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# ROADS AND ROAD TRANSPORT

## HISTORY CONFERENCE NEWSLETTER

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### NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

and

**NINTH BUSINESS MEETING**  
**3rd February 1996**

Members should receive with this copy of the Newsletter the formal notice of the AGM and Business Meeting to be held at the Museum of British Road Transport, Coventry, on Saturday 3rd February, 1996, at 11.00.

As usual, the afternoon session will include presentations by members: this time themes will be "The Tribulations of an Amateur Researcher" and "The Centenary of Dennis of Guildford."

Matters for discussion will include the idea of Colloquia, a new type of event which could be held alternately with Symposia.

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### Keeping up Appearances

New technology now allows us to change the type style and increase the size of the Newsletter. Another change, of policy, means that our meetings will henceforth be recorded in greater detail in these pages. To come, we hope, will be an increase in the number of photographic illustrations.

The frequency and timing of the appearances of the Newsletter are also under review, and by the time of the February AGM this may well be announced. There remains but one factor outside the control of the Editor.....the supply of material for publication." All contributions are gratefully received". must for the time being be my cry, but I look forward to the day when I can say "For the time being, no further material can be accepted for publication!!"



## Conference Matters

Report of the 8th Business Meeting held at the de Vere Hotel, Coventry, on Saturday 16th September 1995

The 8th Business Meeting began with two announcements concerning Society Officers. We are pleased to report that Professor Theo Barker has accepted the post of President of the Society. However, Gordon Knowles wished it to be known that he intends to resign from the post of Secretary at the next AGM, and gave due notice of this intention.

The Chairman gave a report on the securing of various archive documents for future consultation by historians. The rescue of an almost complete set of A&Ds (Road Haulage Records) is described below; the preservation of original scripts by Charles E. Lee and Charles Klapper on the subject of the bus industry in England/Wales and Scotland was discussed and arranged between members present; and the Quick Smith papers, a series of documents by a leading figure of the period of transport nationalisation in the late forties, was discussed as a possible key resource document for a book on Road Haulage in Britain. Other items mentioned included the BET archives, now housed at the National Tramway Museum at Crich, and the Brush records housed at Leicester City Museum.

Professor Hibbs proposed that the biennial Symposia should be interspersed by another type of event (perhaps known as Colloquia) at which members would discuss previously circulated papers. This would allow for round table discussion with instant input from members able to add to the body of knowledge presented, and those unable to attend would have the opportunity to write in advance with a contribution. Indeed, the Meeting itself illustrated the viability of this, as several requests thrown out to the assembly met with instant offers of answers, or suggestions of where the answer might be found. This idea was well received, and will be raised again at the next Meeting and AGM, the provisional date for which was fixed for Saturday 3rd February 1996, at Coventry.

Professor Hibbs also introduced the matter of Data Protection, and a scheme whereby the Society might, by self-enrolling, provide such a service to affiliated societies at a reduced cost. Other members raised diverse issues. A remark that there were important gaps in the documentation of the major Scottish bus companies led to a discussion on the "boundaries" of the Society, and it was generally felt that although primarily British, this certainly embraced British interests worldwide, and several instances were quoted of foreign historians writing to members for information on matters relating to their native countries.

There was also discussion of the need for a reference book of source materials for transport historians (1). Several members spoke of archive documents in which they had an interest: there was discussion on the Smithies Lists of British bus operators, upon which both we and the Omnibus Society are working, with the eventual aim of publication; there was mention of a bibliography of documents relating to London Transport kept at the PRO; the Chairman spoke of his efforts in tracing known copies of *Garcke's Manual of Electrical Undertakings* and *The Motor Transport Year Book* (2); and John Dunabin referred to an unpublished manuscript by W.T. Underwood (founder of East Midland Motor Services) relating to his activities at Portsmouth Dockyard during World War Two.

The latter, "a document in search of an author or editor", led to a suggestion that the Society should publish short or medium-to-short length items as "Occasional Papers". This was another idea referred for further consideration.

The afternoon session began with matters concerning the 1995 Symposium, and then followed members' presentations by John Dunabin, Richard Buckley, and John Hibbs. John Dunabin's contribution is printed on page X. Richard Buckley gave an illustrated talk entitled "How to dispose of the opposition, Yorkshire Traction Company v. Dearne District Light Railway". The DDLR was the last entirely new British tramway undertaking (1924) until the recent arrival of Manchester Metrolink and Sheffield Supertram. During the whole of its time it ran with the opposition of the Barnsley & District (later Yorkshire Traction) buses. Various truces were agreed, and there was a system of pooling fares. The local authorities who owned the DDLR finally agreed to close down the tramway if Yorkshire Traction would pay a yearly sum towards the repayment of the debt incurred in constructing the lines. Herein lay the final irony: such was the wording of the agreement, that the victor of the battle for traffic ended up losing money, and subsidising the rates of the Dearne Valley residents. Perhaps there was a hidden warning in the notice carried by the DDLR trams: *Gentlemen do not spit, others should not!*

Finally, John Hibbs screened some black and white pictures of Corona Coaches of Sudbury, verbally adding the colour by a string of anecdotes and reminiscences concerning the vehicles, the staff, and the passengers of this now long defunct country bus operation.

Our thanks must be extended to the Museum of British Road Transport (our usual venue) for arranging substitute accommodation at the de Vere at short notice.



# BOOK REVIEW

*Books are chosen for their historical content, and because they place hitherto unpublished material or ideas before the reader.*

**PULLING PINTS** by Robert Coates, published by Fitzcharles Press 1993 (£18.95).

Robert Coates is both enthusiast and professional, and it shows! His book outlines the history of the brewers' dray from the point when animal drawn carts replaced the two-man yoke as a means of moving heavy casks, through the steam era, to the motor age, and even looks at possible future developments. Brewers' drays are specialist vehicles, and as a former transport manager with a major brewery, the author explains the requirements for a brewery fleet, and discusses the various methods used, and the specialist features needed for the efficient delivery of a heavy, perishable cargo at both local and national level, with some explanation of legislation and productivity.

The book is copiously illustrated (275 pictures in 144 pages), with views of most British makes of steam and motor lorry, all with excellent captions. There are also useful appendices on imperial measure and British and foreign commercial vehicle manufactures whose vehicles have appeared on British roads.

"Treat yourself to a copy" said *Commercial Motor* but perhaps the best comment of all is that of *Vintage Roadscene*: ".....without any padding." This reviewer would add that this book breaks new ground, and is a very welcome addition to the few available titles on the subject of road freight transport.

**BRITISH TROLLEYBUSES - 1911-1972** by Geoff Lumb, published by Ian Allan 1995 (£14.99)

Geoff Lumb's book is about British trolleybuses, and not trolleybuses in Britain. It differs from previous works in that it is arranged in alphabetical order of manufacturer, and an excellent attempt is made to deal in depth with the early and varied "trackless cars", most of which were semi-bespoke rather than series built, and for which tabulated data is supplied in some cases. Various foreign orders are mentioned and depicted, but it is a pity that not all are listed, and the volume would then have been complete and definitive. The photographs are numerous and of a good standard, there has been much research, and the book is a good work of reference for enthusiast or historian.

