

ROADS AND ROAD TRANSPORT

HISTORY ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

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In This Issue

- 2 **Association Matters**
- 4 **Car ownership North/South divide ?**
A topic arising from our previous meeting
- 6 **News from 21st Century**
Volkswagen Beetle ends production
- 7 **Q & A, Book Review**
- 8 **100 Years of Car Registration**
Centenary of British Registration Plates
- 9 **Parcels by Steam Tram**
Ron Phillips looks at new material on Wigan.
- 12 **History on a Postcard**
Gauge changing at Lisbon

The Association Matters

September 13th 2003

24th BUSINESS MEETING

The 24th Business Meeting of the Association was held at the Coventry Transport Museum, Hales Street, Coventry (formerly known as the Museum of British Road Transport Coventry) on Saturday 13th September. On this day Coventry Station was closed to traffic, as were several other stretches of main line railway for essential track maintenance, but some 23 members were able to make their way to our event. In addition, 12 sent their apologies.

The reconstruction of part of the museum continues, and it is expected that another year will elapse before the work is complete.

Professor John Hibbs welcomed members to the meeting, and recalled what he described as a "little known item of bus history."

The following was said by Lord Curzon (1859-1925) against himself. "This omnibus business is not what it is reported to be. I hailed one at the bottom of Whitehall and told the man to take me to Carlton House Terrace. But the fellow flatly refused." *from The Oxford Book of Political Anecdotes (OUP 1989)*

Discussion of business began with the question of the publication of the papers from the 2002 Symposium. It was explained that the papers of all but one of the speakers had been submitted, but that there were difficulties with the remaining paper, as it had been in the form of a visual presentation. It was decided to go ahead with publication, even if the latter paper could not be included.

The **Companion to British Road Haulage History** was declared a success - it had had some good reviews and had done much good to the R&RTHA. Equally, the summer event at Gaydon had brought useful exposure to the Association and had been an excellent occasion to sell copies of the Companion. It was not clear whether it had been the cause of an increase in membership or not. (Newsletter 34 contained an account of the event)

John Hibbs reported that not a lot of progress had taken place with regard to the Companion on passenger transport: arranging a meeting that was convenient to all parties had proved difficult. However, Corinne Murray had received some draft material already. Grahame Boyes raised the issue of road haulage records...had there been any response to Garry Turvey's appeal? Richard Storey was able to report that there had been a positive result: The R.H.S. Bristol Branch had arranged to deposit a

quantity of material.

Hon. Secretary's Report

Gordon Knowles reported that there had been an increase in both Corporate and Associate membership: in fact, four new Corporate Members joined our ranks recently:

Classic Atkinson Club

National Cycle Archive

lorryspotting.com

BMI Heritage Trust (Archive Section)

There were five new Associate Members, one of whom, Christopher Hogan, was in attendance, and was to speak in the afternoon session.

Gordon also referred to the fact that The Omnibus Society was about to celebrate its 75th Anniversary, and intended to celebrate this in various ways, one of which was to "forge new links" with other bodies.

Hon. Treasurer's Report

Roger stated that the financial affairs of the Association were in good order, thanks to recent recruitment of some new members, brisk sales of the Companion at Gaydon, and a small surplus from the 2002 Symposium

There was some discussion concerning the 2003 Colloquium, due to be held at Chester. It was resolved to write to the speakers and ensure that certain arrangements were made at the venue.

Hon. Newsletter Editor's Report

Ron Phillips recorded that the arrangements for printing the *Newsletter* continued to be both practical and economical. The last edition (No.33) had appeared in two versions to cover the launch of the Companion and the Association's stall at Gaydon: both events required production of extra copies to be used as publicity. The current edition (No.34) comprised just 12 pages, as it would be followed in less than two months by No.35 to be available at the Colloquium.

Any members who did not receive a full 16 page issue of No.33 are asked to write to the Hon.Editor, who will send a copy by return.

Ron drew attention to the issue of the current widespread replacement of rail services by coaches. This issue is discussed further on page 6, in the Q&A feature.

Hon Research Co-ordinator's Report

Ian Yearsley mentioned three current projects by others. Toby Young (ex Greter Manchester PTE) is writing a book on Rochdale tramways and seeks information. The "Community Transport" organisation is now seeking to record its history, and is about

to hold an exhibition at G-Mex. Ian had available registration documents for anyone present to gain access to this display. Thirdly, some archive cine-film which was recently discovered is now being evaluated. Ian explained this in full in the afternoon (q.v.) **Colloquium 2003**

Various "housekeeping" issues concerning this event were discussed. Roger Atkinson reported on the number of members likely to attend. The booking forms are available from Roger, although copies were sent to R&RTHA members along with the notice for the September meeting.

Smithies List

Work on this document is due to commence soon. It was stressed that the format of the list would be of greater value to researchers than the series of lists currently being produced by The Omnibus Society. See item in the centre of this issue.

The meeting adjourned for lunch at this point. The afternoon session commenced with items of "Any Other Business", the first of which referred to one of the new Corporate Members: the British Motor Industry Heritage Trust (formerly the British Leyland Heritage Trust). This body has an archive section which is seeking funding, and the R&RTHA has agreed to support this application.

