

Newsletter

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A Day in the Country

"Boys and girls come out to play, for it is a holiday." That is what the children are singing, or ought to be singing, on the crowded brakes which are leaving London's dismal streets for one brief and happy glimpse of green leaves and blue sky in the country - the real country - if haply the horses can get so far. For alas, London grows and grows, and the "real Country" every year gets further off from these poor little town-bred children. The more is the pity and the greater is the praise due to those well-to-do Londoners - now, happily, an increasing number - who give their money, or, what is infinitely more valuable, their time and their brains, in order to make a journey into the country possible at least once a year to tens of thousands of their little fellow citizens whose horizon is usually as

limited as that in the picture, in which The Gay Parisienne on the west and "Ales & Stout" on the east form the limits of vision, and in which the green of Nature is represented by the geraniums in the window of the first floor of Goswell Street.

From "The Queen's Empire", Cassell & Co Ltd,
London, 1899

Pictures from the companion volume, *The Queen's London* (1896) appeared in *Newsletters* 41 and 42.

NB The caption (above) should have referred to Goswell Road, not Goswell Street. The street from which the convoy is emerging may be Noble Street (later renamed Bastwick Street), but not identified with certainty.

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The Victorian Portable Theatre

by ELEANOR ATKINSON

(There is an apology for nepotism in the Editorial on a later page). The piece which follows was an examination answer on a degree course for stage management. Having attained her degree, Eleanor, a grand-daughter of your Editor, did four seasons as the supervising electrician to a travelling production, *The Spirit of the Horse*, which played in England, Wales, Scotland, the Republic of Ireland and in Dubai. By the time she felt like "settling down", her curriculum vitae won her an immediate place in the (then newly created) role of Police Community Support Officer in a town in the South of England. She is still a PCSO and enjoying it.

At one point in her text, Eleanor suggests that there was no recognisable succession to the Victorian Portable Theatre. May I suggest that the work of Mitchell & Kenyon and their similar targeting of northern industrial areas for their filming, and the garnering of a working class audience, could be an early 20th century analogy, although not a perfect one. (See *Newsletters* 39, p.5, 40, p.8 and 44, p.11).

However, there is a much wider topic opened, but not answered. How was the actual transportation of the portable theatres carried out? There is no evidence that their owners were wealthy, or unwise enough, to maintain their own teams of horses, which would require stabling, forage, attendance and exercise all year round. They must, it therefore seems, have hired horses for each move. This, in turn, pre-supposes that jobmasters held teams for heavy haulage and that other large loads must have been forthcoming on a frequent enough basis to justify keeping these horses for hire. Can readers comment, please?

Q: Which Area of your Researches this year into Nineteenth Century Theatre have you found the most Compelling and Why?

The area of nineteenth century theatre that I have found most compelling this year is one which heavily involves the way of life in the provinces of England, particularly the Northern areas that grew rapidly from villages to towns during the Nineteenth Century due to the Industrial Revolution. The traditional fairs of previous centuries were still very popular in these areas, although their purpose, content and status changed considerably throughout the century. Although, at the start of the nineteenth century, these fairs were primarily for the sale of livestock and for farm workers to promote themselves for employment, they were also public celebrations, involving many varieties of performance and entertainment.

One of these types of entertainment was the Portable or Booth Theatre. This was exactly what its name suggests – not just a touring production or a touring company, but a touring company complete with their own Portable Theatre and a repertoire of shows. These theatres would tour a circuit of fairs in towns and villages for most of

the year, some of them then moving into permanent buildings during the winter months. Companies were often family run and although some thrived it was a difficult way to make a living. Michael R Booth wrote, of Victorian Theatre in general, ".... starvation is not one of the occupational hazards of the modern stage. In the Victorian period it was a very real threat."¹

The touring booths began life in the early Eighteenth Century, from when records exist of stationary booths being used as performance venues. As they developed, however, structures were designed to enable complete construction within a few hours and to enable relatively easy transportation. John Richardson is credited with creating the first fully portable Booth Theatre, after some success with a stationary booth at Bartholomew Fair in the early Nineteenth Century. Soon after, many Booth Theatre companies began operating all over the country, although they were particularly popular in the newly growing northern industrial towns, providing another home for Nineteenth Century drama. The booths were extremely popular with their audiences. Others did not, however, receive them as well. They were "viewed with some disfavour by authority and looked down upon by the established theatre, rarely being regarded in a serious light."²

DOWLAIS POLICE LETTER

Dowlais Police Office
January 8th 1883

This is to certify the Mr Edward Ebley & Co have performed in a Theatre at Dowlais Market for the last five months during which period their performances have been conducted with propriety and to the benefit of the working class in keeping them from drink.

I am yours
Obediently
C Rodman, Inspector

Not always frowned on by authority! This superbly succinct letter from the Dowlais Police bestows approval on Ebley's Portable Theatre and gives its reasoning. Presumably the Theatre rested in Dowlais for winter 1882-3.

(From the website of the National Library of Wales, "Gathering the Jewels")

The reason that I have found studying the Nineteenth Century Portable Theatres so compelling is the sheer scale of what they achieved technically and logistically considering the conditions at the time. Some of the booths were enormous, containing all of the facilities found in any permanent theatre of the time, from stage to seating to, in some cases, gas powered lighting, which in itself was relatively new to theatre. All this was transported from venue to venue on horse drawn carts along a road system that was, at times, almost impassable, meaning "delays and mishaps were frequent."³

Also, the booths seem to have been a random occurrence in theatre history that was never really continued. They had mainly disappeared by the start of the Twentieth

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I am
your Obedient
Servant
J. Cooper

to 1500 people and they were not always very safe, modern Health and Safety regulations being a long time away. The Booth structures have been described as "a booth or tent ranging in comfort and appointments from the miserably makeshift to the relatively sumptuous."⁴ The construction of the Booth was a well-rehearsed task that could often be completed within a few hours, something that I find quite staggering having had some experience of erecting similar modern structures in nowhere near that time period.

On the exterior of the Booths, a promenade area was constructed to allow the actors to advertise their forthcoming performances by performing extracts and highlights throughout the day. In 1824, Cooke's circus at Hull Fair used gas lighting for the first time in a travelling theatre. The billboard stated that it was lit by "a superb gas chandelier."⁵ This was only nine years after the first gas lighting system was introduced to a theatre, at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden.

The construction process and details are what amazes me most about the Booth theatres. As a Stage Manager who would very much like to pursue work in

Outdoor and Site Specific Theatre, I find it staggering that people were transporting and constructing these sorts of structure with relative ease well over a hundred years ago, whilst today it is still a reasonably complex task. Nineteenth Century Theatre staff installed temporary gas lighting systems; today we install temporary electrical lighting systems. In the Nineteenth Century there were so many more problems facing the Portable Theatre companies. For example, transportation nowadays is relatively easy. However, despite the state of Nineteenth Century roads, companies still often travelled to as many as twenty fairs in a summer season, something that even now would be considered a very harsh schedule.

The Portable Theatres did not seem to fit in easily with the rest of the theatrical world in the Nineteenth Century and were not always regarded as real theatre. They were often thought of as "a quaint form of entertainment which could in no way be compared with 'real' theatre."⁶ However, for the people who attended performances in them, they were as real as any theatre could be and were often the only type of theatre they could afford the money or the time to go and see. The majority of audience members were working class factory workers and domestic servants. Although their wages and standard of living are documented as being appallingly low, compared to the hard life in the country that many were used to in the early stages of the Industrial Revolution, these workers did have enough money and time to attend performances in the Booth theatres, especially when several family members were employed and the income

Century and it is difficult to think of a modern equivalent. Travelling circuses are probably the nearest surviving equivalent. However, these were also in operation in the Nineteenth Century, often pitching themselves at the same fairs as the Portable Theatres. Circuses have, therefore, had their own chain of development that has led to the modern circuses that we see today. In my opinion, there is not a true equivalent to the Portable Theatres. The nearest equivalent is probably the construction of marquees containing stages and seating at outdoor events and concerts. However, these do not provide the same service. The booths were not just about the structures. They acted as an alternative method of bringing drama to audiences who might not otherwise have found access to it possible.

The development of the Portable Theatres and the rise of the Industrial Revolution of the Nineteenth Century went hand in hand. Due to the Industrial Revolution, many of the towns on the Portable Theatre touring circuit grew significantly, meaning that there were bigger audiences for the theatres to play to. Also, although, as mentioned earlier, the road systems at this time were poor, the need for factories to transport their goods and materials meant that gradually improvements were made, easing the problems of transporting a theatre from town to town. Also, the advances made during the Industrial Revolution meant that the materials needed for the construction of the Booths themselves, such as tarpaulin and planking, were readily available at a reasonable cost for the first time.

The Booths were often huge structures, some holding up

was shared between them. Wild's booth charged around 1s 6d for entrance which was cheaper than most of the permanent theatres in the North of England at the time but some smaller booths were even cheaper. The Booth Theatres catered well for their audiences, starting performances at a time chosen in relation to factory closing times and, in the case of Old Wild's Booth, "opening the doors early, providing pre-show music and keeping warm fires in the winter."⁷

The repertoire performed by the Booth Theatre companies was very varied, covering most types of drama, including 'war spectacles, dog dramas, nautical pieces, pantomimes, burlesques, comic ballets and farces, together with a great number of the popular melodramas of the day.'⁸ They also often included adaptations of Shakespeare. This is another element of the Booth theatres that I find quite staggering. I cannot imagine a touring company today being capable of touring such a large repertoire of productions and being able to switch between them with such ease on the road as the Booth Theatre companies did. Today, simply touring one production is seen as quite a task. The plays performed in Booth theatres would often include scenes depicting famous battles, particularly from recent wars such as the Crimean War that took place in 1854. This made the productions more relevant to their audiences and took into account the patriotism of the time and the audience's love for spectacle and excitement. I think this indicates one of the major differences between Nineteenth Century Theatre and Theatre today. Although we now have the technological and logistical advances to make touring productions easier, the society we now live in does not demand or enjoy Theatre as much due to the increase in other media such as television and cinema. For a student about to embark on a career in Theatre, this is quite de-motivating. Theatre in the Nineteenth Century was so important to its

audiences and provided them with not only entertainment but with a release from their everyday lives and a way of relaxing and enjoying themselves. It was also much more possible for Theatre practitioners to use their art to make an impact on people's lives. I think this is the main reason that I have enjoyed studying the Nineteenth Century Theatre. It has enabled me to see how important Theatre can be to society and although it is now a struggle to let Theatre make an impact, with an awareness of its former role it is still possible to aim towards the goal of impacting Theatre in the modern world.

