# ROADS & ROAD TRANSPORT HISTORY CONFERENCE

# NEWSLETTER No.3 January 1993

Chairman : Professor John Hibbs, OBE, University of Central
England in Birmingham, Perry Barr, Birmingham
B42 2SU

Secretary : Gordon Knowles, 7 Squirrels Green, Great Bookham, Leatherhead, Surrey KT23 3LE

Treasurer : Roger Atkinson, 45 Dee Banks, Chester CH3 500

Research Coordinator : Ian Yearsley, 97 Putney Bridge Road, London

Newsletter Editor : Grahame Boyes, 7 Onslow Road, Richmond, Surrey,

SW15 2PA Grahame E TW10 6QH

#### EDITORIAL COMMENT

Several of the themes introduced in the last Newsletter have stimulated contributions to this issue: the impact of coal and railway strikes and road improvements on public transport, and the role of hand-propelled vehicles. Your editor was greatly encouraged by this evidence of the Newsletter contributing to the objective of the RERTHC of 'promoting, encouraging and coordinating the study of the history of roads, road passenger transport and the carriage of goods'. That he has been able to fill this issue without any difficulty has made his task both easy and enjoyable. He hopes that it will similarly generate further contributions on these themes for the next issue, and also articles or queries introducing new themes. He would also be pleased to receive notes about other societies that cater for aspects of road transport history.

Another aim of the Newsletter is to disseminate information on the archives of road and road transport history. Readers are asked to submit details of the location, scope and accessibility of archive collections to Ian Yearsley, the Research Coordinator.

#### HON. SECRETARY'S REPORT FOR 1992

As reported in the last Newsletter, the first business meeting was held in March, when the Conference was formally constituted. A second business meeting was held in Coventry in September when it was unanimously agreed to invite Charles S.Dunbar, the doyen of road transport historians, to become our first President. Honorary Associate Membership was conferred on Professor Theo Barker, whose initiative and persistence led to the formation of the Conference. We were sad to learn of the untimely death of Ray Cook of the R&CHS, who was an active member of the initial steering committee and took a major part in organising the first Symposium in Coventry in 1991.

It was agreed that an important function of the Conference should be to build up a register of road transport archive collections.

A sub-committee, consisting of Ian Yearsley, John Birks and the Hon. Secretary, has been working on the arrangements for the second Symposium, which will be held at the National Tramway Museum, Crich on Saturds 6th November 1993. (See the separate announcement enclosed with this issue.)

The publicity given to the Conference in a number of road transport journals, following the issue of a press release in the summer, has led to a number of enquiries, many of which have resulted in individuals joining as Associate Members. Membership at the end of 1992 stands at 10 Corporate and 11 Associate Members.

#### ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

We welcome the following, who have joined as the first Associate Members of the R&RTHC. Their particular interests and affiliations are given in brackets.

Roger Bailey, 57 Victoria Court, Allesley Hall Drive, Coventry CV5 9NQ

Professor Theo Barker, Department of Economic History, London School of

Christopher P.Byers, 119 Connaught Road, Roath, Cardiff CF2 3PY. [The hackney carriage/taxi industry.]

Charles S.Dunbar, 9 Christchurch Road, Malvern, Worcs WR14 3BH. [The road haulage industry.]

Jonathan M. Ellis, 28 Wheelers Lane, Epsom, Surrey KT18 7SA.

Professor John Hibbs, address above.

Economics, Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE.

Dr Martin P.Higginson, 96 St George's Avenue, Tufnell Park, London N7 OAH [Links with National Railway and London Transport Museums.]

Stephen Laing, 70 Thornton Avenue, London W4 1QQ. [Royal School of Mines Motor Club; veteran and vintage vehicles.]

Ronald H.Miller, Woodlands Farm, Aylesbury Road, Aston Clinton, Aylesbury, Bucks HP22 5AG. [Restoration of commercial vehicles.]

William D'Arcy Ryan, 19 Hill View Road, Garstang, Preston PR3 1JU [Road passenger transport and tickets in the UK.]