Richard Storey stated that another new R&RTHA Corporate Member, the National Cycle Archive, is considering producing a reference book edited by Associate Member Andrew Millward. This would be "A Companion to Cycling and the Cycle Industry in the United Kingdom."

Tony Newman spoke of recent developments at the Public Record Office in cataloguing.

Date of Next Meeting

It was confirmed that the **AGM and 25th Business Meeting** of the Association would be held on **Saturday 7th February 2004** at Coventry Transport Museum. Once again the Chairman gave thanks on behalf of the Association to the Museum via Barry Collins.

Members' Presentations

Roger de Boer spoke entertainingly of how he became interested in the subject of battery electric road vehicles, in particular milk-floats. As a child he had been fascinated by road vehicles, but it was the loss of a plastic plane, trodden on by his grandmother, which caused the broken toy to be replaced by a *Dinky Toys* electric milk float. This kindled his interest in such vehicles and in the late sixties/early seventies he wrote on the subject of the electric dust carts of the City of Birmingham, and recorded the demise of the "TASCOS" milk floats in the same city. The Ten Acres and Stetchley Co-op

was taken over by the Birmingham Co-op (in the opinion of Roger this was a 'reverse' take-over of the greater by the smaller) and the number of vehicles was greatly reduced, this being the first step in the gradual loss of these vehicles from the streets of Birmingham.

Chris Hogan described for us the history and activities of the **Post Office Vehicle Club**, and gave a brief history of the motorised road vehicles used by the Post Office. The first motorised vehicles were provided by contractors, commencing circa 1905. In the early twenties, the GPO began to operate its own vehicles, and from then until 1969 all were registered centrally with the London C.C. Work by the late Francis West at the licencing office (before the records were destroyed) means that there is a very thorough listing of all vehicles up to then, but for 1969/1970 there are still some vehicles unidentified. The POVC has been able by various means to keep track of vehicles from 1970-date. (Today the vehicles are registered locally.)

Also in the twenties, vans were introduced by the Post Office Telephones Dept. At first these were painted black, later dark green. These were given "local" registrations at first, but subsequently were also registered with the L.C.C. Trunk movement of mails was exclusively done by rail until the mid-sixties. The first "big" mail vans appeared in 1963. A recent announcement heralded the end of the movement of mail by the railways, and the plan is that the last mail trains will come out of service in May 2004.

In the discussion following this presentation, various members mentioned how the R&RTHA can be a forum for seeking information on little known subjects. It was suggested that there might be a **Questions & Answers** section in *Newsletter*, and such a feature has been included in this edition, using some questions raised at the meeting.

Ian Yearsley now told us about the "Mitchell and Kenyon Project", a joint venture of the British Film Institute and the National Fairground Archive (held at Sheffield University). This relates to a set of 800 cine-films discovered in the 1990s but dating from 1900-1909. These contain crowd scenes, taken in various northern towns in Britain by Messrs. Mitchell and Kenyon, for use by fairground film shows. Some 50% of the scenes on the films show streets, and there are many vehicles drawn by horses as well as electric trams, but very few show mechanically driven vehicles.

Ian put it to the meeting that the films might suggest that there was a North-South divide in the use of motorised vehicles. This topic has been taken as the basis of an article by the Hon. Editor on the next page,

Car ownership - a north/south divide ?

The suggestion by Ian Yearsley (R&RTHA Research Coordinator) that the lack of motorised private vehicles on the turn-of the century films of scenes in towns of the north of England might indicate a north/south divide in car ownership may well be true, but I see some instant flaws in this argument.

Firstly, we have no comparative films showing scenes in the south of England. Secondly, the horse was still a major force in road transport for both light and heavy vehicles at this time and motor cars were unreliable, expensive, and quite dangerous. Motor vehicles were not numerous enough to become the subject of regulation until late 1903, and private motor vehicles were generally a "rich man's toy" for use on the high road rather than the streets of the town. Remember, Toad of Toad Hall donned his goggles to drive wildly in the country !

Early still pictures of tramcars (as the cine pictures in question) usually show a total lack of traffic apart from the odd handcart, bicycle or horse drawn "lurry". Take the view of Doncaster Station Road seen below as an example. Another picture at the

Five cars and a lorry are seen on the move, and the rest of the vehicles in the picture are trams and buses. The "plateau" (to give it its local name) in front of St. George's Hall is clear of any vehicles. I have a post card of the same scene in the mid-fifties. The plateau is clogged with parked cars, trams and buses are surrounded by a myriad of private cars in a rush-hour scene. On the far right, after the dark mass of the North Western Hotel which fronts Lime Street Station and the white rectangular Empire Theatre, is London Road.

The second picture opposite (bottom) is of London Road also in the mid-fifties. Although this road was congested at rush hour, here it is seen with a tram, two cars and a lorry. As the shops seem closed, it was probably taken on a Sunday afternoon. (The clock shows 13 40)

Some of the cars owned by the citizens of Liverpool had probably passed down London Road earlier in the day en route to the Mersey Tunnel and a day in the Wirral or the North Wales coast. But the point is that at this point in time, cars caused traffic congestion some of the time, but not all of the time.



same spot shows 4 tramcars and no other vehicles whatsoever !