## VIDEO REVIEW

**THE STORY OF SHAP** (time 50 minutes)  
produced and edited by Ray Johnson in collaboration with the Shap Memorial Trust, and Friends of the British Commercial Vehicle Museum. (£16.50 inc. P&P). Available from BCVM Trust Archives, Oak House, High St., Chorley PR7 1DW (Cheques made payable to Shap Memorial Trust Fund)

The A6 route across Shap Fell was the main west coast road between England and Scotland before the opening of the M6 motorway in 1970. The hazardous ascent with modestly powered and under-braked lorries, coupled with frequent appalling winter weather conditions, led over the years to the name 'Shap' becoming synonymous with deeds bordering on the legendary. This reviewer's own memories of Shap date back to being a schoolboy passenger in the cab of a Bedford S type, in 1960-1. I looked forward with eager anticipation to the journey, only to be bitterly disappointed because I saw nothing. The route was shrouded in dense fog! A few days later I repeated the journey, and witnessed the slow procession of lorries grinding their way to the summit along a long, steep, and narrow road.

In 1994, the Shap Memorial Trust Fund erected a stone memorial to the road, the drivers who traversed it, and the many local people whose lives revolved around the route and its commercial importance. Gordon Baron, of the Friends of the BCVM, researched the history of the road and produced a book, which then led to this video. After an opening sequence of some vintage vehicles passing through Shap Village (an Atkinson Mk I 8 wheeler with drawbar trailer, an Atkinson tractor unit with low loader, a Reid's Transport Leyland Octopus, a Ribble Leyland Tiger coach and an Austin A35 van), the history of the road is traced incorporating drawings, maps, and paintings, followed by some archive film showing the years of transition from horses and carts, steam trains and railways, to the early days of motorised transport. Some excellent film footage shows two L&Y 0-6-0 freight engines with a heavy goods train.

As the history of the road is traced through the twentieth century, local residents record their memories. The lady whose family was responsible for the weekly winding of the Leyland Clock has some wonderful stories to relate, and a driver recalls his memories as the vintage convoy is seen covering the Kendal - Shap village stretch of the road. For anyone with an interest in road transport, local or regional history, this video production is thoroughly recommended.

Graham Edge

### RANK ERROR

(From the Parliamentary debate 3/5/63 on Beeching)

During the debate Sir Robert Cary, the MP who is chairman of Lancashire United Transport, spoke about having to follow a gigantic vehicle at New Cross, carrying the slogan "Rank's Bulk flour - bringing you your daily bread", and said it carried the sort of cargo which should never have left the railways.

Mr. P.E. Briggs, transport manager for Joseph Rank Ltd., said yesterday, "I know exactly the vehicle he means. It is an 8 wheeled Foden box bulk tipper, which shuttles all day between Battersea and Deptford. Hardly a job for liner trains. Anyway, Sir Robert cannot have been following it for long or he would have got the slogan right. It reads "Rank's flour for your daily bread."

Contributed by John Hibbs



# **The Pride of the Road**

## **The Early Days of the Omnibus**

**The Third National Road Transport History  
Symposium, 14th October 1995  
at the National Motor Museum, Beaulieu.**

### **Introduction**

The Chairman opened proceedings by extending a welcome to all those present, and in particular to Theo Barker, with us for the first time as President. Thanks were expressed to Grahame Boyes for his help in establishing the Conference, and his successful launch of the Newsletter, to Gordon Knowles, for having organised the Symposium, and to Roger Atkinson, for ably manipulating the purse strings.

Professor Hibbs then wondered whether there might be a "pyramid of esteem" in transport studies: railways at the top, tramways next, then buses and coaches, and finally freight transport. He went on to urge the Conference to renew its interest in the movement of goods by road, and suggested that "commercial road transport" might be the subject of future activities.

He then introduced the topic for the day: the early development of the omnibus, from the horse drawn version through to a reliable motor driven version, with mention of how manufacturers and operators organised themselves.

### **The Horse Drawn Omnibus**

Professor Theo Barker then gave the first paper of the day, and in his opening remarks he stressed the importance of road transport even in the pre-turnpike age. Moving to the 1820s, he felt more research was needed, particularly on provincial road transport. In London, Shillibeer originally wanted to call his bus 'Economist' but finally launched it in 1829 named 'Omnibus'. The later nineteenth century saw the creation of operator associations for routes in London, while the 1842 change from a seat-based to a mileage-based duty encouraged development of large capacity buses with seats on top. Trams were kept out of the centre of London, and so buses found much more use there than in provincial cities. By the 1890s there were four horse-buses a minute along Fleet Street and Oxford Street.

The presentation provided a 'taster' for a new book, *'The Rise and Rise of Road Transport, 1700-1990'*, by Theo Barker and Dorian Gerhold (Cambridge University Press), pre-publication copies of which were on sale at the Symposium.

### **The inter-relationship between motor bus operators and manufacturers**

Alan Townsin next addressed the meeting on how the early London motor-bus proprietors all became involved with manufacturers in order to build up fleets of reliable machines suited to the conditions and legal constraints of service in London. Thus Daimler, AEC and Tilling-Stevens became established. The First World War held up the development of heavy passenger chassis, so it was the USA where the next technical advances were made (wider, longer, lower buses, eventually on pneumatic tyres), and both Leyland and AEC eventually recruited John Rackham, who was responsible for the mould-breaking Leyland Titan/Tiger and AEC Regent/Regal range of 1927-9, from a position in North America. Operator influence was still strong, however, with the Tilling Group, the BET, London Transport and the larger municipalities all proscribing aspects of design.

Unfortunately, the constraints of time did not allow Alan to fully explore more recent examples of his theme, such as the NBC and the Leyland National, GMPTE and Northern Counties, and other similar post-deregulation ties.

### **Leading figures of the past**

After a lunch break, the Symposium was chaired by Professor Barker, who introduced John Hibbs' paper on leading figures of the past in the bus industry. This is featured on the next page.

### **The Work of the National Motor Museum**

The final presentation was made by Michael Ware, Curator of the NMM, who explained how the collection of the Museum had been built up from the small assembly of old cars displayed by the Montagu family, when they first opened their home and estate to the public. He explained how the present administration had been built up, and the site developed, now including the fine lecture theatre in which the event was taking place, and the library and archive facilities that participants were invited to tour.

After tea, tours of the library stacks were arranged, and some idea conveyed of the wealth of books, catalogues, magazines and photographs that are available for research in a library which is open seven days a week (Christmas Day excluded!), and which is manned by both permanent and volunteer staff. Limited funds are available to purchase items for the archive, and one of the functions of the volunteers is to look out for suitable new material.

ARP/IY



## Movers and Shakers of the Bus Industry

John Hibbs, in presenting his paper entitled 'Leading Figures of the Past', declared that it represented *work in progress* rather than a finished project. It is his intention to publish the paper together with a series of short biographies of the people referred to, when his research is complete. This summary, and the four lists of key figures within the industry used at the Symposium, is published now, both to inform readers and invite comments or additional suggestions. Please write to John Hibbs at the University of Central England.

My paper originates from a commission from the Oxford University Press to contribute a number of entries to the New Dictionary of National Biography (New DNB). Let me express my gratitude to Professor Armstrong for ensuring that the transport industry will be well represented when the work comes out - slowly we see the industry recognised for what it is - along with agriculture and public health, the essential underpinning of civilised life. One of our functions, as I see it, is to play a part in raising the status of transport studies, by encouraging the serious study of the historical background, and Theo Barker and Dorian Gerhold have now established firmly the importance of our particular corner of it.