Richard Storey, 32 High Street, Kenilworth, Warwickshire CV8 1Lz. [Archivist, Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick.]

# CORRECTION

Owing to a misunderstanding, the name of the N.B.Traction Group was incorrectly quoted in Newsletter no.2 as the North British Traction Group. The editor offers his apploques.

# TRANSPORT TICKET SOCIETY

The Transport Ticket Society caters for all who are interested in the theory and practice of fare collection and associated documentation, both at home and abroad. Most of the Society's 500 members are to be found in Great Britain, but the 50 overseas members are widely dispersed throughout continental Europe, the USA, Australia, Japan, and even Colombia.

Road transport is the main interest of half the membership, the other half being more concerned with railways. Smaller numbers concentrate on water and air transport, whilst many are interested in all four modes of travel. Some search diligently for stage coach waybills, turnpike toll or early rail tickets; others seek to document the rapid growth of computerised ticketing on present—day buses, trams, and trains.

The Society's monthly *Journal* carries illustrated historical articles and up-to-date news of developments in fare collection throughout the world. Members' researches are published in the form of *Occasional Papers* and contributions are often made to company histories and other works on transport subjects.

The TTS seeks to acquire redundant ticket stocks from operators who are changing their ticket systems or have ceased business and these are distributed to members for a modest charge. Circuits and pools enable members to exchange unwanted tickets; regular meetings in London and Manchester provide other opportunities for exchange of tickets and news.

The Society has a small library, mainly of bus operators' fare tables. The point of contact within the TTS for research enquiries is Roger Aktinson (address on page 1).

Further information about the Society and a specimen copy of its Journal can be obtained from the Membership Secretary: Courtney Haydon, 4 Gladridge Close, Courts Road, Earley, Reading, RG6 2DL.

#### RATIMAY & CANAL HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Some years ago the R&CHS recognised that the study of railways and canals cannot ignore other complementary and competing modes of transport. It redefined its role as 'to encourage the study of the history of transport, with particular reference to railways, waterways and all matters associated with them'. Specialist Groups have been established within the Society to exchange information on Tramroads, Road Transport, Docks & Shipping, and Air Transport.

The modus operandi of the Road Transport History Group is through the distribution, 3 times per year, of a selection of short occasional papers, too short or not yet in a form where the author is ready to submit them for publication in the Society's Journal.

Over many years the Society has been building up a Research Index, now comprising over 20,000 cards, containing details of the primary sources on inland waterways and railways held in Record Offices, Libraries and similar institutions. Whilst it does not aim to cover road transport history, it could be useful in identifying sources where there is some

connection with canals or railways. The Society's Research Officer, Tony Warren, 126 Millfield, Sittingbourne, Kent ME10 4TP, is happy to receive research enquiries from non-members.

The road transport bibliography for 1991 reproduced in this issue is extracted from the Bibliography of the History of Inland Waterways, Railways and Road Transport in the British Isles, published annually in the Society's Journal.

Enquiries about the R&CHS may be directed in the first instance through Grahame Boyes (address on page 1).

# COAL STRIKE 1921: STIMULATION OF NEW BUS SERVICES

# Reply from John Hibbs to the query in Newsletter no.2

This is a good point to raise, and one that deserves further attention. After all, by 1926 bus services were generally established, and I can think of no examples of new developments arising from it, though it is not impossible that some did. What contribution I can make to the subject, however, concerns the 1919 railway strike, which I suspect had a greater impact than the Coal Strike of 1921.

When, as a young man, I interviewed Mr Berry of West Mersea, Essex, for an article subsequently printed by Charles Dunbar in Buses Illustrated, he told me that, on the first morning of the strike, he had one bus waiting to leave Brightlingsea for Colchester on a newly-established service, with one of his sons driving. As disgruntled passengers came out of the station, and found the bus, they soon filled it, whereupon Mr Berry junior telephoned his father at Colchester, and two more buses were sent down. The predictable consequence was that the railway got very few of those passengers back, and Berry's bus service was firmly established. (I used to go to school on it.)