- 1 'Theatre In The Victorian Age' by Michael R Booth, Cambridge University Press, 1991, p.109
- 2 'Victorian Portable Theatres' by Josephine Harrop, The Society For Theatre Research, The Alden press Ltd, 1989, p.1 ISBN 0 85430 047 3
- 3 Ibid, p.22
- 4 'Theatre In The Victorian Age' by Michael R Booth, Cambridge University Press, 1991, p.110
- 5 'Victorian Portable Theatres' by Josephine Harrop, The Society For Theatre Research, The Alden Press Ltd, 1989, p.15 ISBN 0 85430 047 3
- 6 Ibid, p.77
- 7 'Victorian Portable Theatres' by Josephine Harrop, The Society For Theatre Research, The Alden Press Ltd, 1989, p.53 ISBN 0 85430 047 3
- 8 Ibid, p.60

Charabancs in Edinburgh

Alan Brochie, the well-known Scottish tramway historian, challenged the location attributed to the line-up of charabancs on p.20 in *Newsletter 50*. He suggested Castle Terrace, Edinburgh, not Princes Street. Peter Stubbs, the webmaster of www.edinphoto.org.uk concluded that Alan was absolutely right. Firstly, a photo of Castle Terrace in the 1930s, in Edinburgh Library, shows that the trees lining the street were on the pavement, as in the picture in *Newsletter*. Then, he went to Castle Terrace and found most of the trees still in place, close to the edge of the curb. The pavement has been widened and the railings have gone.

Mystery unresolved

I don't want you to think no research is being done in sleepy old Somerset so readers may recall my short piece about the Handcross bus accident of 1906 and how I got hold of a postcard with a rather curious message (*Newsletter 48* page 19). I accessed the online catalogue of the West Sussex Records Office and found they had a file containing newspaper cuttings of the accident. For a reasonable fee they sent me photocopies of the newspapers which listed the names of the dead and injured. I let the lady who gave me the card have a look, but none of the names rang a bell as being relatives of hers. So I have got no further in answering why "Reg" sent this card to "Dearest", [the Miss Warren, who has been identified]. Of course it is possible one of the injured was just a mutual friend in which case it would take a long shot to establish the link. So for now I am going to call this "a dead end".

David Grimmett

The Sale of Great Yarmouth Transport

by PETER BROWN

Great Yarmouth Transport Ltd

The former Great Yarmouth County Borough Council operated trams from 1903 until 1933 and buses from 1921, providing a comprehensive network in the then Borough area, plus one route going north to Caister. After local government reorganisation in 1974, which added the rural hinterland to the Borough area and increased the population by about a third, the Council continued to operate the 'Blue Buses'. The route network stayed virtually unchanged except for a few journeys into Bradwell, by then a western suburb of urban Yarmouth, and some contract and tendered services. Most of the bus services in the rural area continued to be operated by the National Bus Company subsidiary, Eastern Counties.

As a result of the Transport Act 1985, in 1986 the municipal undertaking became Great Yarmouth Transport Ltd (GYT), an arms-length company with all but one of the shares owned by the Borough Council. (The other share was in the name of the Borough Treasurer.) However, as far as the public were concerned, there was little change — the same buses still operated the same routes in the same livery. [For further details see *Newsletter 49*.]

Developments after deregulation

Eastern Counties was bought by its management and employees, but the relationship with the Blue Buses was not affected: neither attempted to compete in what had historically been the other's territory.

Halesworth Transit, a minibus firm imaginatively trading under the name 'Flying Bananas', started up in rivalry. It did not attempt to under-cut fares but, because it paid much lower wages and did run evening and Sunday services, it put indirect pressure on the Blue Buses to contain costs. Some maintenance work on the Flying Bananas' vehicles was done by Ambassador Travel, formerly the coaching arm of Eastern Counties, but by then independent and suspected of having links with then-growing group known as British Bus.

Initially GYT's financial performance was satisfactory. Profits averaged £150,000 a year for the first few years, the surpluses being used to repay the debentures and to buy new buses. From 1990/91 the annual profits were much lower, averaging only £10,000 a year, which reflected the long term trend of lower passenger numbers and the emerging competition from the Flying Bananas. Only in 1993/94 was a dividend paid: £11,200. The net book value of the assets in the later years stayed fairly constant at about £1.1 million.

In 1988 Eastern Counties had informal discussions with some senior councillors about buying GYT. When the latter's management heard the rumour, they made an offer to buy, in conjunction with the employees. Nothing came of either of these offers.

The national Conservative Government was keen on local authorities divesting themselves of their municipal trading undertakings. The advice given was:

- The Council must obtain a fair market price;

- Neither the Department of Trade nor the Office of Fair Trading wished to see local monopolies;
- Covenants must be reasonable; and
- Suitable pension arrangements must be made for the employees transferring.

In one way the government attitude changed. To start with, it was content to see a 'single tender' sale, providing it could be shown that a fair market price was being obtained. A sale to the employees could even be at a small discount. Following criticism by the Public Accounts Committee concerning the sale of former National Bus Company subsidiaries, in 1993 the Minister for Public Transport said that it would be unlikely that any single tender sale would be approved. It would therefore be necessary to get bids from a number of potential purchasers.

In Great Yarmouth's case this led to a genuine fear that announcing the intention of selling could provoke Eastern Counties into a 'bus war', either because they were concerned that a major national operator might get a presence in 'their' territory or because the Office of Fair Trading might intervene to prevent the creation of a local monopoly. Eastern Counties' finances were more robust than GYT's, and the consequence could be that latter was forced out of business; Eastern Counties would then become the local operator and the Council would receive just the forced-sale value of the assets. (This had happened elsewhere. The experiences of other local authorities are summarised in the Appendix.)

The local politicians were in no mood to sell despite there being no strong reason for owning a bus company. Before deregulation in 1986 the Council could and did take account of social reasons in making decisions about local bus services. After that date it had to treat all operators equally; if it wished to subsidise socially-motivated services, it had to invite tenders. The Council-nominated directors had a legal obligation to act in the best interests of the company, so could pay little regard to social considerations. As the company only once paid a dividend, the financial case for owning the company was weak: it would never be a good investment. No doubt the Council felt a moral responsibility towards its former employees, but the number was diminishing over the years.

It seemed the sale would only happen if legislation were passed to compel it — or if the Council's continuing financial crisis became so bad that the need for the cash was overwhelming. And it was the need for the money which kept the issue on the boil.

Overtures

In May 1994 Eastern Counties became a subsidiary of the GRT Bus Group, four of the Eastern Counties directors becoming millionaires overnight. From the Blue Buses' point of view, GRT was the best of the companies trying to build up national networks. Their origin was an ex-council bus company, Grampian Regional Transport (formerly the Aberdeen Corporation bus undertaking), and they had since taken over the former Leicester and Northampton council-owned bus companies; they had a reputation of being good employers, and reasonable

people to deal with. At that time Stagecoach had a reputation for aggressive action and British Bus for providing poor quality services to the public.

In November 1994, GRT wrote to GYT, requesting a meeting. This request was passed on to the Council and, at a confidential meeting of GRT, GYT and senior members from the controlling (Labour) group of the Council, Moir Lockhead, Chief Executive of GRT, expressed his concern that the recent expansion of the Flying Bananas' activities was making the local situation unstable. He did not see the Blue Buses as direct competitors to GRT but as an attraction to potential competitors; he therefore wished to run the Blue Buses, providing a network of services agreed with the Council.

At a further meeting in January 1995, GRT put forward a series of proposals:

- A new Blue Bus Division would be created and take over the running of all Eastern Counties and GYT services in the Yarmouth and Lowestoft areas;
- GYT would sell the buses, depot equipment and stores to Eastern Counties;
- All staff would transfer on their existing conditions, including pension benefits, as far as possible;
- The depot would be leased to Eastern Counties;
- The whole of the existing services would be registered and guarantees given about service levels and fares;
- The new division would have a management group including a Council nominee; and
- The current blue livery would be retained.

The Leader of the Council agreed to take the matter to the Labour group meeting the following week. GYT wanted to complete the transaction by the end of February, which the Council officers thought impracticable, particularly as it would be necessary to consult the Department of Transport.

The Labour Group (reluctantly) agreed with the proposal, which was then submitted in writing by GRT on 31 January. A week later the GYT Board agreed to accept the proposals as a basis for negotiation to proceed. The Council's Policy Sub-Committee passed a similar resolution on 17 February; this was confirmed by Council on 28 February.

And that's when the complications started. The main problems were trying to satisfy the Government's requirements concerning the avoidance of local monopolies, demonstrating that the best price had been obtained, and that all covenants were reasonable. However, the process was also significantly delayed when, in April, it was announced that GRT and Badgerline were merging to form a new company called FirstBus; this meant that the negotiations were 'put on hold' through most of the summer.

Avoidance of a local monopoly

Having seen reports in the press about the proposed purchase, the Office of Fair Trading wrote to GRT on 17 February 1995 asking for further information. GRT replied, stressing the competition from the Flying Bananas, which then had 18 vehicles, compared with GYT's 51.

In August, FirstBus's solicitors advised that a joint application should be made for confidential guidance

from the Office of Fair Trading (OFT). Obviously, the OFT could not commit itself to what its decision would be if a formal objection were made but it might be willing to give an informal view. The Council agreed, as it wanted to try to ensure that GRT would not be excluded from bidding. Much work went into drawing up the document which was submitted on 24 October.

One issue was what should be the area considered as the 'local market'. The OFT usually worked on 20 miles, which in this case was inappropriate as it virtually bisected Norwich: better would be either 15 miles or 25 miles. In the event, 15 miles was adopted; within the Borough area GYT's market share was estimated as 60%, Eastern Counties' as 24% and Halesworth Transit's as 15%. (These figures were derived from the apportionment used in the Council's concessionary fares scheme.)

Although the Blue Buses operated mainly in the urban area and Eastern Counties mainly outside, there were inevitable common sections of routes. GYT did a survey and found that only 12% of passengers paying single fares and 3% of passengers purchasing return fares made journeys wholly within the common sections of route. This demonstrated that the two companies did not compete for the custom of the great majority of passengers travelling within the urban area.

In addition to Halesworth Transit, twelve other operators had a presence in the local market, mainly providing school contracts or private hire. The application report thus demonstrated that additional potential competition existed.