The New DNB continues the contribution of its Victorian forebear in providing access to the part played by *people* in our history. This paper envisages a larger enterprise, in which the various contributions of the people may enlighten us in our study of the way the bus and coach industry came into being, grew and flourished, and moved into a period of consensus. "Let us now praise famous men", therefore, and I shall try to impose a frame of reference that seems to me to help to understand their contribution. First of all, I shall take the Men of Foresight. Of these men it can be said that their imagination gave them the confidence to invest in an industry that did not exist, when the 'establishment' remained committed to rails and horses.

Walter Alexander (senior) (1879-1959)  
W.P.Allen ( -1959)  
T.H.Barton (1866-1946)  
A.D.Cannon & A.D.Mackenzie  
Thomas Clarkson (1863- )  
Claude Crosland Taylor (1889-1935)  
Walter Flexman French  
Sidney Garcke (1885-1948)  
A.H.Hawkins (1881-1963)  
E.B.Hutchinson (1882-1967)  
James Coventon Moth (1887-1963)  
O.C.Power (1879-1943)  
Frank Searle ( -1948)  
William Thomson (1881-1949)  
Richard Tilling (1851-1929)  
Walter Wolsey (1873-1964)

I choose to emphasise the word imagination here because I believe it to be unjustly neglected in the study of business behaviour. I refer to Wordsworth's definition, from *The Prelude* :

'...Imagination, which in truth,  
'Is but another name for absolute power,  
'And clearest insight, amplitude of mind,  
'And Reason in her most exalted mood.'

I suggest that *amplitude of mind* was characteristic of these men who had faith in what the future could be made to deliver.

The careers of these men stretched beyond the pioneering days, and many of them must appear again in my second list of the Consolidators.

James Amos (1895-1970)  
Sidney Garcke (1885-1948)  
J.F.Heaton (1880-1949)  
R.J.Rowley (1871-1955)  
Frank Pick (1878-1941)  
William Thomson (1881-1949)

From the horse-bus-with-the-motor-in-front, the industry came to be able to run vehicles with the reliability of the tramcar, and the 1920s saw the bus map of Britain filled in by a variety of business and municipal enterprise with a truly remarkable speed. The Consolidators had a vision of stable investment with a structure that limited what they saw to be the "waste" of competition. From them came the "territorial" impulse, as chronicled by C.E.Lee in his Institute of Transport Paper "*Voluntary Organisation*" of 1947.

These were men who could foresee a future on a grand scale, and from them I turn to an assortment of those I call the Developers, men who worked largely in the field, as it were. It is a fairly heterogeneous collection, and there could be many more names added. It does not contain the "pirates", whether of London, Glasgow, the Potteries or elsewhere, who played their own part in the expansion of the industry: not least in the growth of express coach services between 1925-1930.

A.C.Baker ( -1950)  
R.W.Birch  
Ned Edwardes (1875-1955)  
Ronald Fearnley  
Commander F.T.Hare  
Major J. Hickmott (1881-1947)  
Shirley H. James  
W.T.James (1892- )  
H.R. Lapper  
R. Stuart Pilcher (1882-1961)  
C.H.Preece (1900- )  
John C. Sword (1983-1960)  
John H. Watts (1890-1972)

As with any form of classification of human activity, there must be some overlap between these categories. I turn finally to a small group of men whose contribution was central to the development of what I have called the "consensus": the view that the bus



industry should not be left to the unregulated working of market forces. It is a view most clearly to be found in the second report of the Royal Commission on Transport of 1929-1931, but which was to pass largely unquestioned into the policies of the British Transport commission, and thus to those of the Transport Holding Company and the National Bus Company and Scottish Transport Group. As I have remarked elsewhere, the proceedings of the Royal Commission are marked by the absence of contention as much as by the absence of representation from the entrepreneurial tradition of the so-called pirates.

Lord Ashfield (1874-1948)  
 Sidney Garcke (1885-1948)  
 Sir Arthur Griffith-Boscawen (1865-1946)  
 J.F. Heaton (1880-1949)  
 R.J. Howley (1871-1955)  
 Sir Henry Maybury (1864-1943)

By 1930, there was a decline of imagination and foresight, in contrast to the early days. There was now an "establishment culture", resistant to innovation and change. To borrow a phrase used by David St. John Thomas, by the late 1930s the bus industry was "*in the complacent maturity of its power*". While some of the men listed were working still after 1945, I think it would be difficult to identify any comparable list of outstanding figures in the post-war world; certain notable exceptions apart.

Another thing that seems to me worth consideration is the air of excitement that seems, in retrospect, to surround so many of the men we have looked at. For example, it expresses itself in every page of the early part of W.R. Crosland Taylor's book "*Crosville: The Sowing and the Harvest*", and it can be sensed, at one remove, perhaps, in Fulford's house history, "*Five Decades of B.E.T.*" - but with significantly less force in the two later volumes.

Throughout history, travel has been seen by the establishment as unsettling. Tyrants have always sought to limit freedom of movement. But while the establishment came in due course to use the railways (in the First Class, of course), the bus from the start was a middle class form of transport (the tram was for the working class). Perhaps we have a hint here to explain the political backing that was given to the consensus. I wonder whether the whole idea was to make the bus respectable?

These are personal speculations, and I must admit to bias! In so doing, let me pay tribute to a man who continues to demonstrate the existence of imagination and vision, my first boss, Arthur Lainson. For it is the Premier Travel slogan, *Support Independent Enterprise*, that has been in my mind while preparing these remarks.

John Hibbs 10/95

## Matters arising .....

### Records of Provincial Horse Bus Operation

Theo Barker's presentation on the horse drawn omnibus suggested that much had been written about the operations in London, but little on those in the provinces. Over lunch, a list of known publications was drawn up, herewith presented.

The Story of Solomon Andrews and his family	J.F. Andrews
(Stewart William, Barry 1976)	
Early Omnibus Services in Birmingham 1834-1905	
(The Omnibus Society)	
Horse Buses of Brighton & Hove	A. Peasgood
(University of Sussex 1985)	
(contains excellent general background material)	
Glasgow - The Last Tram	Charles A. Oakley
(Glasgow Corporation 1962)	
History of Public Transport in the Halstead Area	E. Axton
(data on rural operation in Essex)	
(Halstead & Dist. Local History Soc. 1980)	
Early horse bus services in the Harrow area	T.F. May
(The Omnibus Society 1968)	
Transport in Jersey 1788-1961	M. Ginns
(Transport World 1961)	
Leeds Transport, 1830-1902	J. Soper
(Leeds Tpt. Historical Soc. 1985)	
Liverpool Transport Vol. I	J. Horne & T.B. Maund
(LRTL 1975 - recently revised)	
Manchester Tramway & Carriage Co.	E. Gray
(Mer. Tpt. Historical Soc. 1977)	
Sheffield Transport (TPC 1977)	Chas. C. Hall
Wolverhampton Transport Vol. I 1833-1930	Stanley Webb
(Birmingham Tpt. Hist. Group c1990)	RA

### International British Trams and Buses

Our recent discussion of how far afield our "boundaries" lay (see Conference Matters, page 2), prompts the inclusion of two interesting items.