# COAL STRIKES, PIT VILLAGES AND NEW BUS SERVICES: DONCASTER'S EXPERIENCE

# By Philip L. Scowcroft

The previous note (Newsletter no.2) suggesting a connection between the 1921 Coal Strike and the emergence of bus services prompted me to glance at the position around Doncaster, itself a coalfield focus. Coal strikes did indeed affect the running of Doncaster Corporation's trams, not only in 1921, but during earlier pit strikes as well, between 26 July and 15 August 1919, when they stopped altogether, and likewise during October 1920. But despite these temporary inconveniences, the trams maintained their position and, by and large, their income (especially during the September Race Week) until replaced by trolleybuses in 1928-31.

It was the areas which were <u>not</u> served by the trams which saw the development of bus services at that period. Either side of 1914-18 collieries were sunk all around Doncaster; the accompanying pit villages looked to Doncaster for many of their social and shopping facilities. Of them only Woodlands, Bentley and, to a limited degree, Edlington were served by tram routes by 1916. Rossington, Hatfield (ie Stainforth),

arworth and Armthorpe were not; nor was the Pilkington Glassworks 'model village' at Kirk Sandall. Tramway extensions to serve Rossington, Armthorpe, Kirk Sandall and, more comprehensively, Edlington were considered by the Doncaster Corporation in 1919-20, but were rejected because of the high capital costs involved, which would have included much improved track facilities in the town centre — long a bottleneck even with the existing system — and extensions of up to three miles to some routes. Motor buses were seen to be the answer. The Corporation staged several tests with borrowed buses, including a London General K Type in July 1920, and they secured statutory powers in 1922 to operate trolleybuses (not to be used until the trams were replaced, as we have seen) and motor buses, whose routes, fares and other conditions of operation were carefully drawn to prevent competition with the trams.

Private operators, whether authorised or 'pirate' (in February 1924 it was estimated by the Corporation that 40% of all buses around Doncaster were unlicensed), were not quite so particular and there ensued a struggle between them and the Corporation's Watch Committee, who granted licenses to operators enabling buses to ply for hire in Doncaster and prosecuted unlicensed operators. The Watch Committee faced two ways, of course, as the Corporation were bus operators from 1922; but they appear to have carried out their task reasonably, and certainly a wealth of small operators appeared on the Rossington, Armthorpe and Stainforth routes, some of whom continued to run efficient, friendly services cheek-by-jowl with the Corporation until they were bought out by the South Yorkshire PTE in the late 1970s and early 1980s3 . Stainforth was in 1924 served by seven proprietors operating eleven buses (more on Saturdays). The position with Rossington and Armthorpe was not dissimilar. Harworth was largely left to W.T.Underwood (later East Midland), the Corporation making little or no effort to exercise their powers in that direction. By 1928, 17 routes were operated around Doncaster by 30 authorised proprietors owning 424 vehicles.

- 1 The Woodlands tram route was replaced by motor buses in 1935. Another route (Avenue Road/Wheatley Hills) was mostly operated by buses from 1925, then turned over wholly to trolley buses in 1928.
- 2 They were not new in 1920. Rossington had had a charabanc service (operated by one H.Hancock) from Doncaster since 1916, if not earlier, while charabancs ran from Doncaster to Woodlands from 1908, at least until the tram route opened in 1916.
- 3 In the 1920s a vast majority of these non-Corporation buses appear to have been no larger than 14 seaters — minibuses in modern parlance. The wheel has turned full circle on the present Armthorpe route(s) which are now operated, by SYT, entirely with 25 seat minibuses.