The Council officers thought it best to show the Department of Transport officials a draft of the application report. The latter consulted their ministers and wrote saying that they had no objection to allowing FirstBus to compete. The letter concluded, 'You will appreciate that this view is, of course, without prejudice to the conclusions of the competition authorities on this issue.' However, it was suspected that the OFT were told of the DTp ministers' view.

The OFT sent their decision letter on 10 January 1996, the key passage being: 'on the information presently available, it is unlikely that the Secretary of State would want to refer the transaction to the Monopolies & Mergers Commission for investigation'. This was as explicit as could be hoped.

The process could now go ahead reasonably confidently. A detailed 13 point procedure was drawn up. Pannell Kerr Forster were engaged, on a fixed price contract, to provide specialist financial advice. A sub-committee with power to act was appointed to oversee the details.

Competitive tendering

The Government's view was that only a competitive tender process would demonstrate that the best market price was being obtained, but, as explained earlier, the Council feared that having a competitive process could risk destroying the value.

Discussions were held with officials of the Department of Transport in March 1995, soon after the formal approach from GRT had been received, but they insisted that ministers would not be satisfied unless there was genuine competition. They suggested a private competition,

whereby at least three firms likely to be genuinely interested were invited to bid.

The special problem was Great Yarmouth's isolation and the relatively small size of its bus operation. Any bidder other than FirstBus (Eastern Counties) would know that buying the Company would be likely to precipitate a commercial war with FirstBus. On the other hand, it was important that things should not be made too cosy for FirstBus: it must not be allowed to assume it would be the only bidder and thus be able to buy the Company at just above 'break up' price. The Council therefore made it clear that the tendering process was genuinely to find the best deal, and that if the price were thought to be too low, the Company would not be sold. FirstBus would not be told who the competitors were, of course.

As well as FirstBus, the Council decided to invite tenders from two other companies:

- Yorkshire Traction, a medium-sized company operating in West Yorkshire and Lincolnshire, its route network extending to Kings Lynn, and which had been purchasers of the Lincoln ex-municipal company; and
- Go Ahead, the fourth largest by market capitalisation of the quoted bus companies, which operated mainly in the London area, Brighton, Oxford and parts of the north-east.

Stagecoach was FirstBus's main rival nationally and owned Cambus, the former Cambridgeshire operations of Eastern Counties; it had the reputation of buying new buses and providing reliable services, but it was regarded as commercially ruthless. British Bus, the other major national company, had a poor reputation for service, so were not considered. An informal approach had been made to Sanders' of Holt, the main coaching firm in north Norfolk, which also ran some public bus services, but they did not want to oppose Eastern Counties in case there was retaliation in their home area.

Other issues

The Council wished to ensure that the public continued to receive a good service, that the employees were well treated, and that there was no 'asset stripping'. The DTP would not approve covenants which were over-restrictive or which extended for more than two or three years. In any case, there was no point in having conditions which would be unenforceable in practice.

Concerning the service to the public, the Council decided not to include any particular requirements in the contract but instead to ask bidders to state what commitments they would make, and to make it clear that those issues would be taken into account when recommending which (if any) bid was to be preferred.

Purchasers were required to make a commitment to continue the current basic conditions of employment and to provide a pension scheme broadly equivalent to the current one.

Other than the vehicles, the main asset was Caister Road Depot, the site of which had the alternative use of housing. The options were:

- For the Council to buy the depot from GYT, then lease it to the purchaser of the Company; or

- To include the depot in the assets to be sold, possibly with a covenant giving the Council the right to buy it back if it ceased to be used by the purchaser.

Although the former had previously been preferred, in the event the Council decided on the latter method, and did not include a right to repurchase.

An important technical financial issue was the exact form of the transaction. In previous sales of municipal bus companies, the purchasers had bought the shares. In Great Yarmouth's case, what was proposed was the sale of the assets; the cash-rich Great Yarmouth Transport would then be liquidated, the proceeds going to the Council. There would be a resulting tax liability for GYT, but this would be balanced by a lower liability for the purchaser, who would therefore pay a higher price. The practical advantage for the purchaser was that it would simplify the 'due diligence' stage, as GYT would continue to deal with creditors and liabilities at the sale date. The advantage for the Council was that the payments from GYT to the Council would be by way of dividends, giving the Council total freedom about what to do with the money. (Income from sales of shares would have been regarded as a capital receipt, the uses of which were restricted.)

Sale

The invitations to tender went out on 31 May 1996 with a return deadline of 5 July.

Go Ahead declined to bid. Yorkshire Traction's bid was £825,000 whereas FirstBus put in an indicative bid of £1,100,000, reduced to £1,050,000 a week later once GYT's trading results for the year to 31 March 1996 were finalised. The Council therefore formally resolved on 30 July that FirstBus be the preferred bidder and that, subject to the approval of the Department of Transport, detailed negotiations proceed with a view to completion by 30 September.

The Transport & General Workers Union submitted a letter stating that: 'The vast majority of the employees of Great Yarmouth Transport Ltd believe it is in their, and the Company's, best interests if the transfer of assets, trade and undertaking of Great Yarmouth Transport Ltd to FirstBus plc be allowed to take place.' Presumably it was felt that this would give the best long-term security and also preserve their conditions of employment.

The formal sale contract was drawn up and signed to take effect from midnight on Saturday 28 September 1996.

There was a momentary concern when one of the local coach operators (who was also a councillor) received a letter from the Office of Fair Trading stating that the OFT was considering whether this was a qualifying merger for the purposes of the Fair Trading Act 1973 and if so whether it raised competition or other public interest concerns sufficient to merit reference to the Monopolies & Merger Commission. A telephone call established this was a routine action taken whenever they heard about a merger. After a formal exchange of letters, nothing more was heard from the OFT.

The voluntary liquidation of GYT took much longer than expected because of a difficulty in agreeing the Pay As You Earn tax liabilities with the Inland Revenue and a late personal injury claim against the Company. After

allowing for the expenses of sale, the Council received £1,120,782, which, after adjusting for the difference between the book value of the shares in the Council's accounts and the actual value of the net fixed assets, meant that the Council had £1,042,235 available to finance its projects.

As expected, Eastern Counties closed their own old depot in Wellington Road and concentrated their vehicle maintenance on the Caister Road depot. Services continued much as before. The local buses retained their blue livery for several years.

In May 1998 Eastern Counties bought the Flying Bananas, so removing the competition. It is a matter for speculation whether the DTp and the OFT would have been as willing to approve Eastern Counties' takeover of the Blue Buses if it had not been for the competition at that time provided by the Flying Bananas.

Sources

The factual information is derived from various reports and papers of Great Yarmouth Borough Council, in particular:

- 'Sale of the Bus Company' — Report to the Finance Sub-Committee, 16 November 1993.
- 'Operational Review: Asset Sales' — Report to the Policy Committee, 17 February 1995.
- 'Sale of the Bus Company' — Report to the Policy Committee, 15 March 1996.
- 'Bus Company: Sale Conditions' — Report of the Policy Sub-Committee, 16 April 1996.
- 'Bus Company: Sale Arrangements' — Report to the Policy Sub-Committee, 29 May 1996.
- 'Bus Company: Bids Received' — Report to Policy Sub-Committee, 23 July 1996.
- 'Sale of the Blue Buses' — Report to the Finance Sub-Committee, 16 June 1998.
- Letters from the Department of Transport, 24 July 1992, 2 September 1993, 16 March 1995, 2 November 1995 and 8 October 1996.
- Letter from GRT Bus Group plc dated 31 January 1995.
- Letters from FirstBus plc, 11 July 1996 and 18 July 1996.
- Joint application to the Office of Fair Trading for confidential guidance, 24 October 1995.
- Letters from the Office of Fair Trading, 10 January 1996 and 13 September 1996.
- Letter from the Transport & General Workers Union, 31 July 1996.

The file containing these and other papers is to be passed to the Norfolk Record Office.

Any impressions and opinions are personal and subjective. The author was Borough Treasurer from 1981 to 2000, and was the lead officer for the sale of the Company.

Appendix

Experiences of other local authorities

To 1993

[As reported to the Finance Sub-Committee, 16 November 1993]

Grampian (1988), *Yorkshire Rider* (1988), *Cleveland Transit*

(1991): successful buyouts by the management with the employees (MEBOs). All are now [i.e. at 1993] strongly profitable.

Derby (1990): Employee buy-out in conjunction with Luton & District (itself an employee buy-out of a former NBC subsidiary). Barely profitable, despite severe cost-cutting and fare rises, and saddled with a large burden of debt, probably because the purchase price was too high.

Chesterfield (1990): Employee buy-out. Barely profitable stringent economy measures; again with a large debt burden.

All these buy-outs were under the previous government policy whereby, providing the price seemed reasonable to the Minister, there did not have to be competitive bids for the company.

Maidstone (1991): This municipal company more than doubled its activities between 1986 and 1989, then got into severe trading difficulties around 1991. The council decided to sell the company, but precluded the neighbouring operator (Maidstone & District) from bidding. The latter reacted by registering 'copycat' services throughout the Borough. The result was that the municipal company lost so heavily that it went into liquidation, and the council was only able to sell the depot (to Maidstone & District).

Lincoln (1991): The municipal company peacefully co-existed with Lincolnshire Road Car Company until it made the mistake of extending into Scunthorpe. War broke out; the Road Car Company registered competing services; timings and fares were altered frequently; and Lincoln was left fatally weakened. Following rationalisation, the company was brought by its employees, Derby (an ex-municipal company) holding a 40% stake. In February 1993 the new company sold out to Lincolnshire Road Car Company, the OFT raising no objections as administrative receivership seemed the only alternative.

Lancaster (1993): Following three years of strong competition from Ribble (a Stagecoach subsidiary), the two companies reached an OFT-registered agreement on the co-ordination of services in 1989, which enabled the company to return to profitability. The Council decided in 1992 to sell. Ribble announced it would not be making a bid, citing the likelihood of OFT intervention as the main reason; it then registered competing services. With the municipal company pushed into deeper trouble, Ribble offered to buy the depot and some vehicles, but not the company itself. Lancaster had little alternative but to agree. The situation has been referred to the MMC, the report being expected in November.

Southend (1993): Before 1986, Southend Corporation had a co-ordination agreement with the NBC subsidiary, which subsequently became Thamesway. There was no real competition until Badgerline bought Thamesway in 1990. Fares were halved and extra services put on in 1992, and Southend's municipal company rapidly went from profitable to loss-making. This caused the Council to initiate the selling of its company, but not to Badgerline. Indicative bids were requested, a short-list selected,

further confidential information given, and actual tenders invited. These proved to be much lower than the indicative bids. The short-list was reduced to two, but one of these then dropped out. Consequently, the company was bought by British Bus.