In Shanghai, from 1924 onwards, a tram and a bus company both under British ownership ran in competition, as the Municipal Council failed to see any territorial boundaries with regard to transport. The China General Omnibus Company (owned by the Sassoon family) ran Tilling-Stevens, and later AEC buses, driven by White Russian emigres. The tram company (Shanghai Electric Construction Co) employed Chinese crews, supervised by Korean inspectors, paying in cash to Portuguese clerks, under British management. All this to avoid collusion and embezzlement.

IY

As this Newsletter is being prepared, the order for new vehicles for 1996 of the Stagecoach Group has been announced. This includes a quantity of buses for the use of the overseas companies in the group. Fifty are for the Portuguese operation (based at Cascais and Sintra) which also includes a ninety year old tramway!

ARP



Some realities of  
**RURAL TRAVEL**

*in the second half of the  
NINETEENTH CENTURY*

*by John Dunabin*

*Talk given to the Meeting of the Roads and  
Road Transport History Conference  
on 16 September 1995*

"Some" in the title is an important qualification. This is a limited view of a small area on the Welsh border as seen through the eyes of a young curate and later a vicar there.

Francis Kilvert arrived in the village of Clyro, a mile north west of the market town of Hay (now Hay-on-Wye), in 1865 when he was 24, to take up duties as assistant to the Vicar. For part of his stay there and in later years he kept a detailed diary written up each night by lamp or possibly even candle light.

Rural curates at that time were in a somewhat unenviable position. Educated, well educated, they obviously had little other than their faith in common with the so called lower classes. Socially, they fitted better into the society of the gentry, but money was a perennial problem. Vicars often had private wealth to supplement their rewards of office, which included spacious vicarages, but curates rarely did. With stipends of perhaps £100 to £150 per annum, they may not have been technically poor - a farm labourer's wage was a fraction of this - but they had no cottages to live in, no kitchen gardens, and there were many demands on their slender resources. Their commitments rarely included wives and children.

The steam railway had only reached Hay a year before Kilvert. From the use made of the train it is clear that life in this previously isolated village would have been very different for him in its absence, with some strains, arising in part from his financial situation, becoming unbearable. Even as a curate, but possibly more frequently later, Kilvert travelled, largely for pleasure, on a scale many cannot afford even now. Neglecting his visits to France and to Switzerland, of which we know little, apart from many local journeys, even village to village, by train, he reached Canterbury, Cornwall, Liverpool and London, with fairly frequent trips to visit his parents in Wiltshire.

We learn from Kilvert of trains running very late because locomotives were inadequate for their heavy loads, and, to be fair, of trains on time and therefore missed, of "slip" carriages, a broad gauge train immediately followed by a narrow gauge one, and of a derailment on the Isle of Wight when a screw jack was brought, the carriage restored to the line,

and normal service resumed. Once he rode from Newbridge-on-Wye to Hay in a magnificent saloon used by Lady Bailey the previous day to come from London. Unmentioned is the shunting necessary at Three Cocks Junction.

For his longer journeys, Kilvert commonly travelled 2nd class, using 3rd for local ones, but problems did arise. Returning once from the Gower, "As I was taking my ticket, Hughes, Rector of Brangwyn, clapped me on the back. He was going to Hay, so out of politeness I was obliged to go third class with him though I had paid for a second class ticket". On another occasion he notes that the Rector of Whitney with his mother on their way to Hereford wanted to go second class, but one carriage was full of farmers and another full of tobacco smoke so they went first *and paid the difference*. We also learned that when Kilvert travelled with his vicar, the latter paid his fare. Very occasionally he used an excursion train; this prompted sharp comments on the behaviour of some of his fellow passengers.

But of course, to use the train he had first to reach the nearest station, which he usually did by walking. From Clyro to Hay this was easy, and from Bredwardine when he was Vicar there, he walked the four miles to Kinnersley station, allowing one and a half hours for the journey. Returning was different. Hay did boast an omnibus which probably met some trains, but he records walking back to Clyro leaving his luggage to follow by the bus. On a surprising number of occasions though, friends gave him lifts.

This leads me to my main theme. The picture we get from Kilvert's diaries of this sparsely populated rural area is one of near-continuous movement. The gentry were scattered, social; intercourse was their lifeblood, and for this, transport was essential. All of them possessed the means, means it would appear in plenty. We learn of gigs, broughams, 'chariots', 'chairs', phaetons, covered waggonettes, 'whitechapels' etc. Some households had several types of conveyance for different purposes. Kilvert sampled them all; he was a frequent participant in social activities, and never lacked invitations to ride with their owners.

There was undoubtedly an element of 'one upmanship' in all this; Kilvert saw it but remains uncritical. We do not know if the Thomases of Llanthomas - Mr. Thomas refused to let his daughter Daisy marry the diarist because of his poor prospects - lost status by buying a second-hand carriage. He did however comment on the irony of the local squire, Mr. Baskerville, in his one-horse brougham, being overtaken by the Vicar in his mail phaeton (a much more expensive vehicle) which also carried two servants. Lord Hereford, as befitted his status, owned a travelling carriage *with imperials*. Kilvert was precise



in his terminology, so no doubt the meaning of the two words was clear to him, but in one place I have seen 'imperial' defined as an outside seat, and in another as a trunk (presumably secured).

Here, I must leave Kilvert to speculate a little. These people were comfortably off by late nineteenth century standards with private incomes from land or investments. They usually owned their own (large) homes, food was cheap, so were servants, and their domestic lifestyles were modest. I suspect that possession of means of transport, even without ostentation or extravagance, was a major item of their expenditure. Long before this time coachbuilding had become a fine art and therefore expensive. A large carriage, made of the finest woods from far afield, brightly coloured (yellow was a popular colour) and highly polished, could cost up to £500. Broughams were cheaper, whilst gigs, the most widely owned middle class carriages, might only cost £25. All however, needed horses and horses needed covered accommodation, as did the coaches. They also needed a stableman, possibly a coachman too, and they needed hay. Then there were taxes, modest but irksome, on male servants, on carriages themselves, and for those entitled to display them, taxes on armorial bearings.

There was the risk factor too. An expensive coach could be reduced to matchwood in minutes as the result of an accident and horses, expensive horses, could be killed or rendered unfit for further uses. One solution of the horse problem was hiring ('jobbing'), widely used in London but possibly difficult in rural Radnorshire. Kilvert quotes figures showing it cost nearly four times as much to hire a horse as a house-keeper.

Kilvert's diary entry for New Year's Day 1878 provides two illuminating pieces of information. After visiting his friend and ready provider of transport, Miss Newton, he called at Mrs. Matthew's shop to ask Mrs. Baynham, obviously the local carrier, to bring a new chimney glass from Hereford the following day. This was not Hereford market day, so perhaps Mrs. Baynham made several round trips each week.