The motor car did not become a major means of transport for work, rather than pleasure, until the second half of the 20th century. The view opposite (top) of the centre of Liverpool dates from the mid-thirties. Seven cars are seen parked in the foreground, opposite (to the left) an important office building.

So, I do not think the scenes in the Mitchell and Kenyon films show anything but the norm, and the same could probably be found in the South, with the exception of London. The third picture opposite is not London, but Paris, and I think it makes the point that traffic congestion as we know it started in the metropolitan capitals of the world, but has now come to the provinces.

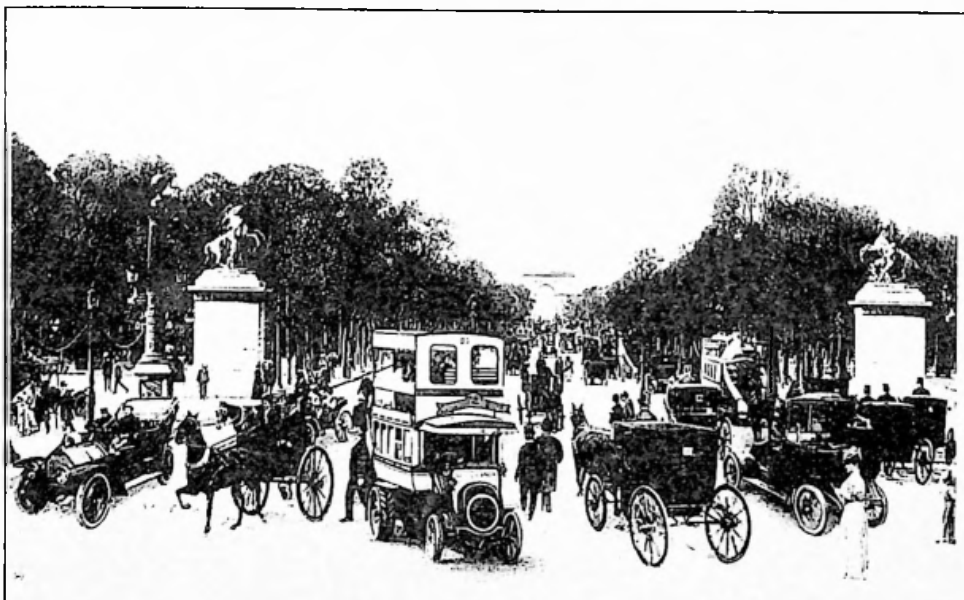
Ron Phillips



St Georges Hall
and Lime Street,
LIVERPOOL



London Road,
LIVERPOOL



Champs Elysees,
PARIS

News from the 21st Century

Museum Fire

The National Motorcycle Museum at Solihull was destroyed by fire on 16th September 2003, with the loss of 400 machines (about 500 survived). The fire was said to have been caused accidentally by a discarded cigarette and caused damage to the extent of £9,000,000.

Last VW Beetle

The last ever VW Beetle (of the original type) came off the production line in Puebla, Mexico in July 2003. It was alleged to be the 21,529,464th built since December 1945. Manufacture over the years had taken place in many countries.

Three thousand Ultima Edicion models were built to conclude the production run, all powered with the familiar air-cooled flat-four 1.6 litre engine.

The prototype Beetle, designed by Ferdinand Porsche to Adolf Hitler's brief for a "people's car", able to carry four at speeds up to 62 m.p.h. appeared in February 1936. Mass production at the war shattered Wolfsburg factory began in December 1945 under the supervision of Major Ivan Hirst of the British Army. The first exports started in August 1947. In 1950, 100,000 had been produced and production reached 1000 per day. Only five years later, production had passed the one million mark.

With the completion of the 15,087,034th one on February 17th 1972, the Beetle overtook the production record held by the Ford Model T. Two years after this, in 1974, production at Wolfsburg ceased after 11,516,919 Beetles had been assembled there, although it was still made in Germany at Emden until January 1978.

Production continued in Brussels and in Mexico, where the 20 millionth Beetle was made in May 1981. Export to Europe ceased in 1985.

As well as spawning military derivatives, the Variant hatchback and the famous Volkswagen van, the Beetle also appeared in cabriolet form for the American market. Karmann made 330,281 of the convertibles, the last leaving the factory at Osnabruck in January 1979. The Beetle also formed the basis of the first Porsche.

The front-wheel drive VW Golf replaced the Beetle on the production line at Wolfsburg. This is now in its fourth (Mark IV) version and is well on its way to becoming another record-breaker.

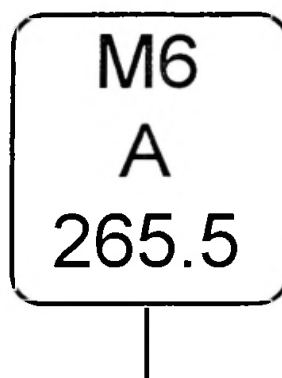
Concorde taken from service

Although not road transport, we feel we should record that Friday 24th October 2003 saw the last commercial flight by the supersonic airliner after more than a quarter of a century in service. Last in service was British Airways Concorde 002, flying between New York and London.