Northampton: This company had the reputation of being the most successful ex-municipal operator in the country. In late 1992 the decision was made to sell the company. Basic information was given to interested companies, and indicative bids invited. A 'long list' of seven was chosen, who then had the opportunity of looking at the records in detail and questioning management. (The employees had wanted to purchase the company, but could not match the outside bids). The local operator, United Counties (a Stagecoach subsidiary), were excluded from the second round because the DTp/OFT would be likely to object. United Counties then registered competing services at much lower fares; Northampton's highly profitable operation soon became loss-making, though as they had substantial reserves, the company is not in financial difficulties. The long list was reduced to two, then to one, GRT Holdings. The bids at this stage were significantly lower than the indicated bids. Negotiations have

continued, and a deal is ready for signing once the DTp has agreed. However, United Counties' cut-throat competition continues.

Colchester: After seven years without explicit competition, Eastern National (a Badgerline subsidiary) had just registered minibus services in the town.

Developments, 1993/94 [From memo on file]

Grimsby & Cleethorpes:	Bought by Stagecoach.
Southend:	Bought by British Bus
Northampton, Leicester:	Bought by GRT
Colchester:	Bought by British Bus after being severely weakened by Badgerline
Yorkshire Rider:	Previously an employee buy-out, now acquired by Badgerline
Cleveland & Hull:	Previously an employee buy-out, now acquired by Stagecoach
Darlington:	To be sold to Yorkshire Traction

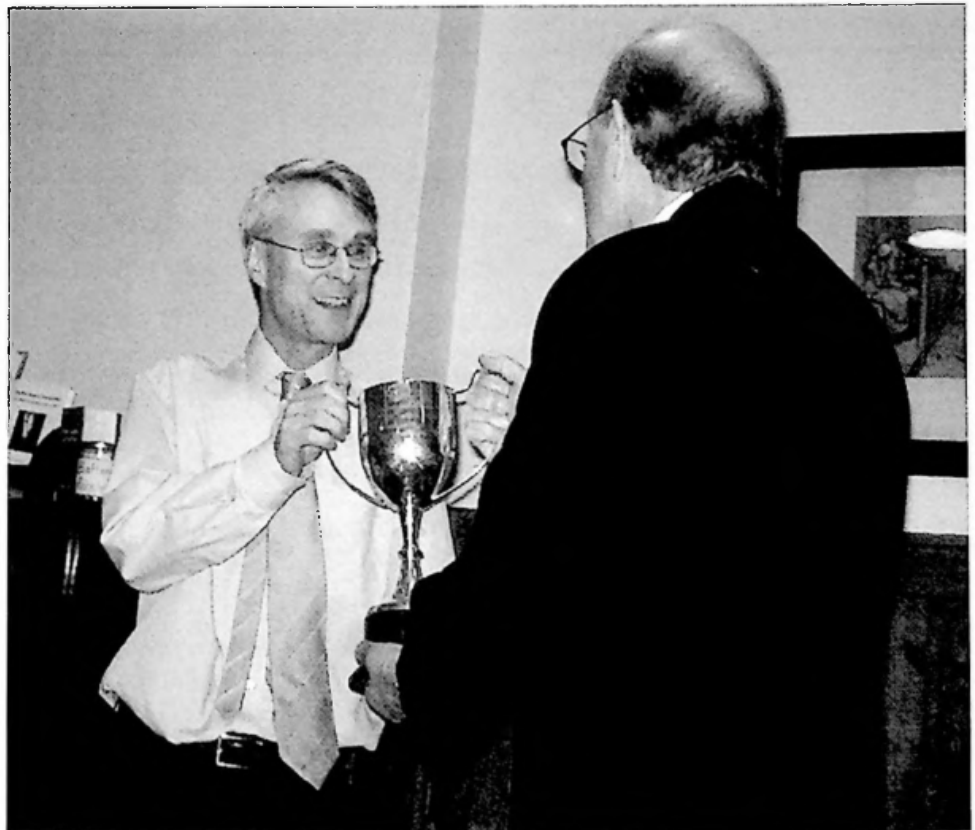
By November 1994 only 20 ex-municipal companies remained, of which only one was smaller than Great Yarmouth.

Transport Book of the Year Award

The book chosen as Transport Book of the Year by the Railway and Canal Historical Society for 2007 was Dorian Gerhold's *Carriers and Coachmasters – Trade and Travel before the Turnpikes* which was reviewed in *Newsletter 45*, p.17 by Ian Yearsley.

Despite its name, our corporate member, the RCHS, has grown over more than fifty years to cover the serious study of all forms of transport including roads, shipping, aviation and even pipelines.

Carriers & Coachmasters is the fourth winner of the award which was set up by the RCHS in its Golden Jubilee year. Dorian Gerhold receives £500 and a silver cup donated by the literary trust of former transport publisher (and R&RTHA member), David St John Thomas.



The judges called it a book that "sets out to change our perceptions of road transport in the pre-turnpike era with an excellent range and interpretation of sources". The judges commended the publisher, Phillimore, "on producing and pricing some quality non-fiction in an affordable way".

We picture here the presentation to Dorian Gerhold by (back view) Grahame Boyes.

Association Matters

☐ The Board of Directors has to announce with regret that Garry Turvey has decided to resign as Chairman of the Board. The President of the Association, John Hibbs, is to be acting Chairman while the Board find a successor to Garry, whose contribution to the work and prestige of the Association has been outstanding.

☐ Better news on Roger de Boer (*Newsletter* 50, p.16) is that he has left hospital and is recovering in Sparkbrook. He hopes to be well enough to come to our next members' meeting on 29th September.

☐ A warm welcome to new members:

David Brown of Stirling
Gavin Booth of Edinburgh

☐ "The Full Turn of the Wheel"
Our latest book, *The Full Turn of the Wheel*, by member Peter May, was launched at a Road Haulage Association meeting at Redruth on

customers at the Freight Transport Association, to review the chapter on continental haulage, and sent a copy of the draft chapter on the RHA to Roger King for any observations.

Peter's text had been written largely from his memories as few company records survived, but fortunately he had kept a good number of photographs covering the entire period of the book. Some of these proved to be quite a challenge to caption accurately – a picture of the bus fleet in 1927 (before sale of that part of the business to Aldershot & District) enabled most of the gaps in the known May's pre-war fleet to be filled, but a car registration number TP 4191 in the same photograph proved more elusive to caption. A visit to the Portsmouth City Record Office did not assist greatly as the only details included in the registers there of the period were the registration, date issued and person registering the vehicle. We sought help from *Car & Classics* magazine,



24th May (pictured above). Peter May originally wrote to us in April 2006 in response to the articles written about the Association in the RHA's "Roadway" magazine and the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport's "Focus" magazine by our then Chairman, Garry Turvey. Peter was close to finishing a first draft of the history of his family haulage business covering the period 1920 to 1997 and was seeking a publisher. We thought that his book was a very worthwhile project and after an approach to a commercial publisher had come to nothing, the Association agreed to act as Peter's publisher with Peter funding the printing costs.

Your directors spent the autumn and winter months reading the draft and making suggestions, while Garry Turvey asked David Green, former head of international transport and

who suggested a number of specialists covering the 1920 period, one of whom, was able to identify the car as a Ford model T Tudor sedan, a fairly rare variant of the marque. The post-war May coach fleet should have been an easier proposition, but the two Bedford 28-seaters, HKJ 531/3, bought secondhand in 1947 proved to be a puzzle as they were new in September 1945 and could have been either OWBs or OBs. Peter had bought these to use as coaches and had spent a bit of money on them, giving them wheeltrims, a roof luggage rack, chrome front bumpers and radiator grills, so those consulted on the model type were split evenly between the two models. Another visit, this time to Maidstone, and the Kent Archive, was more fruitful and the chassis numbers (29473 and 29796) confirmed the wartime model. The two were part of a batch of five



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NEWSLETTER No.52

☐ The target date for issue of No. 52 is 6 December 2007

Contributions by
6 November

☐ Provisional target date for No.53 is 6 March 2008

Contributions by
4 February 2008

☐ The 2007 subscription covers Nos.49 to 52

Bedford OWBs (HKJ 531-5) bought new by Ashline Ltd., of Tonbridge in September 1945, and it would be interesting to know whether anything more is known about the fate of the rest of the batch or what happened to the two operated by May's Motors between 1947 and 1949.

We are hoping to persuade Peter to pick up his pen again and write us an article for this *Newsletter* on his choice of vehicles over the years, from the first Bedford truck APF 418 allocated by the Ministry of War Transport in 1942. Bedfords were bought in the 1940s and 1950s, Guys followed in the 1960s, followed by Atkinsons and then Scania in the 1990s.

Our thanks to everybody that has assisted your directors

with the publication of the book – Graham Boyes, *Car & Classics*, David Green, Peter Jaques, Roger King and Mike Moore from the RHA, John Scotford, Tucket Brothers, and others.

☐ Next Coventry Meeting

A reminder that our next members' meeting is on Saturday, 29th September at the Coventry Transport Museum. At the time of going to press, we have three confirmed presentations, on Coventry Fire Engines and using technical drawings for historical research, while Ken Swallow will bring us up-to-date on progress in drafting the entries for the *Passenger Companion*. A further two groups and a speaker have also been invited to make presentations at the September meeting.

Leaving No Stone Unturned

This autumn the R&RTHA is holding its principal event in Leeds: **Saturday 27 October 2007** at Leeds City Museum and Art Gallery. 10-30 a.m. – 4.00 p.m.

The target audience for "Leaving No Stone Unturned" is :

- Members of our own Association
- Libraries, Museums and Archives in Yorkshire, or within range of Leeds
- Local History and Family History Societies within range of Leeds
- Certain Civic Societies and academic bodies
- Enthusiast bodies in the road transport field (not limited geographically)
- Individuals interested in road transport history, who are not our members

The primary aim is to cross boundaries between these different interests. Between the academic and the amateur historian and between the differing disciplines of road transport, local and family history, drawing attention in each case to borders that frequently overlap between one and the other. There will be encouragement of audience participation (i.e. plenty of time for questions to the speakers) after each talk. And there is the Brains Trust-style panel at the end. There will also be the lunch break for people who come to the event to mix with each other.

We think that we have assembled a good team of speakers – with a strong Yorkshire element among them – Stanley King, Stephen Lockwood and Alan Earnshaw. Our Chairman for the day will be Dr David Robinson; other speakers are Dr Roy Edwards of the University of Southampton, Dr Charles Roberts of Liverpool John Moores University and Peter Brown (author of a major article in this *Newsletter*).