Greater excitement followed. Francis Kilvert was expecting his parents to visit him that day from Wiltshire, arriving by posting from Hereford at 5.30 pm. The anticipation of reliability and good timekeeping was made clear not only by the expected time of arrival, but by the fact that Mr. Kilvert senior was to take evening service at Bredwardine Church. The bells, though, were ringing, and Kilvert junior was hurriedly preparing a sermon himself, when the travellers arrived. There had been a slip-up regarding the provision of post horses at the Green Dragon in Hereford, and his visitors left an hour late. Then, five

miles short of their destination, a rear axle broke, so the driver on one of the horses galloped back to the home of Mr. Berkeley Stanhope, and borrowed a waggonette from him, leaving the broken carriage in the ditch '*with its lamps burning*'. We do not know whether the prime reason for this was the safety of other road users or to reduce the risk of damage to the coach.

Two days later, Mrs. Kilvert suffered a touch of bronchitis, brought on, her son concluded, by the change from a close carriage to an open waggonette. Kilvert himself was very hardy, but ladies were not regarded as capable of facing the cold winter air. 'Close' carriages were essential for them, but more was sometimes called for. Going out for a drive in February, Mrs. Venables of Lysdinam had carriage and cushions thoroughly aired with hot water bottles and warming pans.

When after serving elsewhere Kilvert returned to the area as Vicar of Bredwardine he had a house of his own, a coach house and a stable too, and of course a higher salary, but he did not acquire a carriage. An unmarried local lady of means, daughter of a former Vicar, was assiduous in providing him with transport, but he still walked to and from his nearest station, now Kinnersley, four miles away, as a matter of course even though Mrs. Bynham's trap, used by a 'live-in' pupil when he came to stay, must have been available.

One of the last known diary entries is perhaps revealing. "Went to Hereford by the 11.45 train....., Busy shopping all day, and getting things to furnish a bedroom for my pupil that is to be. Went to the National Provincial Bank, and found that I had overdrawn my account by between £30 and £40". Obviously he could not afford personal transport.

But all this movement, to picnics, garden parties, and many other social gatherings, together with the ready use of the train, barely touched the vast majority of country dwellers, now lumped together in retrospect as the underclasses. A few travelled, the carriers going to town and girls using the carts to leave home for good, entering service in London or big country houses. Greater numbers went to the nearest market, but on foot, driving animals for sale in front of them. The young, the old and in fact most women of any age, rarely strayed far. They were born at home, died at home, and never took holidays. Even for their last journeys, wheels were not essential, coffins often being carried for several miles by relays of human bearers.

One striking omission from Kilvert's accounts of journeys around Clyro and Bredwardine is any comment on road quality. Even though some were made in unsprung carts, or riding outside, once by choice even in the 'rumble', normally reserved for



servants, there is no mention of ruts, potholes or worse; apparently, all went very smoothly. It should be borne in mind that many country lanes, now metalled, were then like the great drovers' roads (the 'green' lanes) neither intended nor suitable for wheeled traffic.

Kilvert's Diary is published in three volumes by Jonathon Cape.

## PhotoCAT

*The Historical Model Railway Society's  
computer coding system for photographs and  
documents*

At our Seventh Business Meeting early in 1995 we were addressed by Peter Stevens of the HMRS who showed us a series of photographs and asked us to classify the pictures, and in a brief way, to indicate both content and detail.

Peter then went on to describe the system evolved by himself, as the society's computer data manager, to classify photographs by a series of 15 characters, forming 3 groups of 5: the first group indicates the ownership and type of vehicle, the next indicates the type of location and, if known, the exact location (i.e. "Crossing a bridge/or on Lodge Bank

Bridge), and the final group indicates the vehicle identity (number) or other information as applicable. The system was designed for materials relating to railways in Great Britain and Ireland, and therefore also has the ability to classify into three time periods (Pre-grouping, the era of the Big Four, and British Railways), but it can be adapted to catalogue other types of vehicle.

Individual pictures may be encoded several times, for example, our hypothetical picture of a locomotive and van crossing Lodge Bank Bridge might be listed for the locomotive, the van, and the bridge. Similarly, a road transport picture of a tram and an articulated lorry on a level crossing could be recorded by three codes. Peter emphasised in his demonstration talk how a single picture can contain 'something for everyone', and should therefore receive multiple classification, although it must be said that there are many other pictures of transport subjects which demonstrate the single-mindedness of the photographer, and his desire to isolate the subject from the world in which it worked.

Ian Yearsley, our Research Co-ordinator, is keeping in touch with the HMRS and any future developments of the PhotoCAT system will be reported in this Newsletter.

ARP/IY

## HISTORY ON A POSTCARD

*A curious by-product of the First World War was the large number of postcards produced showing the destruction of many French and Belgian towns. The view below shows damaged overhead and blockaded tracks at Rheims.*



Ville Paris-n° 2  
15

LA GRANDE GUERRE. — Le Crime de Reims. — Rue du Faubourg Cérés.  
Maisons incendiées et bombardées par les Allemands. — The Crime of Reims.  
Ceres district. — One of most bombarded street.



## The Omnibus Society

Second in a series of items describing the Corporate  
Members of the R.R.T.H.C., contributed by Reg Westgate

Three transport enthusiasts, after visiting the Commercial Motor Show Exhibition at Olympia in November 1929, adjourned to a Lyons teashop (long since disappeared) for light refreshments. There they discussed the lack of any organisation for the study and exchange of information about the bus industry for anyone who might be interested. An inaugural committee meeting was held in Dulwich on 15th November 1929, at which Charles E. Lee was elected Chairman, Charles F. Klapper Secretary, and W. Noel Jackson Treasurer. The Omnibus Society was born. The first meeting held on 17th January 1930 at Tillings Social & Athletic Club, Park End, Forest Hill, coincided with the issue of the first *Omnibus Magazine*. The first visit, arranged on 29th May 1930, was to the Chiswick Works of the London General Omnibus Company.

Now entering upon its sixty-seventh year, the Society has become a widely respected nationwide organisation, with headquarters in London, and branches covering the Midlands, North East, North West and Yorkshire, Scotland, South Wales and the West Country. Meetings and visits are arranged in all areas. Each year since 1946, when Sidney Emile Garcke, CBE, accepted the Presidency for a year, a leading figure from within the industry has been invited to serve as President. An associated weekend study tour, including the annual dinner, is regarded as the highlight of the Society's calendar. Many lifelong friendships have resulted through membership of the Society, which covers a wide age range, and is drawn from all walks of life, as well as from professionals from the industry itself.

The *Omnibus Magazine*, currently published bi-monthly, is the official journal of the Society. Its contents of current and historical interest, and details of events, satisfy the needs of the enthusiasts, the professionals, and the historians. It is supported by branch bulletins, and those of the Provincial Research Group, and London Historical Research Group, which co-ordinates research outside of the metropolitan area.

The Society will shortly achieve Charitable Status to safeguard the future of its accumulated wealth of archive material at present housed at Coalbrookdale, Shropshire, together with the John F. Parke Memorial Library and the Timetable Library.

Facilities offered by membership of the Society are access to fellow enthusiasts, papers read by leading figures in the industry, visits to operators and manufacturers, a magazine supported by branch and

research group bulletins, access to the library and archives for research work, a photographic service of prints from historic negatives donated to the Society, and the use of OSMART for the disposal of surplus items and/or the purchase of items for personal collections.

Full details of membership are available from:

The Hon. Secretary,  
The Omnibus Society  
The Spinney,  
Meadow Road,  
Ashstead,  
Surrey KT21 1QR.

