are lessons to be drawn from history, and it is my intention here to bring the neglect and misunderstanding of the industry that has marked its past into the focus of today's problems. But now I want to examine the extent to which the industry has been neglected by historians, and I do this in the knowledge that we cannot be open to serious criticism in that way. What I want to do is to try to identify some gaps in the story, in the hope that this will stimulate further research, and perhaps also contribute a few more contributions to the proposed Companion volume. Of course, if it can be shown that I am wrong, and that material exists, then I shall be only too pleased, and shall hope that it can be made widely known.

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As to the general history of the industry, my own book *The History of British Bus Services* (David & Charles, 2nd edn revised 1989) sets out to cover the story as far as 1986. Attempts to find a publisher for a further, updated edition have so far been unsuccessful. Part Two, which goes into more detail area by area, exists in typescript, and there is just a possibility that it may yet appear, if I can find time to complete photocopying the pages. If I go on to suggest some areas where more knowledge is required it is my hope that you will add to them as well as telling me that material in fact exists.

Let us start with the age of the horse. Published material exists on the stage coach industry, though there may be room for closer attention to its operations in various areas of the country. 'Short stage' services in both urban and rural areas could usefully be examined, and some rural motor bus services seem to have replaced facilities of this kind. Indeed, it is the element of *continuity* that strikes me as important, and while this seems to have been marked in the case of the country carrier, it is its existence, or the lack of it, in urban areas that comes to mind. We know quite a lot about the demise of the London horse-bus trade when threatened by the motor, but how much do we know about the situation in provincial cities? Horse-drawn cabs seem to have survived into the age of the motorised taxi - I can recall them standing outside Willesden Green station in London in the 1930s - and that story seems to me worth exploration.

Perhaps the biggest gap in our knowledge concerns what I often refer to as 'the coaching trade'. The enthusiast observers, to whom we owe so much for the records of the industry, tend to be interested, vehicles apart, mainly with service operation. While many small firms have operated services commercially, and many today tender for subsidised services, others have remained in the private hire market. This whole sector of the industry seems to have been neglected, but its part in the movement of people has always been important, even though individual firms are so much smaller than the principal service operators.

Then there is the matter of terminals and bus stations. From my own observation there have from the start been wide variations in the way these have been provided and financed. This may have related to the element of concentration of ownership; Colchester, with many different firms in the 1920s, provided a 'bus park', whereas at Chelmsford the Eastern National company used its own depot as a terminal, and the few other firms had to use streets or side roads. (Colchester later built a 'bus station', which is a different sort of thing). Victoria Coach Station provided for the large operators, but there was a complex story concerning the arrangements for the others at Kings Cross, and that terminal finally disappeared. The Associated Motorways 'coach station' at Cheltenham, which was a key hub, has long gone. There is a story here concerning land use and planning as well as local authority and company finance which I would very much like to see written up, while alongside it there is the matter of bus stop signs - who owns them and why it took so long for service information to appear on them in many places up and down the country.

I will leave these thoughts here, though I hope that others will emerge from our discussion, including areas other than buses and coaches. Let us never forget that history is happening around us, and indeed I think we can congratulate ourselves on the insights that have emerged form papers at our symposia and colloquia. I believe we have an important part to play in our field.

The Roads & Road Transport History Association was formed in 1992 following the success of the First National Road Transport History Symposium at Coventry in 1991. From the start, its prime objectives have been to promote, encourage and co-ordinate the study of the history of roads and road transport, both passenger and freight.

It embraces the whole range of transport history from the earliest times to the current age of motorways. urban congestion, pedestrianisation and concern for the environment. It aims to encourage those interested in a particular aspect of transport to understand their chosen subject in the context of developments in other areas and at other periods.

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