It is a deliberately "low-cost" event designed to encourage people to attend. We have been greatly helped in this aim by generous financial support from Transdev Blazefield and the PSV Circle.

Other supporters (non-financial, but in terms of publicity) have been the websites of:

- Archiveawareness - click on green map at Yorkshire & Humberside
- Local history on-line – click on calendar and page down to October 27
- But the best write-up of all can be accessed by playing in "Bridge building local historians"

Do not forget the R&RTHA's own website, superbly maintained by David Harman: www.rrtha.org.uk, then click on Research workshop.

We are hoping for other significant local publicity for the meeting. Have you booked yet? The price is £15-00 for the day, plus an additional (optional) £5-00 for a light buffet lunch. Either send your cheque and booking form to:

John Howie,
37 Balcombe Gardens, Horley RH6 9BY.

Or, if you want more forms or more detail, phone, e-mail or write to

Roger Atkinson, 45 Dee Banks, Chester CH3 5UU,
01244-351066. E-mail rogeratkinson@2s.com,

Unfortunately Andrew Johnson, whose help in negotiating the PSV Circle's financial support was invaluable, will not himself be able to come to Leeds; but he has sent some good advice on How to Prise Information out of Chief Engineers.

I would dearly like to come to the Leeds Meeting ... but I'll be back in South Africa, trying to prise more data out of the bus companies. I am just beginning to become known, (even if only at the "I think I've heard of you" stage), and my pleas for information from (mainly) Chief Engineers no longer get the "Pull the other one" or "I don't believe what I'm hearing" of heretofore. Indeed, I've produced two books* on South African buses (and I hope I've more in the pipeline). When a Chief Engineer says (inevitably) "but why do you want to know?", the best possible answer is to flourish a specimen of one of these books and to say "to do something like this for your outfit". That gets 'em taking notice.

- * **Algoa Bus** (Port Elizabeth) and **Golden Arrow** (Cape Town); £9 each, post free (cheques made payable to A G Johnson) from:

Andrew Johnson,
30 Bonnerfield Lane, Harrow HA1 2LE

Editorial

An apology for nepotism is needed for running the article on Victorian Portable Theatres. But this is only an obligatory, rather than a heartfelt, apology, as some readers may appreciate that the article opens up the subject of nineteenth century heavy road haulage, using hired horses and wagons. Bear in mind that this phenomenon was at a time when the canals and railways were largely providing the principal means of heavy haulage. Readers with long memories may recall an article by Dr John Tolson in *Newsletter 25*, "Racehorses on the Road" which has some pertinence to the surviving use of roads at that time, despite the coming of the railways.

However, turning from nineteenth century history to the present day, Peter Brown's article on the successful sale of Great Yarmouth Transport Ltd to FirstBus in 1996, is wonderfully apposite to the contrastingly bungled sale of another municipal company, Chester City Transport Ltd, at grievous financial expense to the Chester City Council, this summer. A prime example of where lessons might have been learned from history – but were not.

Christopher Hogan gives the background to the Association's publication of *The Full Turn of the Wheel*, though he totally underplays his own significant role in aiding its appearance. Richard Storey provides a review of the book. Considerable emphasis (and thanks) ought to

be accorded to two of our corporate members, the Road Haulage Association and the Freight Transport Association for the parts that they played in fostering, encouraging and helping with this book. It is one in the field of freight transport in which too few books are published and too many firms' archives end up on skips.

The R&RTHA's forthcoming autumn event in Leeds, "Leaving No Stone Unturned" will be focussing heavily on the inter-relationship between road transport history, local history and family history. This month's "Masthead" provides an excellent illustration of the potential for this inter-play, bringing in social history and 'health and safety' as well. Did the benefactors and organisers of the "Day in the Country" provide a risk assessment for the girl in the white dress perched at the offside front? At what date and in what theatre was "The Gay Parisienne" by George Dance being staged? Then, as an interesting prelude to the Leeds event, we have Ken Elks' article on Integrated Research.

David Grimmett need not fear that your Editor doubts that research takes place in sleepy Somerset; he knows it does. A contribution by David Grimmett on the Handcross Hill disaster (see *Newsletter 48*), appears in this issue.

Letters to the Editor

☐ Ladies of the road

David Trindle's comment that the final chapter of Bob Rust's book, 'Where Do You Want This Lot?' should not be included, I find disappointing. Bob has written a book of his experiences, which in the years to come will prove to be a record of road transport history, much as the similar books by Bill Downs and Ted Murphy.

The 'Ladies of the Night' that Bob refers to have always been part of road transport history. They still are, indeed more so with the influx of immigrants, and as such are an integral and legitimate part of road transport history. To suggest the chapter should be omitted is to suggest that history should only be recorded depending on the taste of the recorder or the perceived taste of the reader. History should be recorded as accurately as possible; it is not the role of the recorder to determine what should and should not be recorded, especially if using an arbitrary parameter such as personal taste.

Roy Larkin

☐ Officialdom at work

The review of the book 'Early Motor Vehicle Registration in Wiltshire' in *Newsletter No.50* reminded me of many hours spent in the basement of County Hall, Trowbridge, during the early 1970s trawling those very archives for PSV extractions. Although 'thinning' of the files had been conducted at various periods, there remained much correspondence and two items in particular stick in the mind.

Owners of commercial and passenger vehicles had to make a declaration of their weight on both initial and

subsequent licensing, rendered in Tons, Cwt, Quarters (or Tod) and Stones. In an application received in respect of a charabanc the clerk detected a variance in the last two figures from that on the original registration. A conference of heads of department concluded that there was clearly mischief afoot, a letter was sent to the local Constable who promptly (cycled?) out to carry out an investigation at the operator's premises. The apologetic handwritten reply therefrom was subsequently filed with all due solemnity. It explained that 'our boy' had been sent to the back of the garage to read out the legal lettering on the vehicle but, it being gloomy there and having but a candle, he had misread the numbers. He had been chastised for his mistake. The Constable's report confirmed the circumstances and added that he had interviewed the (trembling?) miscreant and issued a warning about his future diligence. On such trivialities does officialdom thrive!

The other letter resulted from an obvious exercise in trying to tie up loose ends. All last-known owners of vehicles that had neither been taxed for some considerable time nor ever declared as having been broken up were written to with a demand for the overdue tax – a time-honoured and still extant official device to elicit a response. From deepest Lincolnshire came a letter explaining that the old bus concerned had been purchased purely for use as a caravan on the farm and never driven since purchase. However, it had caught fire and been totally destroyed 'some seven summers since' according to the writer. He felt he could be precise as to that in so much as Aunt Agnes had still been alive at the time and 'young Johnny' born afterwards!

D J Bubier, 4 June 2007

▣ Excursion to Buckfast Abbey

The item in *Newsletter 50*, reminded me that many years ago Peter Hardy, who spent much time researching Midland Red history, told me that that company used to employ men to go round public houses arranging "private parties" to travel by Midland Red. This practice had, of course, to cease after the 1930 Act came into force.

E Keith Lloyd

Roger de Boer's interesting article prompted me to look up my record cards for OWB sightings in Ware, Hertfordshire, in the 1950s. Tersons, the contracting spin-off from Cater Patersons, were working on New Town sewer contracts in the area and the following OWBs in Tersons' white livery were logged: FAD404, FNY564, 888, FSM624, FUE742, HHU309, HHW764.

Richard Storey

▣ More about OWBs

In 1941 I visited Bristol for the first time and having read (in 'Modern Transport' I think) an article about the birth of the Bedford OWB and its introduction to Bristol. I sought it out and found it on the short service 18 between the Tramways Centre and Clifton Suspension Bridge by way of the very steep Park Street. My memory is of a noisy engine magnified by the austerity of the interior and very hard wooden seats.

The OWB will not be remembered as a city bus though there were other instances. Portsmouth Corporation had a handful, which were used in the city on the O-P Tipner-Milton service certainly until 1949. But the OWB was usually a rural bus, the largest user being the Lincolnshire Road Car Co. which, finding itself short of buses because of the large number of airfields which had to be served, acquired no fewer than 56 new and at least another 42 from various operators whose businesses it acquired. The OWB was based on the OB which had been introduced just before war broke out, the W in its designation signifying 'Wartime'. After the war literally thousands of OBs, most with Duple 29-seat coach bodies were placed in service.

T B Maund

▣ Sydney Garcke on 1921

It seems pertinent to the article on the 1921 coal strike in *Newsletter 50* to tell you that in the Proceedings of the Chartered Institute of Transport, January 1923, Vol.4, No.3, there was reported an address by Sidney Garcke.

After prefacing his remarks by acknowledging that, until the coming of the railways, the normal means of land transport had been by road, Garcke said that the railways had then rapidly dominated all medium and long-distance transport and had spectacularly increased the numbers of travellers.

"The coal strike, coming at a crucial stage in the efforts of the railways to restore normal facilities [in the aftermath of War] – combined with abnormally fine weather – caused, in the summer of 1921, a boom in long-distance road passenger transport so great as to lead the optimists to the natural conclusion that this traffic would pass from the rail to the road".

His more reasoned forecast was that, while for scenery or other leisure pursuit, some passengers would now use the motor coach, the railways would retain their dominance in travel over distances where the motor omnibus would be unattractive.

Derek S Giles

Book Reviews

▣ 'HELLO COASTAL'

the story of Victoria Coach Station.

by Richard Paramor.

Venture Publications Ltd., Glossop.

ISBN 13-978-1-905304-10-3

176 pages, Illustrated £25-00

The story of Victoria Coach Station is much more interesting than might appear at first sight and this book certainly turned out to be more worthwhile than I anticipated

This history covers more than the particular terminus since it records events that have occurred from the days of sedan chairs until the formation of National Travel with of course the predominant era being that of the motorised coach. I had not realised that the development of coaching was so complicated nor so competitive. The book is broadly divided into three sections: pre-war, wartime and post-war. The early days characterised by the development of termini in London, together with what would seem today many innovative marketing strategies. For instance, it was at Victoria where the many different operators' timetables were collated into a single record to make it easier to provide information for travellers (and it begs the question that if it was possible then, why, with all the technology to help, this is so difficult now?). Changes brought about by legislation in

the 1930s are thoroughly described as are the difficulties created by wartime restrictions. The post-war section not only looks at the effects of peacetime after the problems of wartime operation but also includes the impact of changes in demand and, for example, the impact of the motorway network. The formation of National Travel is the true end of this book's story.