RGW

## Off the Beaten Track

Stepping back in time 1995

The recent Symposium took your Editor by road to the South, via Motorways and Clearways. Seeking a break from the "race track" of the A34, I took the A338 on return, via Wantage, a place I had never been to, but knew of its name because of the famed Wantage Tramway, a rare instance of a rural steam hauled passenger tramway in England. This ceased its passenger service in 1925, but continued as a goods carrier for another twenty years.

CLEGG & SON for Photo Materials

ESTABLISHED OVER A CENTURY.

**J. N. ARBERY & SON,**

The up-to-date Family and Furnishing Draper, Carpetman, Tailor and Gentleman's Outfitter, Hosiery, Glover, Hatter, &c.,

*Clothing Clubs and Charities supplied at Wholesale Prices.*

**Market Place, WANTAGE.**

**ARTHUR J. BELCHER,**

Furnishing and Agricultural Ironmonger,

CYCLE & MOTOR AGENT,

**WANTAGE.**

Cheapest House in the District for  
Agricultural Implements. Bicycles.  
Bedsteads. Guns & Ammunition.  
Mail Carts and Perambulators. Stoves.  
Lamps, etc. Oils and Colours.

CLEGG & SON Mineral Water Makers.

CLEGG & SON Oil, Paint and Color Store.



The Market Square, with its statue of King Alfred and stone facades, looks as if it could still echo to the sound of the steam tram whistle. The present day public transport is Thames Transit minibuses, which start outside the drapers shop of Arbery and Son. This, I was told, was the oldest established business in town, a fact borne out by the steam tram ticket illustrated below, and which must date from 1925 or earlier. It declares Arberys to be "established over a century". In the autumn of 1995, however, the business was about to close down, and was selling off the stock.

The steam tram ticket is shown life-size. It is of the tear-off coupon type, unusual in Britain, but common in continental Europe, although perhaps not to the same dimensions. It is printed on white paper, and seems to have been produced locally by Clegg & Son. This firm also made mineral waters, and sold picture post cards.....no doubt some depicted the steam trams. Post cards of this (not for sale) are displayed in the shop entitled "Wantage Novel Library", at 16 Newbury St. The owner explained that the shop had opened in the thirties as a private library of fiction titles, but had ceased to operate as such in the sixties, and now sold sweets and stationery.

Before leaving, I took a cup of coffee in a furniture shop which had a small cafe on the upper floor. Here the tables and chairs, crockery and cutlery, were reminiscent of forty years ago, only the price (75p) seemed up to date. I left feeling that the Wantage tram might still be lurking in some forgotten corner.

ARP

*Illustrated, from the collection of Roger Atkinson, is a Wantage Tramway white paper tear-off ticket. It appears to have been printed locally by Clegg & Son, and the advertising, which is purely local, is a good indication of the needs of the populace of this rural community.*

CLEGG & SON, Cash Chemists, Wantage.

d. Wantage Tramway Co., Ltd.  
FARE.

ENT & SON,  
IRONMONGERS,  
& Implement Agents  
WANTAGE.

Largest Stock & best Selection  
the District of Furnishing and  
all Ironmongery at prices to  
compare with London Stores.

ALLS AND MOTOR SPIRIT.

CLEGG & SON, for Cheap Stationery & Picture Post Cards.

WEEDON BROS.,  
COAL MERCHANTS,  
BRICK and TILE MAKERS and  
Chemical Manure Manufacturers,  
GORING, &c., &c.

Stores at the  
Tramway Terminus,  
WANTAGE.  
TRUCK LOADS TO ANY STATION.  
Agent: Mr. P. W. Belcher, Mill St.

No: 4119

## New Members

We welcome several new associate members to the R&RTHC.

**Laurie Hughes**, 14 Westbury Close, Hitchin, Herts SG5 2NE has a special interest in Turnpike Trusts and the Coaching Era.

**Roslyn Thistlewood**, Archivist of the British Commercial Vehicle Museum Trust Archives, Oak House, High Street, Chorley, Lancs PR7 1DW, joins as an associate member. The archive contains information on Leyland commercial vehicles, and vehicles of other makes taken over by Leyland, such as AEC, Daimler, Guy, Maudslay, Morris, Thornycroft, Scammell, and Sunbeam. To visit the archive, telephone Roslyn on 01257-266036.

**L.Gordon Reed**, Clover Paddock, Broadway, Shipham, Somerset BS25 1AU, joined the R&RTHC as a result of attending the recent Symposium. He writes "...when I started my career as an unindentured apprentice in 1934 there were over twenty British commercial vehicle manufacturers, and I am very anxious to continue to play my part in rescuing as much information as possible about these companies before it is too late. I have been continuously employed in the industry for over sixty one years, mostly on the engineering side, but I was also fortunate enough to be closely associated in the development of the "new" legislation prior to our disastrous involvement in the EEC."

### Chester City Council TRANSPORT HISTORY Source Guide

The Chester City Council Record Office has produced a Source Guide on Transport History. In its present form, it lists source material held in its own archive, and gives general guidance by listing various national bodies (PRO, NRM, NTM etc.) where a local researcher might find further information on a chosen topic.

The A5 booklet has four main sections: Canals, Railways, Trams and Buses, and Roads and Motor Vehicles.

It is an excellent idea to have such booklets available, as they serve as a portable index for the subject of your choice, and can save much searching in an unfamiliar index, using up time you would rather be spending on the scrutiny of the documents you wish to see.