What is significant about this is that there is no replacement: transatlantic crossings by air now take over twice the time taken by Concorde. Much of the groundbreaking technology has been abandoned, and no replacement is foreseen. Backward steps in the transport field are rare, here is one great leap backwards.

New Motorway signs

During 2003 it was announced that British motorways are to be given a new type of sign, to help motorists who have broken down pinpoint their location. Some of these have recently been put in place on a stretch of the M6 in Cheshire. They take the form of a plaque, some two feet high, mounted on a post about the height of a bus-stop.



The information given seems to be the number of the motorway, "A" denoting "outward" direction and the distance in kilometres from the start of the motorway. The "inward" signs are lettered "B". They are placed at half-kilometre intervals. Existing low level distance markers at intervals of a tenth of a kilometre remain in situ.

Local Identity Numbers

The FirstBus company, as its rival Stagecoach, introduced a National Fleet Numbering system for its buses in 2002, using five-digit numbers. These, it seems, are not "the right kind of number" for the record keepers at local level, so FirstBus vehicles will be seen with a different set of numbers carried on radios or over the fuel filler cap. These are "Local Identity Numbers" for the use of the maintenance staff.

Let it not be said that "bus spotting" is not what it used to be.

Q & A

There was a suggestion made at the September 2003 meeting that we include a Question and Answer page. It has been found that very often at our meetings when a member raises a query someone present has the answer. Why should not this "service" be extended to all? We start with an unanswered question from the last meeting.

Q. When was the first instance of "rail replacement" by motor bus in Britain?

This is a complicated issue. It refers to the use of motor buses to cover interruption in the rail service for the purposes of maintenance or long-term breach of the line. It does not really refer to the use of buses as the result of an unforeseen accident. It does refer to the railway operator arranging to have a bus service to replace trains, the buses working to a version of the railway timetable.

Can anyone provide an answer?

Q. What tramway or bus operators used the Atherton non-registering punch?

The very reason for using registering punches for tickets is to keep a check on the number of passengers carried, and to guard against fraud by the conductor i.e. the number of passengers and the number of tickets issued must be the same. Hand nippers could be used to perforate extra holes in tickets to record date, day of the week etc.

Three operators are known to have used a simple ticket punch known as the Atherton punch. This was worn on a strap but did not register nor give an audible indication of cancellation to passengers.

Known users were South Lancashire (of Atherton), Wigan Corporation and Sunderland Corporation. Tickets cancelled by this type of punch have smaller holes than those made by the Bell Punch and similar counterparts.

What is not known is the rationale behind the use of the Atherton punch. Passenger numbers can be calculated by adding up the number of tickets issued by the conductor, but the conductor could issue bogus tickets and be undetected. Did any other tram or bus operators use them? And why did they choose to use them?

(RA/ARP)

BOOK REVIEW

NORFOLK CARRIER, Memories of a family haulage business, Barker & Sons, Wells-next-the-Sea, Norfolk, by Brian Barker and David Lowe. Published 2003 by David Lowe. 96 pages, 15cm x 21 cm, illustrated in black & white.
www.davidlowe.org

This is the story of a small transport business in a small coastal town. It commenced typically after the First World War, and was carried on by several generations of the same family. However, the daily problems and national issues had to be met by small firms as much as by the largest haulage companies. Licensing, fuel tax, plating, drivers' hours, de-regulation, "next day delivery" are the same for all. And so too are regular customers and their expectations.

In the preface the author says:

'Despite the shortcomings of the age, most local carriers ran strictly controlled and efficient operations - in so far as road conditions, weather and the foibles of early motor vehicles would allow. And these operations were carried out with as much concern for cost control and profitability as their modern day counterparts. They had to be run as tight ships. Customers, as always, held the whip hand, being free to choose another firm if their regular carrier failed to meet service expectations.'

No motorway stories here! The firm ran its lorries between the Norfolk coast and Norwich, mainly. The narrowness of the roads, the regular arrival (often sudden) of fog, the East Coast Floods of 1953, the closure of the railway in 1964....these are the background. As the small businesses that were the chief customers shrank in numbers, the firm took on warehousing and shared in a new shipping trade which came to the old fishing port of Wells. After deregulation, Barker's lorries did move further afield, but remained rooted in its own part of East Anglia.

All in all, this book gives an excellent insight into rural goods transport over a period of 80 years (the business closed down in 2000, although the family still has members engaged in road transport. Although set in Norfolk, a broad picture emerges of the road transport industry and its problems throughout Great Britain.

As in all such stories there are anecdotes and descriptions of characters to add some colour. Add to this details of the lorries (many of which were Commer - remember the "blown" TS3 engine?) Even the family Morris 8 was pressed into service from time to time to do some surreptitious delivery work!

(ARP)

100 Years of British Registration Numbers

It was in November 1903 that local authorities in the British Isles began the issue of registration numbers to mechanically propelled vehicles. This was in advance of 1st January 1904, from which date it became compulsory to display a number.

The numbers were prefixed by a letter code (index mark) which was allocated to each local authority in the British Isles. Scotland was allocated the letters G, S and V and Ireland the letters I and Z. For England and Wales, letters (commencing with A) were allocated to all local authorities according to their population size. Hence the scheme began with A for London, B for Lancashire etc.....through to Y for Somerset. Then AA for Hampshire, AB for Worcestershire etc. with the list ending with Rutland C.C. allocated the letters FP.