The author's insights into the parallels between different modes are thought provoking in highlighting the way in which sedan chairs, turnpike formation and stagecoach operations have influenced the organisational aspects of motor coaches and these 'gems' occur throughout the text. Another strength of the book, no doubt resulting from the author's personal involvement in Victoria Coach Station, are the stories, skilfully interwoven into the history, about the people involved in the Coach Station which gives an unusually human experience for the reader.

I particularly liked the way in which this book does not pander only to the enthusiast market and the diversions – for example about vehicles – show how much progress really has been made. One example of this is the description of the introduction of a radio on a vehicle which is in the form of an anecdote which truly makes the point. In addition, there are sections on marketing, promotion and administration which provide a rounded picture of Victoria Coach Station's existence. There is also

a wealth of photographic and other graphic content of which, from my perspective, the best are those which show people using both the Coach Station and the buses – what might be called the ‘working’ pictures as opposed to the portrait.

This book offers more than a single book’s worth within its two covers. For enthusiasts it gives both details, written and photographic, of the development of services and vehicles over the time. For the more ‘serious’ historians it provides a contemporary view of the development of the industry from an extremely knowledgeable author.

As with all books, it is easy to find fault. Providing only three main sections means that these were long and, whilst subdivided, many of the subdivisions were not headed which makes navigation around the book difficult. Shorter chapters with more headings would have enhanced readability. I also found the way in which references are given (bold italic text) extremely distracting. Perhaps more importantly, many of the author’s views about what has happened for example, regulation in the 1930s, nationalisation and the formation of National Travel, are stated as facts rather than opinion and I found myself in disagreement. And I was truly upset when the story ended thirty plus years ago!

Overall, I always judge whether a book is worth recommending by asking myself whether I would buy the book if I had not been asked to do the review. The answer in this case is unreservedly ‘yes’ and this is for the story, for the photographs but mostly for the narrative which demonstrates throughout the love of the author for his topic.

Dr Corinne Mulley, Newcastle University

☐ **THE FULL TURN OF THE WHEEL**
– The Story of May’s Motors of Elstead 1920-1997
by Peter May
Roads and Road Transport History Association,
Shenstone, 2007
ISBN 978-0-9552876-1-9
236 pages, Illustrated. £16-00

Given the number of firms involved, the size of some of them and the significance of the industry for the economic life of the country over the past century, the paucity of road haulage histories is a matter of concern. How appropriate then that the R&RTHA has been able to undertake the publication of Peter May’s inside story of the growth of his family business, from his father’s carrier’s van after the First World War to a fleet of some 18 to 20 units in the late nineties. The end came from a combination of factors: a changing customer base, with increasingly demanding customers, heavy borrowing to meet the new demands on the business and the pressing need for a new base as a result of changes in the local road pattern.

A review is not the place to list the events between foundation and closure, especially as these are given in absorbing detail by the author. However, one or two aspects of the story resonated with the reviewer’s acquaintance with other haulage firms. Into and out of buses is one such aspect: following a Ford TT dual-purpose vehicle, Dick May acquired eight more buses or charabancs in the 1920s, selling up a fleet of four amicably

to Aldershot & District in 1928, with May providing rented garaging for two A&D buses for years to come. After the Second World War, in common with many other hauliers who could not tolerate being without vehicles to operate, should the nationalisation of freight transport deprive them of their principal activity, May’s diversified for a second time into PSV operation, running first two Bedford buses, then two Santus-bodied Crossleys and an AEC Regal. All were bought second-hand and PSV operation ceased in 1954, but in its time had been a useful subsidiary income-stream.

Acquiring a source of material to carry, usually sand, is another common theme: a significant purchase in the early years of the business was the Glebe Meadow in Elstead, which not only provided a site for the depot and family dwellings, but also yielded sand and ballast, hand-dug and also ‘dredged’ from the bordering River Wey, providing material to be carried by May’s lorries. Other local commodities carried in the early years included Godalming stone and faggots and other timber products: a familiar pattern in the early years of many hauliers in rural areas. Bulk work post-war was provided by ash and clinker and top-soil from building sites. Traffic on flats included two important customers among its originators, the Heald Sack Co., which had relocated from Bermondsey to Godalming, and Guildway, a sectional building manufacturer. This and other work often took May’s vehicles far from Elstead, eventually into Europe and even to the Middle East.

Fleet development over the years is well covered by excellent illustrations, which show the moves from Fordson to Bedford, Guy (for which May had an agency for some years), Atkinson and finally Scania. They also cover the bus and coach fleets. Peter May’s activity in the Road Haulage Association has a chapter (11) devoted to it, whilst threaded through the narrative is the growth of the May family, with its close involvement in the business. There are some stern words for the attitudes of some encountered in banks and finance, local authorities, political decision-making and militant trade unionism, but Peter May emerges as a caring employer and family man, with loyalty to and interest in not only his business and family, but also the local community and the wider world. He has a story of which he can be proud and he can also be proud of the way in which he has told it.

Richard Storey

☐ **ROYAL MAIL COACHES - An Illustrated History**
by Frederick Wilkinson.
Tempus Publishing – 287 pages, paperback,
ISBN 978 0 7524 4212 9. £16.99

Although they were operational for little more than sixty years, the Royal Mail coaches left behind an indelible romantic memory. Leaving aside the sentimental romance, the story of the mail coach period is fascinating. The majority of books dealing with the mail coaches were published in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. With one or two notable exceptions, they were largely anecdotal, often based on recollections and oral history, but making little or no use of references, thus making it impossible to verify some of the statements in the books. Unfortunately, some information in these early books has become established fact and is then repeated.

Frederick Wilkinson’s new book is the first history of

Royal Mail coaches based almost exclusively on contemporary records and offers a detailed insight into the mark that mail coaches left on British postal and social history. His book is based almost exclusively on records held at the Royal Mail Archive at Mount Pleasant, although there are references to other sources such as the Bath postal museum. Mr Wilkinson notes his frustration on occasions where the information drawn from the records is incomplete and no firm conclusion can be drawn or where the detail in the records is insufficient to gain a full understanding.

The coaching network created by William Palmer, a somewhat obstinate businessman, eventually covered most of the British Isles, growing from a few routes in 1784 to reach its peak early in the nineteenth century. The volume of letters and newspapers handled increased steadily and, as the empire grew, the packet service handling overseas mail had to be expanded almost continuously in this period. The Mail Coach Office was directly responsible for the livelihood of many coach makers, drivers, guards, letter sorters, leather workers, post boys, innkeepers and their staff. It also created a demand for hundreds of horses and their associated workers – blacksmiths, saddlers and ostlers. When the railways began to take over the carriage of mail in the

1830s the demand for the coaches and all associated staff and trades diminished and this had far-reaching effects on local employment and hardship for those made redundant.

The author's treatment of the subject is to take each aspect (guards, their equipment, the journey, the roads, the coach and so on) in turn, rather than present a chronological history. This works very effectively as the period covered by the book covers only about seventy years, and the result is a very readable history underpinned by detailed primary research. There were two things that irritated me with the book: firstly, his use intermittently throughout the book of the term Postmaster as a abbreviation for Postmaster-General (the two rôles being quite different, the latter being the political head of the General Post Office), and secondly had the format been larger and on coated paper, reproduction on some of the archival extracts could have been made legible without the need to use a magnifying glass.

These are minor criticisms and this book should become the definitive work on this aspect of postal transport history.

CH

Book Notices

☐ PLAXTON. A CENTURY OF INNOVATION

by Stewart J Brown

Ian Allan Publishing Ltd, Hershham.

ISBN 978 0 7110 3209 5

Hardback 144pp Illustrated. £19.99

This is a welcome study of an enduring coachbuilder which began with a Scarborough joinery business diversifying into wood-framed car body production before the First World War. This was resumed after the war, when charabancs and small coaches were added to the output. Until the late 1950s, Plaxton was especially associated with the building of coach bodies, but from the on the building of bus bodies came to form a significant part of its output, so that today Plaxton is a major produced at both ends of the pcv market.

As might be expected from both author and publisher, this centenary history is very competent work, which this reviewer found particularly helpful in its coverage of the complicated series of changes in both manufacturing and operational aspects of the bus and coach industry over the past two or three decades in so far as they affected Plaxton. This makes it an essential read even if you have Alan Townsin's 75th anniversary history (Transport Publishing Co, 1982). The overall impression is of a pictorial history and it certainly has many well-reproduced black and white and colour illustrations, but each of the seven well divided chapters has a relatively short text, with content supplemented by detailed captions. There is, however, no index, so that particular aspects of Plaxton's development such as the takeovers of Thurgood of Ware (1965) and Reeve Burgess (1980) have to be sought by working through the text. In the case of Thurgood, this reviewer was disappointed find only four short lines of text and not a single illustration of their output before the works became Plaxton's southern service depot, where some Mini-Supremes were assembled after takeover. Reeve Burgess of Chesterfield features largely, as it was of greater significance to

Plaxton, indeed the author comments that its 1991 Pointer body for the Dennis Dart 'saved' Plaxton. Reeve Burgess which carried out many conversions of van chassis to minibuses had earlier launched the Beaver body for the Mercedes-Benz 608 in 1986. Also on Iveco and Renault chassis, Beaver production had exceeded 1000 by 1991 and the London bus market was thereby penetrated.

Chapters six and seven cover the merger years for Plaxton, which bought the Kirkby dealership concern in 1986 and Henlys in 1989. New management premises, such as Kirkby's Anston, Sheffield depot, and a wider outlook entered the Plaxton scene. Also in 1989, Kirkby bought Arlington the north London dealership, and Plaxton bought Duple's service division and some design rights when Duple closed. Northern Counties were bought by Henleys, bringing double-decker production into the Plaxton range. In 2000 Henlys and Mayflower, which had acquired Dennis, came together as Transbus International. Years of crisis and rapid change followed, but with a successful outcome with the emergence of Plaxton Ltd following a management buyout in 2004. The text of the book provides a competent guide through the labyrinth, but the sacrifice of a single page of the illustrations in favour of a chronological family tree of these complicated changes would have been of great benefit to the reader (authors and publishers of similar business histories, pleased note!).

The final pages provide an alphabetical pictorial guide to Plaxton body types.