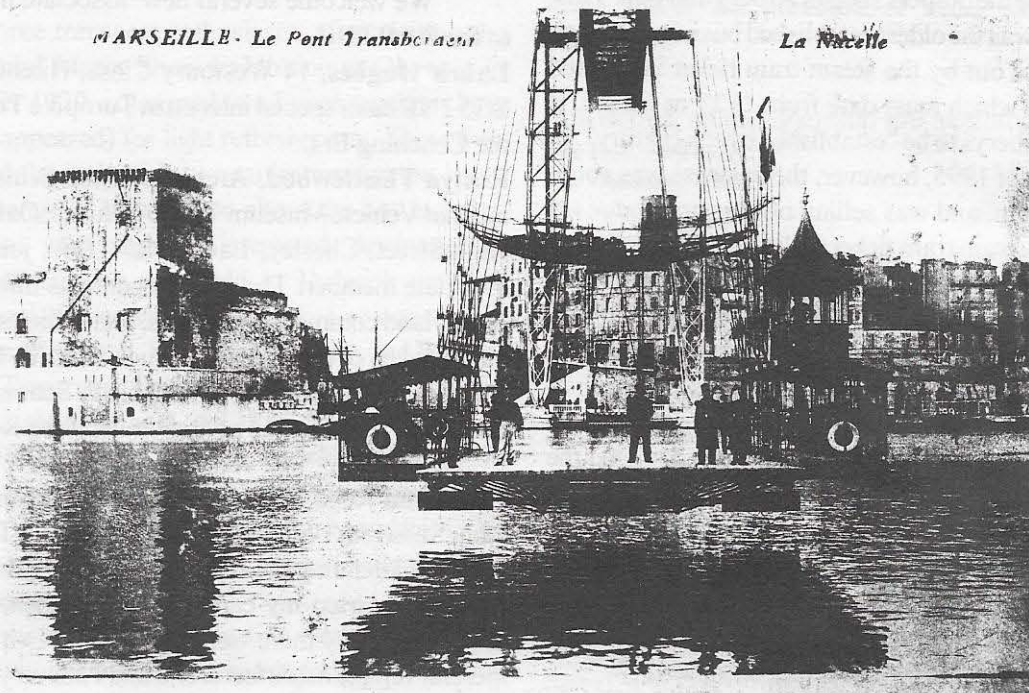
RA

Chester City Record Office  
Town Hall,  
Chester CH1 2HJ (01244



## HISTORY ON A POSTCARD

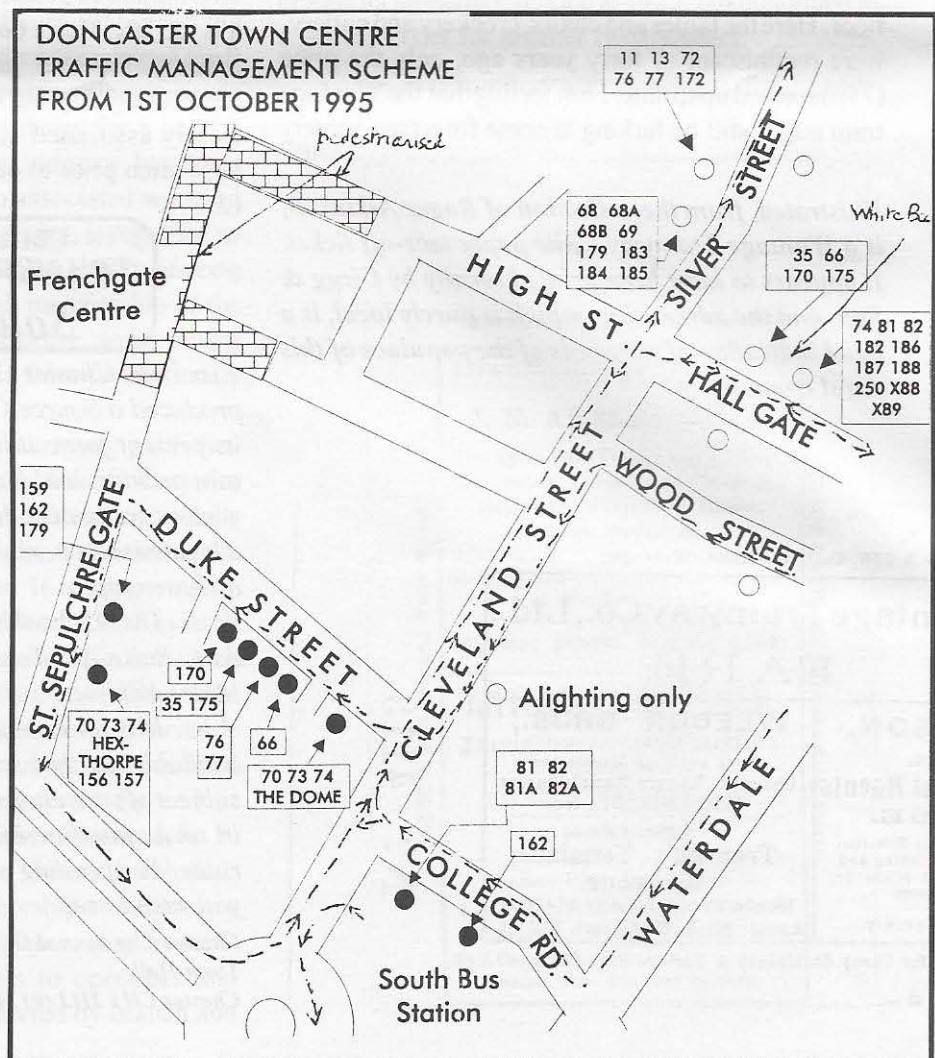
### *The Marseilles Transporter Bridge, posted 1916*



The card featured above was posted in 1916 by a serving member of the British armed forces. The obverse has the Censor's Stamp, and the post mark (there is no postage stamp) is entitled "Field Post Office" Sent to a young lady in Hull, sister of the soldier on active service.

The card depicts an end-on view of the "gondola", or transporter car, Marseilles. Note how this contraption built by the French engineer Arnodin (not R. Emmett), has features of a seaside pier. The netting is for catching falling objects.

Starting on page 16 is an article devoted to the first year of a much grander transporter, in fact, the largest in the world, at Widnes and Runcorn.





# Public Transport and Pedestrianisation

Two items which look at a modern trend from a different viewpoint. Firstly, Philip L.Scowcroft examines changes in Doncaster from an historical standpoint, and takes us back into the days when vehicles were not very numerous.

## TRADITION & CHANGE IN DONCASTER TOWN CENTRE BUS STOPS

The town centre end of St.Sepulchre Gate in Doncaster has a long tradition as a bus terminal for in-town services. This began around 1890, when the grocery emporium of Hodgson & Hepworth, situated in that stretch of St. Sepulchre Gate, ran horse buses drawn by one or two horses from several Doncaster suburbs to bring customers into town. These buses did not survive by many weeks the introduction of Doncaster's municipal trams(1), but the trams and the trolleybuses that followed them after 1928-31 used that same stretch of street as their town stop, as also did several local bus routes after the trolleybus era ended in 1963. This came to an end on 30th September 1995, with the introduction the following day of a new town centre traffic management scheme which involved (*inter alia*) the pedestrianisation of that part of St. Sepulchre Gate.

One tradition thus came to an end, but another, much older, was revived. Before 1st October 1995, many local bus routes had a picking-up point in High Street, which was itself partly pedestrianised under the new scheme. The displaced services have now to stop in Silver Street, or in the case of seventeen routes, in Hall Gate, outside the White Bear public house. The White Bear (now admittedly much altered) had a tradition during the nineteenth century as a terminal first for stage coach (and stage waggon) services, particularly during the 1830s and 1840s (2), then for "omnibuses". The first "omnibus" services based on the White Bear ran to and from the North Midland at Swinton between 1840-9 (3). Then, from 6th October 1857 William Daykin's omnibus left the White Bear for New Bridge (for the packet boats for Goole and Hull). This service lasted only four months before its starting point was cut back to Thorns, but it ran again from the White Bear in summer 1858, although apparently not subsequently. A Saturdays only Market Day omnibus service between Doncaster and Wroot in Lincolnshire, seating 24 passengers, also ran from the White Bear, which it had just left on 24th March 1860

when the fore axle fractured, severely injuring a passenger. This probably ran at least until 1867, and other similar Market Day services at that time may have terminated at the White Bear. The house is now an important bus boarding point in the town,(4) reviving a very old public transport connection.

(1) Trams commenced 2/6/02. On 17/7/02, 20 horses, 5 pair-horse buses and 2 single-horse buses belonging to Hodgsons were sold. The business remained in the same place until about 15 years ago. Other in-town horse bus services run by Steadman & Sons Livery Stables, terminated just round the corner in Station Road, between c1889 - c1903.

(2) The White Bear Coach Office was opened by William Bradley in May 1836, and ran several services to Sheffield, plus others to New Bridge, near Goole, and to York and Scarborough, these other connecting with steam packets respectively on the Dutch River and the Aire & Calder Canal. The White Bear had been a coach staging point before 1836. In the 1840s, coach services ran to Selby, Gainsborough and Thorne, from the White Bear.