The examples above are all counties, the towns which were county borough councils also are in the list, hence Chester with FM and Canterbury with FN were towns with the smallest populations (as at 1901 census). As the series were used up, new letters were allocated in a random way, for example K for Liverpool was supplemented by KA, KB, KC, KD and KF, the intermediate KE having been taken by Kent C.C. Birkenhead having had CM first allocated, later took up BG, when G was no longer tied rigidly to Scottish issues. Many of the G series were issued to London, which outstripped all others in the number of index letters allocated. (GC, GF, GH, GJ, GK, GN, GO, GP, GW, GX and GY became London, *inter alia*).

A magazine with the title "Car Illustrated" published statistics from time to time on the number of vehicles registered with each authority. In the first few years (1904-1910) it is clear that motorcycles far out-numbered private cars, and "heavy motor cars" were few and far between. One particular reason for the latter fact was the practice of heavy vehicle manufacturers to register their products locally. Most Leyland wagons were registered in Lancashire (B) and most Fodens in Cheshire (M), but they did not operate in those counties. Secondly, of course, until 1910 mechanically propelled goods vehicles were rare. Historians are sometimes baffled by the widespread practice of "re-registration", or, the re-issue of voided numbers, which occurred before 1920. An owner could thus retain the number of a scrapped vehicle and apply it to a new one, or to one acquired with a different number. In the case of buses, it was often the practice of local authorities to apply the local registration mark to a second hand vehicle, as a matter of civic dignity.

The Roads Act, 1920, which came into force in 1921 brought about a change. From this point the local authorities not only had to register the vehicles (for a fee) but also were responsible for the collection of the "Road Fund Tax" on behalf of the exchequer. Owners were obliged to pay annually a fee set by Parliament. At first the tax fell due each 1st January, but to spread the work-load of the collectors, three and six month periods were later allowed. At the same time, the re-issue of voided numbers was stopped, although it still occurred for special reasons.

Some local authorities allocated blocks of numbers to certain categories of vehicles, such as motor cycles, private cars, goods vehicles etc. This was allowed to continue after 1920, and was done at the whim of the officer in charge for whatever local reason..

Three letter marks etc.

In 1932, Staffordshire C.C. had used up all its two letter index marks and there were now no more to allocate (combinations such as BF and OO etc. were not permitted). So ARF plus three numbers was allocated, and all local authorities bar the very small ones followed suit in due course. A second "crisis" in the fifties saw the introduction of "reversed" plates, with the numbers preceding the letters. As a third "crisis" loomed, in the early sixties, staved off by the issue of BF and OO and the like to the largest authorities (Staffs. and Essex), a new scheme combined a solution to the lack of new index marks and a scheme to help the police judge the age of a vehicle at the time when M.o.T. Vehicle Tests were to be introduced.

The "Year suffix Scheme" was phased in in 1963-4, a system which added a seventh element to the registration number to denote the year of first registration. A=1963, B=1964 etc. When this ran out, the suffix letter became a prefix letter. A=1983, B=1984 etc.....this system ran until it was replaced in 2001 by the present system, which was described in R&RTHA Newsletter No.27.

The present scheme, now in its third year, is intended to run for fifty years. New letter codes have replaced the traditional ones, and there are still plenty of letters in hand should they be needed. The present scheme took away the ability of fleet operators to match fleet numbers and registration numbers, and observations show that there is a strong random element in the issue of sequences of the final three letters on plates of the current type.

(ARP/J Harrison)

NEW RESEARCH

Sending Parcels by Steam Tram

Ron Phillips reveals the results of recent research at Wigan, where a parcels service was operated by the steam trams, but not it seems by the electric cars which replaced them.

Sending parcels by tram was a possibility in a number of English towns, and was certainly a widespread facility on motor buses during the period 1920-1980. Methods of operation varied, as did the range of the service provided. I was surprised to discover on published timetables for the Wigan and District Tramways, which operated three routes from close to the Wigan Market Place, that they offered a parcels service, and that this facility was inherited by the Corporation (electric) Tramways. It was, however, discontinued. Below I offer the probable reason why.

History

The Wigan steam tramways operated over three distinct routes. A line from Pemberton (west) and another from Hindley (north east) was joined in 1896 by a line from Platt Bridge (south east). Each line was worked separately from the others, although they terminated fairly close to Wigan Market Place, which was a focus for horse drawn omnibus services. As the steam tram engines were single ended, they required triangles rather than loops to run round the double deck trailer cars, and each route had a depot at the outer end. The first two lines opened in July 1880 and January 1883 respectively: at first the Pemberton line used horse traction. The business foundered and was operated by a receiver for a time. In the early 1890s new (local) capital was injected, and Wigan Corporation purchased the tracks within the Wigan boundaries, leasing them back to the operating company for an annual rental. The third line, to Platt Bridge, was laid by the Corporation (the work was done by a local contractor), and also rented to the company now known as the Wigan & District Tramways Co.