# THE APPLICATION OF REINFORCED CONCRETE TO THE CONSTRUCTION OF ROADS AND TRAMWAYS

After reading the article on The Emergence of the Motor Road in Newsletter no.2, Ian Cormack submitted the following extract from B.R.C. Roads: a Photographic Record of the Use of Reinforced Concrete in Modern Road Construction, published by the British Reinforced Concrete Engineering Co.Ltd, Manchester c.1921:

The scientific and regular application of reinforced concrete to road construction was first introduced by the BRC Engineering Co. in 1911, since which time it has passed through the normal stages of growth of any new idea and now stands as a recognised feature of road construction. Actually it has emerged to save the situation in regard to road strength. Where road reinforcement in 1911 was expedient it is in 1921 a necessity and it is only a question of time and finance before every important road must have a reinforced foundation... Even today, is not expensive.

BRC road constructions are divided into three classes of work, which serve different purposes: these are road foundations, complete roads, and tramway foundations.

#### BRC Road Foundations

BRC Road Foundations are used under surfaces of stone setts, wood blocks, asphalte, and tar macadam. These require a permanently level bed, in order that they themselves remain level. A BRC foundation provides the level bed. The standard BRC foundation is concrete, 6 in. thick, reinforced with No.9 BRC Fabric. This is sufficient for the heaviest modern traffic in any ordinary ground, and is better than plain concrete 12 in. thick. In very bad ground thicker concrete and heavier reinforcement may be necessary, and in very good ground the thickness of concrete may be reduced.

# Complete BRC Roads

Complete BRC Roads are the combined construction of reinforced concrete foundations and concrete surface built together as one. Although they are generally sprayed with tar, the drag and grind of the traffic is transmitted quite closely to the actual concrete, and the surface concrete must have a very hard wearing stone as aggregate. Where suitable stone is obtainable locally it is used throughout the concrete and the road is called a 'one course road'; where such stone has to be imported a softer and cheaper local material may be used for the bottom portion of the concrete and the harder material for the top  $1^{1}/_{2}$  in., the top being laid within 20 minutes of the bottom. Such is called a 'two course road'. Complete BRC roads are generally 6 in. thick, reinforced with No.9 BRC Fabric laid 11/2 in. from the bottom. This construction has, during the 10 years which have elapsed since its introduction, been found sufficient for all ordinary cases. On very bad ground, such as soft peaty land, we have used thicker concrete and heavier reinforcement, but for ordinary purposes nothing further is required. The concrete is sufficiently strong in itself to withstand, without special reinforcement, the shearing stresses and the slight tensile stress which may occur at other parts than at the bottom. In soft peaty ground the tensile stress at the top of the concrete is increased, and No.14 BRC Fabric is then laid 2 in. below the top in addition to the No.9 at the bottom.

#### BRC Tramway Foundation

BRC Tramway Foundations provide for tramways the same purpose as is provided by BRC foundations for roads, that is, they give a permanently level bed on which to build a permanent superstructure. The concrete underneath the rails is generally 7 in. to 9 in. thick, of the same quality as road foundation, reinforced with No.7 or No.9 BRC Fabric cut

into sheets and laid transversely to the track 2 in. from the bottom of the concrete. The effect of the reinforcement is to spread the load over the whole width of foundation, the concrete does not crack, and the surface remains level. For a troublesome track the BRC Tramway Foundation is a certain cure, and for tracks on good ground it is economical because less concrete may be used.

# WIDER ROADS AND BIGGER BUSES

#### By John Hibbs

In the 1950s a significant change came over the bus and coach industry as vehicles, particularly single-deckers, came to have greater carrying capacities. The impact of this on rural operation was closely related over much of England to changes in highway provision, and this interaction between roads and road transport seems to have been largely neglected.

Prior to 1950 the maximum 'box dimensions' for a Public Service Vehicle were fixed at 7'6" (2.3 metres) x 27'6" (8.4 metres), although the length could be extended to 30'0" (9.1 metres) if there were a third axle. An increased width of 8' (3.2 metres) was permitted in 1950, for a very peculiar reason, giving a good example of the obscurantist attitude of those responsible. A consignment of trolleybuses intended for export to South Africa, where 8' width was permissible, was diverted for use in Britain, and their use demonstrated practically the case for changing the Construction and Use Regulations. Yet even when this was done (and the third axle requirement was also dropped) the Traffic Commissioner for the Metropolitan Traffic Area sought to limit their use (on stage or express carriage services) to specified streets. The absurdity of this was made plain to him when it was pointed out that it did not and could not apply to contract carriages (private charter), and it was quietly dropped.