Richard Storey

Reviewer's Footnote

As reported in *Bus & Coach Preservation* (July 2007), p.20 the wheel has again turned full circle for Plaxton, with its management team selling out Alexander-Dennis. History rolls on

☐ **CHESTER TRAMWAYS** - by Barry M Marsden
Tramway Classics series Middleton Press (2007)
ISBN 978 1 906008 04 8
Hardback 120 Plates black & white. £14-95

Even your reviewer is not old enough to remember trams in Chester; the last one ran in February 1930. Yet the publishers must envisage a market for a well-produced hardback book on this small system, which had no route developments after 1906, nor new cars after 1907. The choice of pictures is wholly tramway-orientated. Some are good, several disappointingly poor. In sheer quantity they become boring. The brief introductory text is concise and clear. The captions are accurate, but suffer from two or three deficiencies. As 95% of the book consists of pictures with captions, the deficiencies begin to jar. They lie in a failure to date many pictures, a failure to use the pictures as street scenes to encourage a wider readership than just the tramway enthusiast, and a failure to evoke the evolving social background over thirty years, for which in some pictures there is rich material.

To a Cestrian seeking local history, more commentary on shops, hotels and buildings would make the book more interesting. To the transport enthusiast, the casual dismissal, or simply non-mention, of other traffic in the pictures represents a lost opportunity. Handcarts, bicycles, horse-drawn wagons in fair variety and early motor cars are frankly as interesting as the repetition of the same scarcely changing trams.

The failure to date several of the pictures is not good. If a book of this quality is being produced, then an effort is needed by its Editor to break away from the purely tramway mould and to study dress and fashion, to check in local directories, to consult with enthusiast bodies to date cars, particularly those with clear registration numbers.

The suggestion in the caption to plate No.48 that the flags were out to celebrate "the peace" (i.e. November 1918) is untenable. There are ladies with cloche hats, relatively short skirts, men wearing an early form of trilby, a motor car with registration MB8790, and a sign outside 27 Eastgate for Fullers [Cakes]. Nine or ten years later is more likely.

All in all, this is a book where considerable effort has been made in finding tram postcards and photographs, and obtaining permission to reproduce them; a worthy achievement. But there has been a major defect in neglecting research that should not have been too arduous. The Introduction to the book states "The poor quality of many of the images has to be accepted as a result of their age and poor copying in the past". In 2007, is not recovery of old photographs a little more advanced?

Roger Atkinson

NB This review has also appeared in *Vintage Roadscene*

The late Robert Astrella

On the front of *Newsletter 45*, there was a picture of wartime buses in Chester by an American Air Force photographer, Robert Astrella. A U.S. citizen, Nathan Howland, saw it and wrote to say that he was researching Robert Astrella's work and trying to track down Robert himself. Nathan has now written to say that, sadly, Robert Astrella died in November 2004.

He adds that he was based with the 7th Photographic Group (a reconnaissance squadron), with the U.S. 8th Air Force during the war. He had worked for Kodak before the War and his photographic talents were perfect for the Air Force photo labs. He took a small Brownie box camera with him wherever he went, and took an extraordinary collection of colour images over the period of his entire stay at the base until late 1945: over 300 Kodacolor pictures. Nathan attached one to give an indication of the quality – not road transport, but *Newsletter* has already benefited from the picture in issue 45 – so, we see here a reconnaissance plane with nine swastikas painted on its nose, representing reconnaissance missions over Germany.

Nathan explains that the plane was flown by Col. David Rowe the name School Boy Rowe was the nickname of



a famous baseball player at that time. It was the second plane given the name. If you look at the nose of that F-5C, you will see that the cannon mountings have been blocked off, the guns having been removed to save weight. With all unnecessary equipment removed except the camera under the nose, the plane was so fast it was almost impossible to catch. The blue paint was a special zincchromate mix which rendered the planes virtually invisible at high altitude.

Integrated Research

by KEN ELKS

At the time of writing (July 2007) I am in the process of finishing a study of the ticket and fare systems of the Dover Corporation Tramways (1897-1936), which should be published later this year. Before embarking on my main theme, it may be of interest to readers if I sketch in some of my background, as that may help to explain the course my research has taken.

Over the years I have had several hobbies, including collecting stamps, coins and, latterly (for the last 25 years), railway and tram tickets. To keep this ticket collection within reasonable bounds, I have concentrated on railways and tram systems in Kent. When forming a collection it is useful to have some degree of knowledge concerning what is available and to this end I have recorded details of relevant tickets noted in auctions or seen in other collections. From this, it is a very short step to trying to assemble this information into some sort of sequence in order to determine how the system of ticketing worked and, at times, obtain an insight into what else might have been done at the time. This has worked up to a point, as quite a few tickets have subsequently turned up which matched my expectations. Being so familiar with the system that you can make accurate predictions to fill the lacunae is a very worthwhile exercise, and it is rewarding (and a relief!) when they prove to be true.

My main background is in engineering, though in my last sixteen years before retiring I taught computer studies in a college. Both of these disciplines teach you to be precise, and both constantly faced me with situations that needed thought and patience. Maybe this last trait is innate - if a ball of string or wool got entangled when I was a boy, my parents would always hand it to me to unravel, and I would persist until I was successful.

Another hobby is genealogy and I have managed to trace both my own family and that of my wife as far back as the 16th century in a few cases. The importance of this experience should not be underestimated, as one of the skills required is that of lateral thinking, trying to find new leads and avenues of research. Above all is the familiarity of working with official records and how to access them. Even knowing such things as opening hours, nearest car parking, where to get meals, etc. all make life a lot easier for the researcher.

When starting my research into the system of fares and tickets on the Dover Tramways I decided that my rather meagre collection and notes were unequal to the task. Fortunately for me, a fellow collector (and rival), Godfrey Croughton, gave me details of his Dover tickets and armed with a copy of a book by J.V. Horn, "The History of Dover Corporation Tramways", which gives quite a lot of details about the changes to the ticketing system, I made my first attempt at establishing the sequence of issues. I quickly became aware that there were discrepancies between what Horn said happened and the tickets in front of me, the most obvious being that he made no mention of the commonest Dover Tramway ticket known to me, the long combined adult and child 1d. single tickets from the 1930s.

Nevertheless, I was able to identify many of the tickets by using his book and place them in chronological order. This was further assisted when I discovered that lurking in the bottom right hand corners of the later tickets were various

codes. These were often difficult to read as the print is very small and not always clear, sometimes slightly smudged, but it did not take long to work out that numbers such as 8-26 were the month and year and that later codes took the form of a four-digit number, on its own or prefixed with a letter A or B. The sequence of these is fairly obvious, but just in case, I checked against the supposed sequence of tickets and found to my delight that they supported my theories. Feeling pleased with my discovery I hastened to tell Godfrey, only to find that he had known about these codes all along but had not thought to mention them to me as he assumed I would already know. A lesson for both of us there!

As I examined my records and information about other tickets kindly supplied by collectors, one thing began to

puzzle me. It was that what appeared to be identical tickets had different code numbers. I could not think of a single reason why this was so and even took the trouble to make transparencies which could be laid one on top of the other to see if there was something that I had overlooked. The breakthrough came when I realised that two tickets with adjacent serial numbers had been reported with different codes. On checking it became clear that one of them was incorrect and that, in fact, both had the same code number. When all the other discrepancies were double-checked, it became possible to eliminate the errors and the end result was a much smaller list and a system that made sense. This was done by writing down only the numbers that were clearly

visible, putting a question mark for any that were unclear, for example A13?0. After a while it was obvious that in the cases where there was no room for doubt on there was only the same number each time. In this particular case, the missing number, variously reported as 3, 5, 6, 8 or 0, was actually an 8.

There is a spin-off for other researchers in getting these details right. Lists are available showing all the known printing block numbers from Bell Punch found on tickets on a wide variety of bus and tram systems. If the Dover tickets can be dated fairly precisely (as most of them can), then this would surely enable other printing block numbers to be dated more accurately and thus help in other ticket studies.

Early on in my research it occurred to me that if the tramway was a council undertaking then there might be information in the minute books held at the local library. I was glad to find that there was even a book containing the actual hand-written minutes of the tramway committee. This was held at the East Kent Archives Centre and I spent days reading it through and making notes of anything relevant. Unfortunately it only covered the period 1903 to 1916, ending just when all the major changes to the fares and tickets were about to begin. This was not as much of a setback as at first appeared because the minutes of the



main Council meetings made up for this loss by including a copy of the reports made by the Tramway Committee. Armed with this information it was possible to set more precise dates for the changes to the fares and tickets than it was from using Horn's book; a major step.

The main obstacle to research in the early period was the absence of any real information concerning the Dover Tramway available in these minutes, because there was a tendency to gloss over its workings by entries such as "The report of the Tramways Committee was agreed". However, from previous research into my family history (my mother's side all came from Dover) I was aware that the local newspaper, the "Dover Express" often devoted a whole page to reports on the meetings of the council, often giving verbatim quotes of what was said. Accordingly, the next step was to read every edition of this newspaper starting in 1895 when the tramway was first proposed and from this gleaned a remarkable insight into matters which were entirely absent from the official records, especially with regard to how changes to the fares were received by the public. Even more important is that by a process of deduction, it was possible to ascertain with reasonable accuracy the dates of some matters which were omitted in the official record. Local newspapers are an absolute goldmine for researchers and should be a primary source. Another aspect that needs to be included is maps. It is difficult to appreciate the nuances of changes in things like fare stages and routes if you do not have detailed knowledge of the local geography. This is something that maps supply. From the Dover library I was able to get photocopies of the whole of the Dover tramway system from the 25 inch maps of 1905. Although too big to join together in one piece (without moving house to accommodate it!), these maps became a constant and invaluable source of reference and one that should be recommended.

Apart from the East Kent Archive and the Dover Library, I was able to consult the Dover Museum and the independent Dover Transport Museum. Both of these had only a limited amount of relevant material relating to the tramway, but each had something vital to contribute, and if such resources are available they should be used to the full, otherwise there is a danger that something important might be missed. In my experience, it is rare for research to turn up the whole picture in one go; rather it is assembled painstakingly from small pieces, like a mosaic.



One aspect of tramway tickets that has always fascinated me is the advertisements on the backs and when compiling my book I wanted to list these and relate them to the tickets they were used on. Being a relatively small tramway system this was probably easier than for one of the bigger ones, nevertheless I was able at first to identify twelve different adverts and work out which series of tickets they were used on. As time went by new adverts were discovered and at the time of writing there are over 50 known.