The steam trams ran on narrow gauge tracks (3ft. 6ins), an unusual choice in Lancashire, but one chosen because "of the narrowness of the streets". The streets were not universally narrow, but there were numerous "tight spots" and a private company was in no position to purchase land and demolish buildings and rebuild bridges, so the choice of a narrow gauge was logical enough.

Services

Each route ran to a twenty minute interval during commercial hours and the evening. The tracks were single with passing loops, and the "normal" service required 4 cars. It is probable that a further

engine was kept in steam, and at certain busy times extra cars were advertised, allowing a 15 minute frequency. Let us look at the daily timetable of the Pemberton route.

A workmen's tram left Pemberton at 5.20 am, returning from Wigan at 6.05 am. It made a second journey at 7.05 am, and returned at 8.04 am, thus being the first car ex Wigan of the daily service. A second tram left Pemberton at 8.am to commence the daily service, joined by a third at 8.20 am. The first engine arrived back at Pemberton in time to run the 8.40 am, but the indications are that the steam trams waited at the terminal points (both ends of the line) for 20 mins, so the 8.40 am would be worked by a fourth engine. Why such a long layover?

The answer is probably an amalgam of the following. It was necessary to turn the tram engine on a triangle, requiring the participation of both crew, at the outer end the turning of the engine may have been substituted by the bringing out of another engine and/or a change of crew. The engine might need to take on water at either end, or fuel at the outer end. The conductor would have to make up his waybill, and would probably have collected fares before the departure of the car, in order to concentrate on other duties along the route. Any parcels aboard the tram would have to be taken to the office, and parcels for the journey would need to be picked up and stowed (where on the car?) The conductor may have also had the duty of sweeping out the car at the terminus.

Some of the parcels could be delivered along the route. The Company's notice states

'Parcels consigned to parties along the line of route will be delivered from the passing cars, and parcels addressed to consignees beyond the terminus may be left in the Company's offices until called for.' The offices were also Waiting Rooms, and occupied premises other than the Company's three car sheds. They were presumably manned by a parcel clerk. The notice goes on to say

'For the convenience of the public the Company have adopted Parcel Stamps of the value of 1d and 2d each, and these may be purchased in any quantities at the terminus, or at the Chief Offices, 23, King Street, Wigan.'

The scale of charges was:

Not exceeding 2lbs	1d.
Over 2lbs and not exceeding 14lbs.....	2d.
Over 14lbs and not exceeding 28lbs.....	3d.
Over 28lbs and not exceeding 56lbs.....	4d.

Travel tickets were of the usual punch type

printed by A. Williamson of Ashton-under-Lyme, and ticket punches were hired from the same source. Unusually, there was a complex scheme for the issue of contract tickets, with three categories of passengers catered for.

Scholars & Apprentices under 18yrs.

Scholars & Apprentices over 18yrs.

Ordinary Passengers

Contracts were available for 3 months, 6 months, or 12 months, and there were intermediate stages on each of the three routes, although the fares "all the way" were the same, working out as 15/-, £1, and £1 7s 6d for a 3 month ticket. Also available was a 10% discount if three or more tickets were purchased by members of the same family.

Municipalisation

The Wigan & District Company was bought out by Wigan Corporation on 1st October 1902. By this time, a system of narrow gauge electric trams was in operation on three routes; (Martland Mill, Boar's Head and Mariebonne) each of which had contract tickets for 1d., 1½d. and 2d. stages, but there were no special concessionary rates and certainly no parcels service.

Acquisition of the steam worked lines was with a view to electrification, but at first the working of the lines was left unchanged, with the same staff, and separate accounts were kept under the heading "Wigan Corporation Tramways Steam Section"

It is clear that the Tramways Committee had to consider the future of the Contracts scheme and the Parcels Service, so for the year 1903 there were certain changes.

Electric Tramways. The Contract tickets were now issued only for 6 months, and were for fixed periods commencing April 1st and October 1st. (This kept issue in line with the financial year)

Steam Tramways. The wording of the official notice regarding contracts was changed

'For the convenience of the public and to preserve continuity of working contract tickets will be issued at the Company's Offices, 23 King Street, until further notice. The Tramways Committee reserve to themselves the right to close any section, wholly or in part, during reconstruction, and contract tickets will only be granted on this understanding. In the event of the tramways not being available for traffic from the above cause, all contract tickets in force at the date of such stoppage, will be extended for a period equal to that for which the lines are closed.'

The complicated tariff was simplified, and the rate for Students and Apprentices over 18 was abolished. The arrangements for the parcel service were allowed to stand as before, this service only being available on the steam worked lines, of course.

Conversion to electric working

As electric cars were available, it was decided to convert the Platt Bridge route with cars running on the narrow gauge track brought into service in September 1896. The intention to do this was declared in March 1903 and the work, erection of overhead wires and bonding of the tracks, was completed by the end of May. The line was inspected for electric operation on 29th May 1903, and electric trams started running in public service in the afternoon. No break in service had occurred.