Within the box dimensions space had to be allowed for the engine, and the driver -- whether 'forward control' (sitting in a cab beside the engine) or 'normal control' (sitting inside the vehicle, behind the engine). The result was that for most purposes the typical seating capacity for a single-decker was limited to 33 or 35 people -- an odd number because an offside emergency exit allowed five seats across the rear. three-axle vehicles were in practice double-deckers. Faced with low bridges which limited double-decker operation, John Petrie of the Northern General company in the north-east designed and built a 44-seater saloon as early as 1933, using a side-mounted engine on a three-axle chassis, while at the same time AEC marketed the 'Q', in both single and double deck modes, placing the engine in a similar position, but inside the chassis frame. Nevertheless the standard 'half-cab' remained the general choice for a heavy coach or bus up to and after the 1939-45 war. By using lightly framed seats some models could accommodate as many as 37 passengers, but the cost in comfort was considerable.

Alongside these vehicles there remained after 1945 a remarkable variety of smaller ones, mainly coaches with normal control layout. (The author recalls conducting a Reo Gold Crown as late as 1955.) With 20 seats or less it was possible to dispense with the services of a conductor, and in some Traffic Areas this was extended to any vehicle with normal control and a front entrance. Foremost among available coaches were those built

on the Bedford OB chassis, or similar makes, which typically had a 29-seat body with front entrance, such as that marketed by the Duple coachworks as the  $\it Vista$ .

For small rural operators this type of coach (rarely in bus format) was the workhorse. The petrol engine was easy to maintain, and it not only gave a smoother ride than the diesel of the period, but the diesel was only economic on much higher mileages than these firms would expect in a year. (As late as 1957 a Suffolk proprietor was operating a petrolengined Leyland <a href="double-decker">double-decker</a>.) But in the deep rural areas there was another reason why smaller vehicles remained attractive: the width of the available roads.

In the 1930s a number of improvements had been made, and today the observant traveller can judge the way things were by looking at corners that have been cut off, leaving a short right-angled piece of road with perhaps a few cottages on it. It is often hard to believe that commercial vehicles ever passed that way. Main roads were also improved, and the Trunk Roads Act gave us Eastern and Western Avenue and the dreaded East Lancashire Road. But for a small firm running a few buses on market days and Saturdays, with some school contracts and the summer excursion trade, the roads were still, to adapt a term, 'narrow gauge'.

Into this situation there came, around 1950, not just enlarged box dimensions (bringing the Bedford-Duple Super Vega normal control 38-seater coach), but the path-breaking development of an efficient, flexibly mounted underfloor engine. Suddenly, apart from space for the driver and an access door, the whole interior of the vehicle was available for revenue-earning capacity. Standard size went up to 41 seats (43 or 45 in bus format) and the half cabs were obsolete virtually overnight (their second-hand value collapsed as quantities of them came onto the market).

In the 1950s there was still a considerable demand for rural bus services, and the opportunity to run a bigger vehicle and save mileage on 'reliefs' was welcome. So also was the chance to increase labour productivity in the excursion trade: in term of drivers' wages it could pay to 'stop booking' and fill 41 seats instead of sending two drivers with 29-seater Vistas. By the start of the 1950s many small firms had acquired one or two diesel coaches — Leyland, AEC, Dennis, Daimler or Crossley — and had come to terms with the new technology, and while the underfloor engine had its own maintenance problems, it was at least more accessible than the forward mounted power unit — provided always that you had a pit.

But what about the roads? It was here that a more far-reaching change, recorded in the books of George Ewart Evans, was taking place at the same time, so that bigger buses could run round the country lanes by the middle of the decade.