In order to round out the picture and give some local

colour to the proposed book it was decided to include brief details of these organisations. My main source was a series of street directories of Dover, usually referred to as the Dover Blue Books, which began in 1889 and continued until just after the outbreak of World War II. These gave the names of the occupants, including businesses, at every address within the town. From this it was possible to state with some accuracy when some of these businesses opened or when they closed and this has great relevance when applied to dating some of the tickets. On one such occasion a small unconsidered detail gave a clue, where it was stated that the premises of the advertiser were "Next Lloyd's New Bank". Since the new Lloyd's Bank was not opened until October 1906, this gives a very useful *terminus post quem* for such a ticket and the fact that it was possible to refer to it in such a way suggests that it was not long after the new branch opened. In fact the earliest tickets with that advert dated to 1905, and the reference to the bank was possible because by October of that year the prestigious and well-advertised building was substantially complete (as can be seen in a photograph in the local newspaper), although it was another year before it was opened for business. The flow of information also works both ways, as local historians were interested in learning about some of the advertisers, for example, the Dover Greyhound Stadium, one that had hitherto gone unnoticed.

With the help of the Internet it was possible to find information about companies that were not local and include that as well, to flesh out the picture. Another aspect of the Internet is the ability to check on the background of some of the advertisers. This is where genealogy skills came into their own, because it was possible to discover many of them in the Census going back to 1840, and also discover whom they married, their children (especially those who followed them into the business) and when they died. The Census gives their residence and occupation and this can provide other clues about the business.

In particular the 1881 Census for England, Wales and Scotland is available on CD and is searchable, as is the 1901 census, which is accessible online, though a fee is charged for this. Other copies of the census are available on CD, usually on a set covering a particular county. A problem in consulting the census is that there are lots of mistakes in transcription and you need to develop a knack of working out spelling variations in order to find the person you are looking for. You would be surprised at how often even common names manage to be garbled. As ever, patience is the name of the game.

By June of this year I was able to start work on an initial draft of the proposed book and various copies were farmed out to knowledgeable collectors for their comments. This proved premature because just at that moment some of the research began to provide dividends and a timely input of ticket details from major collectors meant that a whole section about the early tickets had to be re-written. The irony is that the owner of one of these collections actually apologised because he didn't really have much to contribute. When my book finally appears and the importance of his holdings is recognised, he might begin to have second thoughts about that.

"All successful research is about knowing what questions to ask and getting the right answers. Knowing what questions to ask is easy, as you will discover what they are as your research progresses. The trick in getting the right answers is knowing who to ask!"

A 1910 Traffic Census

by DAVE BUBIER

Assessment of traffic flows by means of a census has always been an essential tool in determining any justification for expenditure on highway improvements, etc, and the earliest ones provide a fascinating insight into how road usage was developing. Godalming Museum has unearthed a 1910 example in the borough archives and the statistics from the same are reproduced with permission.

In connection with an application to the newly formed Road Board for improvement grants to reconstruct macadam surfaces and eliminate dangerous corners, the Borough Surveyor, J H Norris, presented to the council the results of a census conducted on Meadrow (the northern approach to the town centre) and Ockford Road (to the south). It must be borne in mind that at this period Godalming was situated on 'The Portsmouth Road', the present alignment of the A3 not then thought of, and must have witnessed a fair degree of 'through traffic'.

Conducted between 8.0 am and 8.0 pm over two days, Tuesday 19th October and Monday 1st November, 1910, the totals for each class of vehicle observed passing (both directions) on the two roads show some curious anomalies. The high proportion of horse drawn trade vehicles to motor confirms the relative slowness of the transition there compared with passenger vehicles, where the car has substantially started to eclipse the horse. One can understand why there is a greater proportion of trade vehicles to and from the north (the populous Guildford conurbation), but why more cars to the south? Why more animals on Meadrow? Was there perhaps an abattoir or market on that side of town? Only traction engines and barrows are on an exact par, north and south, but surely the latter did not represent 'through traffic'! The preponderance of pedal cycles, by a margin the largest group, demonstrate these to have been the mode of choice

for the masses, but why so many more to the south?

	OCKFORD ROAD	MEADROW
<i>Horse drawn trade vehicles</i>	309	548
<i>Motor trade vehicles</i>	11	24
<i>Horse-drawn passenger</i>	62	64
<i>Motor passenger vehicles</i>	238	176
<i>Traction engines, etc</i>	4	4
<i>Animals</i>	7	156
<i>Barrows</i>	23	23
<i>Ordinary cycles</i>	886	515
<i>Motor cycles</i>	15	7

Dave Bubier, with acknowledgements to Godalming Museum.

Tony Newman, the R&RTHA Research Co-ordinator, offers comment on the number of cyclists in this Godalming census :

Even making considerable allowance for the censuses having been taken on weekdays in October and November, and in 1910, it may still be relevant that the Census was concerned with "The Portsmouth Road". Newsletter No.153 of the Surrey Industrial History Group (SIHG), September 2006, mentioned that in 2004 the Surrey History Trust purchased the Cyclists' Visitor Books 1881-1895 of The Anchor Inn at Ripley, (a few miles to the north of Godalming). It makes reference to cyclists "thronging the Portsmouth Road". The book only recorded those who stopped at The Anchor, took refreshment and chose to sign the book; yet in peak years, there were in excess of 6,000 entries. The SIHG does comment that "with the advent of the motor car the number of cyclists on the road diminished".

Road Fund

The Road Fund was instigated by the Liberal Chancellor of the Exchequer, David Lloyd George, in his Budget Speech of 1909. This was enacted with the Development and Road Improvement Funds Act, 1909.

A graduated scale of motor duty was introduced with petrol tax set at 3d per gallon. It was stated that the Treasury would not gain from the new duties and that all the revenue raised would be spent on the roads.

Revenue was paid into the Road Improvement Fund, later known as the Road Fund, and was managed by the Road Board. The Road Board did not undertake construction or maintenance of roads but controlled grants to local authorities to maintain roads.

The Finance Act (No.2) of 1915 allowed the Exchequer to retain the whole tax revenue of the Road Board to help pay for the war. Interest on investments was retained by the Road Board. In all, £14,329,000 was diverted from the Road Fund to the Exchequer with £8,250,000 refunded in 1919 with a further £1,408,000 in 1921/22.

In 1920, The Roads Act, differentiated between cars and goods vehicles for taxation from January 1st 1921. Prior to

then private cars and goods vehicles were taxed the same.

Winston Churchill's Budget of 1926 appropriated £7,000,000 from the Road Fund and made provision for one third of revenue from motor vehicle duty to be paid to the Exchequer. This was openly justified as protecting the railways from the growth of road transport. A wholly new revenue stream to the Exchequer was thereby initiated.

Churchill further raided the Road Fund in 1927 by transferring £12,000,000 to the Exchequer on the basis that the Road Fund had sufficient income and that temporary loans could be made to it if necessary.

Neville Chamberlain continued this trend in 1935, when he noted that the Road Fund had a credit balance of £4,470,000 and transferred the total to the Exchequer. Chamberlain's Budget of 1936, repeated the transfer of all credit monies, £5,250,000, to the Exchequer. At the same time, provision was announced for the Exchequer to receive all future revenue from motor vehicle taxation. The Road Fund was required to submit annual estimates of expenditure and be funded from the Exchequer, based on these estimates, subject to Parliament's agreement.

The Crick Committee on the Form of Government Accounts recommended that the Road Fund be abolished as it served no useful purpose.

The Miscellaneous Financial Provisions Act, 1955 abolished the Road Fund.

Roy Larkin ©2007

Traffic Hazards

TRAVEL ACCESSORIES

In the winter of 1795-6, John Pease travelled over 700 miles on business in Scotland. He recorded in a Journal held by the National Library of Scotland:

Not having sufficient light to discern the deep Rutts and great Stones in and upon the Road; and the gloominess of the Country, induced us to come to the following Resolutions:

At the first convenient place to have lamps placed on the sides of the Carriage that we may avoid these grand enemies of Giggs before mentioned. And for our greater security to provide ourselves with a Brace of Double Barrel'd Pistols, being frequently obliged to ride in the Night and having considerable Sums with us; the Pistols will be a protection to ourselves and the Lamps to the Carriage.

With acknowledgments to the National Library of Scotland website

ANOTHER OPERATORS' BURDEN

The extraordinary shapes for islands in roundabout traffic schemes have, at least occasionally, unhappy effects on transport operators. We recently had this intimately brought home to us when alighting at such a roundabout. To make a simple right turn the bus had suddenly to make a gyration of about 150° at the end of a lozenge-shaped island. We were flung through one of the side windows of the bus. So the operator pays in glazing for a ministerial experiment.

An equally harmful practice frequent with the Metropolitan Police is for policemen to urge tram and bus drivers to start away from advertised stopping places before they have been rung off, in order to expedite traffic flow at crossings. Drivers who yield may involve the operator in heavy compensation claims from passengers injured in attempting to board vehicles which move off without any warning.

Extract from "The Omnibus Magazine", August 1934

Hygienic Bakery Van

Ken Elks, in the foregoing article on "Integrated Research" has introduced the inter-play of research in different fields. Fortuitously, a good example has recently occurred that brings together the relevance that minor ephemera can have, and the use of the internet as a research tool. (And quite separately it raises the trivial question of the one-time favoured use of the word "hygienic" in business titles – particularly with milk and laundries – but did we not have "hygienic bakeries" as well?).

Dot Shaw of Rotherham was researching her own relatively recent family history and regretting how little she had taken in, and wholly failed to record, of what her late father had told her about their family bakery business, Vere & Sons Ltd, that had been a casualty of the rise of the supermarkets. She typed "Nu-Loaf" into her computer and it came up with the website of our corporate member, the Transport Ticket Society. The website had noted that a member, a diligent recorder of detail, had noted that, fifty years ago, some tickets printed by the Bell Punch Company for Rotherham Corporation Transport had carried Nu-Loaf adverts on their backs. Dot got in touch with the TTS, and an appeal was published in the Society's monthly *Journal* for examples of those tickets. Members found some and sent them to Dot.

When the R&RTHA heard of this, a letter was sent to Dot asking whether she could tell us something about the Nu-Loaf bakery vans. She has sent us the advertisement reproduced here, showing one of their vans. The caption records: "From a new fleet of hygienic vans, fitted with a sink, hot water, soap and towel" – a health and safety aspect perhaps rather advanced for its time. (Readers may care to comment).

RA

DELIVERING DAILY THROUGHOUT
SOUTH YORKSHIRE



From a new fleet of hygienic vans, fitted with
a sink, hot water, soap and towel

VERE'S

QUARRY HILL
ROTHERHAM



and, of course, all the
usual Cakes and
Pastries

NU-LOAF