The depot at Platt Bridge was converted to house electric cars. The inspector was concerned about the safety of upper deck passengers under low railway bridges, of which here were five on this line. As a result he recommended that the cars be fitted with roofs. Of course, roofed double deck steam tram trailers had been running here for some time, so in a way it was a retrograde step to introduce open top cars. But did the inspector realise that roofed double deck electric cars were a rarity, and it was only in the autumn of the previous year that C. R. Bellamy, the Liverpool manager, had started experiments with a top cover. Wigan had expressed an interest in this cover, independent of the instructions of the inspector in October 1902, and a sample top cover of this type was installed on Wigan car no. 13. This roof may have been too high for use on the Platt Bridge section

Wigan responded to the instruction to fit roofs by providing some cars with wooden roofs supported on metal rails forming an extension to the existing upper deck railings. There was a round hole through which the trolley mast projected, and the height of the roof seems to have been fixed by the need to clear the swivelling top part of the trolley mast.

The existing fleet of narrow gauge electric trams was housed in a depot at Woodhouse Lane on the Martland Mill route, but the Platt Bridge section was worked independently from its own depot for a number of reasons.

1. A fleet of roofed cars was required.
2. Staff and other facilities were already in place at Platt Bridge.
3. For the time being, the line was treated as part of the "Steam Section" and facilities such as the parcels service were continued.
4. Numerous other instances point to the fact that the Tramways Committee were anxious not to upset passengers and staff on the steam lines.

New Timetable

The published timetable for 1904 places the Platt Bridge line in the steam section. Instead of the 20 minute daytime frequency of the steam cars, there is a 15 minute frequency. However there was a 10

minute frequency from 3.55 am ex Platt Bridge to the former steam tram terminus in Wigan (King St.) lasting until 5.45 am: after this the daytime service commenced to Market Square, joining the existing electric network by a line along Station Road. The 10 minute workmans service required 4 cars in service. This was also so with the steam trams on early workmen's duties from Platt Bridge.

Conversion to standard gauge

In July 1903 Wigan made a most remarkable *volte face* and decided to build all future electric tram lines to standard gauge, and to convert existing lines to that gauge as convenient. There were various parties pressing for a change of gauge, but as things turned out it was mainly a waste of money, as the desired ability to join with other existing or projected tramways in the area never led to anything other than a half-hearted attempt to run a through service to St. Helens in the late twenties.

The decision meant a prolongation of steam operation on the Pemberton and Hindley lines. The Pemberton steam operation did not close down until 10th April 1904, and the line reopened for electric cars on 26th July. Once again the steam tram depot was equipped with track and wiring and the first electric service commenced from there each morning at 5.40.. One car maintained a 40 minute service until a daily 10 minute frequency was started with a tram leaving Pemberton at 7.35 am.

It had by now been decided that the steam routes should no longer be operated as a separate entity with separate accounts. On 1st April 1904, start of the new financial year, the two operations ran under the same set of accounts. The use of Pemberton depot was necessary because in April 1904 the new standard gauge Central Depot was still under construction. Although this was possibly used from July 1904 (but more probably from September) it was not formally opened until the summer of 1905.

After just one year and nine days of electric operation on the narrow gauge, the Platt Bridge route was closed down for reconstruction to standard gauge, and was re-opened on 2nd September. Although the Central Depot must have been partly open to trams by this date, Platt Bridge depot was converted to standard gauge and had some alterations to the fabric for this purpose. The reason was a physical one: the Wigan end of the line adjoined narrow gauge tracks and the new cars were isolated and could not reach Central Depot. For the first few months they terminated in Compton Street.

August 1st was taken as a date from which fares were to be "standardised." New contract rates were announced (in fact, the pricing system and 6 monthly contract system of the electric lines became

universal). The Chairman of the Tramways Committee was asked to organise a number of things in July 1904, essentially because the opening of the Pemberton line would see the introduction of new single deck cars and would be a well publicised event. On the other hand, it was something which should take place as soon as the contractors finished and the inspector could be prevailed upon to pass it as fit for use....Pemberton people had been without transport for three months. There was no time to wait for certain decisions to be dealt with at the next monthly meeting of the Committee.