The years from 1945 to 1965 saw the end of a rural economy and a rural way of life that had changed little for 1,000 years or more. The effect on the landscape was devastating. Suffolk, which had been a county of small farms and small fields, was turned into the open prairie, exploited by the 'barley barons' in a form of agriculture based on the use of machinery. As the holdings were put together, field hedgerows were grubbed out, with financial support from the Ministry of Agriculture and, since roadside hedgerows had only been there to keep the livestock in — and arable now

ruled all — they went too. Rural roads exist as part of the infrastructure of agriculture, and local highway authorities, no doubt quickly aware of the need for wider roads to move combine harvesters over, took the opportunity for further improvement. Even where stock farming was still practised, old skills such as hedge-laying became costly, and hedge-cutting machines were acquired by councils to keep things 'tidy'.

So it was that, just as the bigger buses came onto the market, the roads were developed and they could be put into use. School contracts were altered, conductors (until made virtually extinct by the Act of 1968) enjoyed a brief heyday of prosperity, and passengers had greater comfort. (It could be argued that the first generation of underfloor engined coaches offered a better ride than anything since, short of the 'high-spec' imports of recent years, with their heavy power-to-weight penalty.) Whatever pressure may have been brought to bear upon the County Surveyor by the farming community, we may be sure that little thought would have been given to the rural bus operator. (In one market town in the early 1960s the Borough Surveyor designed and built a new bus station without providing sufficient turning space for a 9 metre vehicle; it seems he was not aware of the increased box dimensions.)

Sadly, this is not the end of the tale, for the very improvements that farm mechanisation brought about meant the shift of surplus labour to the towns, and the loss of just the traffic that had made so many small bus and coach businesses viable.

#### HAND-PROPELLED VEHICLES

# Reply from Richard Storey to the query in Newsletter no.2

As unlicensed vehicles, it seems unlikely that any statistical measure could be applied to this type of road vehicle, unless records of a major user, such as Express Dairies, could be located, to provide a basis for the projection of a national total. The multiplicity of users and variations in the size of their 'fleets' would probably render any such calculation worthless. However, the ever useful *Shire Album* series provides an excellent descriptive introduction, with an analysis of types and examination of their builders: G.Backhouse, *Old Trade Handcarts*, Shire Albums no.86 (1982). Its illustrations cover a range of types, from the builder's handcart to the dairyman's 'pram'.

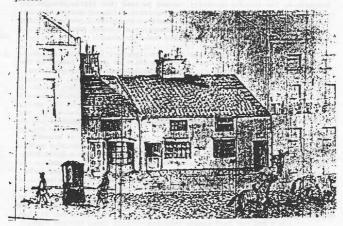
The present writer has recently been fortunate enough to purchase some manufacturer's literature of the late 1930s issued by D.Sebel & Co.Ltd, 'industrial truck specialists' of Borough, London SEI. The firm offered a range of hand trucks for municipal and other purposes, with steel or wooden bodies, on two or three wheels. They included covered trucks for gas companies' fitters, and low-loading trucks for refuse collection or appliance transport, as well as the ubiquitous builder's or general-purpose truck with pole handle. More elaborate, registered designs, such as the Borough and Universal refuse-collecting and street-sanding trucks, could be supplied with pneumatic-tyred wheels.

The company's promotional literature included a list of some of the councils, electricity, gas and water undertakings, commercial and other concerns, including co-operative societies. Howis Ltd. and the G.P.O.

Engineering Department, which were users of Sebel trucks or the company's patent steel wheels. Reacting to the national preparations for defence against air attack (ARP), Sebels also produced and advertised Sebeltow ARP trailers to carry 10 to 12 cwt., for towing by a motor vehicle, but with the facility for a handle attachment to permit the trailer to be pulled or manoeuvred by hand.

# SEDAN CHAIRS IN DONCASTER: AN EARLY MUNICIPAL VENTURE

Since Philip Scowcroft's article was published in Newsletter no.2, he has come across the drawing reproduced below of the municipal sedan chair in Hall Gate, part of Doncaster's main street. It is taken from the Doncaster Gazette of 17 June 1927, but the date of the drawing is not quoted.



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