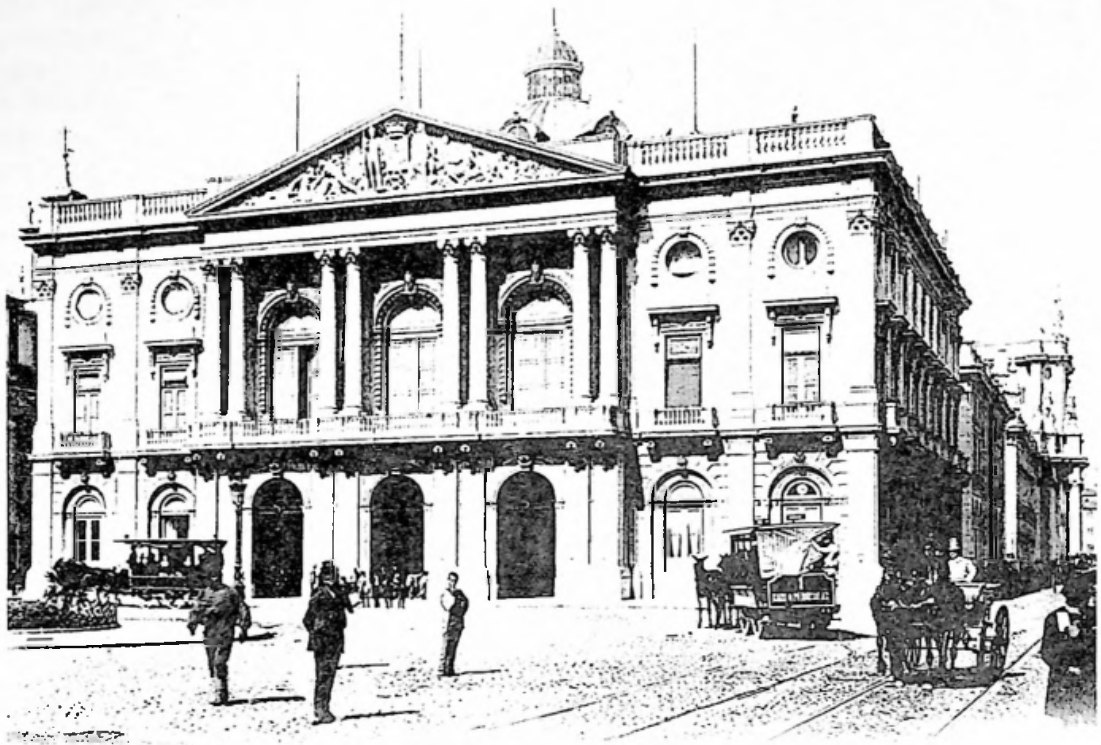
The Chairman was also called upon to decide the fate of the parcels service, an issue brought to a head by the need to renew the lease on the Platt Bridge Waiting Room. Clearly the service depended upon the collection points, and these cost money to staff and rent. It was the policy to retain the former steam tramway employees, and during the changeover periods they were to be "kept busy" However, some economies would have to be made at a point in the tramways' history when money was being spent at a furious rate.

The Transport Committee minutes do not record at what date the parcels service was withdrawn. The last steam tram service to Hindley ceased on 24th September, the line reopening in December with standard gauge electric trams. This line was not worked from its former depot, as initially electrification only covered the Wigan end of the route and it was another ten months before cars ran all the way. It is probable, therefore, that the parcels service finished when the Hindley steam service ceased, as until then the other ex-steam routes were still being worked from their former depots.

Central Depot came into full working order by July 1905, when it was officially opened. However, it had poor workshop accommodation, and Pemberton Depot later became a subsidiary workshop. It was subsequently sold to Massey Brothers, bus body builders. Both Hindley and Platt Bridge depots were not disposed of, but remained the property of the Corporation for many years and were rented out. The building at Platt Bridge still exists in October 2003.

Not all of the working practices of the steam tramway disappeared. The Company purchased its tickets and hired punches from Williamson of Ashton, whereas the Wigan electric tramways used Bell Punch of London. Clearly Williamson's tickets were cheaper, and the Committee started to buy tickets for the electric routes from the Lancashire printer. This led to a dispute with Bell Punch, who alleged that Wigan had broken a contract to purchase tickets from them, which was strongly refuted by W.C.T. who stated "no contract exists"

History on a Postcard



L'Hôtel de Ville

The postcard seen above (slightly enlarged) is of the Town Hall in Lisbon. Architecturally, nothing has changed here, and tramcars still pass along the street on the right to the nodal point of the old tramway system at Praça do Comércio., marked by the taller building. One thing has changed, though, and that is the gauge of the tramways, which have always since electrification used a very narrow 90 cm. gauge, in Imperial measure this is 2ft 11½ins.

The image dates from the last decade of the 19th Century. The Lisbon tramways used mule hauled cars running on standard gauge tracks. The mule trams had an advantage over other road vehicles in that their passage was a smooth one. One operator of mule buses, one Eduardo Jorge, two of whose vehicles are seen on the left and centre right of the image, arranged for the wheels of his light open sided buses to fit the gauge of the tram tracks, *et voilà*, a smooth passage could be had by all. The Eduardo Jorge buses operated at a very cheap fare, and of course could leave the tram tracks to serve places not reached by the mule trams.

We must now look at the third vehicle in the picture, a two-wheeled carriage drawn by two mules or horses. This two has wheels which fit the gauge of

the tram tracks. Early traffics show that hire of a "two horse carriage" was more expensive than that of a "one horse carriage", and with two horses and the tram lines a speedy journey could be assured.

When electrification was proposed for the Lisbon tramways, a solution to the problem was the adoption of a gauge so narrow that a carriage or bus could not use both tracks (other photos show that it was the practice to use one track !) In addition, the tramways were built on new routes with steep hills, where the horse drawn vehicles were completely unable to compete with the powerful acceleration of the electric cars. They could, of course, block the trams by proceeding slowly ahead of them, but such a practice left no-one any better off. The mule buses did not go out of business, but continued bumpily to serve certain routes at very cheap fares, allowing poor people the chance to travel.

On one route, the Lisbon Electric Tramways introduced "People's Cars", run for workmen at very cheap fares. This route followed the wide Avenida 24 de Julho along the sea front, a flat area where the speed of the cheap-fare trams allowed them to overtake the animal drawn buses on the wide road. The mule buses ceased about 1920.