(3) The White Bear was also the agent for the parallel aquabus service along the Don to Swinton. J.Ashforth ran both bus and aquabus.

(4) The bus shelters outside the White Bear were not ready on 1/10/95, and for a while buses had to stop further up Hall Gate.

## SECOND THOUGHTS IN CHESHIRE ON PEDESTRIANISATION

It will be noted from Philip Scowcroft's item that it was a shopkeeper that instigated local horse bus transport in Doncaster, and the Wantage Tramway ticket illustrated on the centre pages would indicate that shopkeepers were concerned to attract the custom of the tramway passengers (that is if they knew how to read, and had very good eyesight!). This link between urban passenger transport and commerce has perhaps not been studied before, but is it not true that the tram and horse bus did as much for the city centres as the railways did for the seaside resorts of this country?

Pedestrianisation schemes break the link, and the experience of two Cheshire towns is discussed below. In both cases, all traffic including buses must now circumnavigate the town centre, and there was all-party political support for this. Traders were initially "unhappy", but in late November, TV local news bulletins spoke of disquiet amongst traders, and a declaration in the case of Chester that the matter would be urgently reviewed if the Christmas trade proved disappointing. Similar views have been expressed in the local press at Warrington. The attitude of the "public" in both towns differs slightly, but there are many similarities, not least the fact that both places are the subject of current "bus wars"

*We should be interested to learn of the experience of other British towns with regard to this issue.*  
*continued.....*



## Pedestrianisation in Warrington

Road traffic was banned from Buttermarket Street and Horsemarket St, Warrington, from 28th August 1995. This was the final stage of a process, which has quite an interesting history in respect of public transport. When horse tramways were proposed for Warrington (none were built) it was suggested that they be of narrow gauge, and even then, there were doubts expressed as to whether they could reach the centre of the town, which took the form of a crossing of two major roads, the now A49, a former Roman Road linking Wigan with the mid-Cheshire salt fields, and the now A57, the very important Liverpool-Manchester turnpike.

When electric tramways were proposed, which were to be of standard gauge, the town centre was declared too narrow, and trams by-passed the central crossing. A widening scheme put forward at about the time of the construction of the tramways (1902) envisaged a central circus, with provision for all five tram routes to meet. The objective was fulfilled in August 1935, when the last tram service was withdrawn, and all bus routes could meet at the town centre. The circus was only partly built at this time (it took until 1980 for this to be achieved), and Sankey Street (A57) was even then very narrow, so narrow that Warrington was one of the last to receive buses built to the width of 7 feet 6 inches in 1965. Serious accidents to shoppers in Sankey Street resulted in it being first made one-way, and subsequently pedestrianised by 1980, a decision which certainly was received favourably by the citizens. The displaced bus routes were diverted, along with all other bus routes, to the new Bus Station.

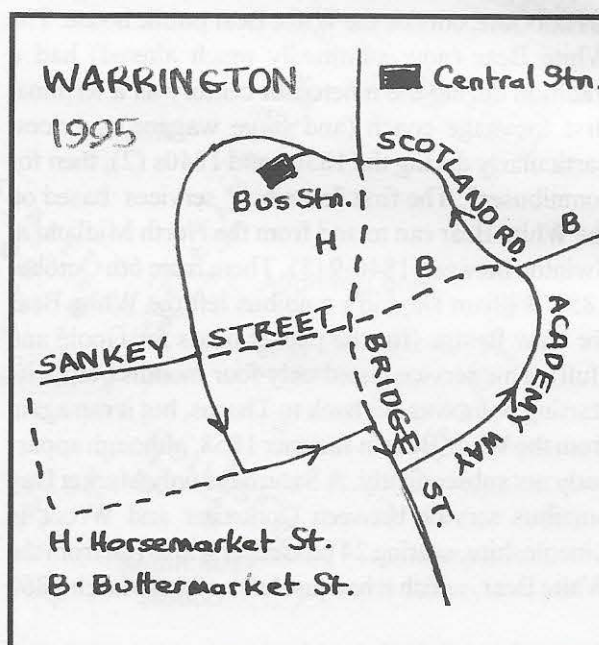
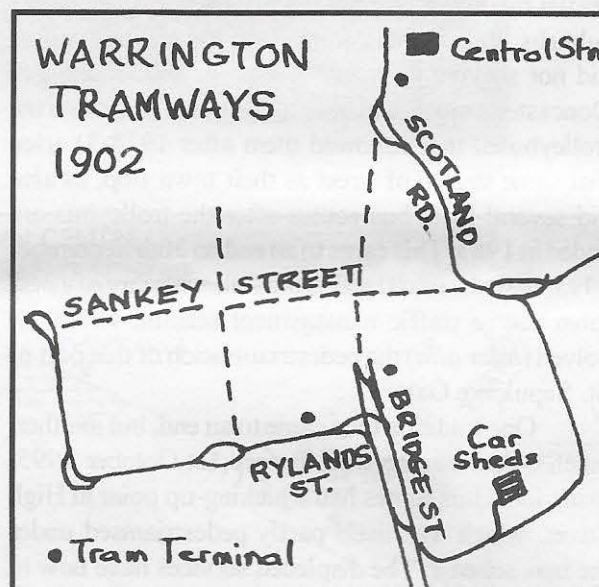
Bridge St. was partly closed to traffic about 1990, displaced bus routes using Rylands Street in the outward direction. This had also been used after Sankey Street was made one way, but originally it was the "by-pass" used by the most important tram routes 1902-1935. The 1995 stage of the scheme was much more radical. Closing off Horsemarket Street and Buttermarket Street means that all bus routes, with the one exception of routes using Winwick Street, must now circumnavigate the town centre, partly on the ring road, which has an all-day bus lane, and partly along the narrow Bold Street, Palmyra Street, Rylands Street corridor.

After three months, the scheme has drawn more criticism than praise. The bus operators, already locked in a bus war, did not want the scheme at all, as the majority of routes are involved in extra mileage. Several important stops, once provided with shelters and located in front of well lit shop windows, are now

re-sited in unsheltered and poorly lit parts of the ring road, some distance from the shops.

Taxi drivers, unable to use the bus lane on the ring road (Academy Way, Scotland Road, Golborne St.) have considerable extra mileage to drive, with a consequent increase of fare to pass onto the customers. The local press has carried numerous complaints from the disabled, now unable to reach certain central destinations. None have been noted from a group of people far more numerous than the disabled, those who would say they were "bad on their feet", and who form a large proportion of daytime bus passengers. The motorists of Warrington have in general remained silent, as it is a fact that there are several large car parks close to the centre, and the new scheme has in no way affected their facilities, although there have been in recent years higher parking charges and more restrictions on on-street parking. There is no park and ride scheme in Warrington.

ARP





## Pedestrianisation in Chester

Major pedestrianisation took place in Chester in June 1995. All buses and most other vehicles are prohibited from passing through the central streets. Buses do still serve the Bus Exchange, the principal bus station near to the Town Hall, but most of them have to pass, in both directions, along the narrow Northgate Street. Buses to or from the east and south used to both enter and leave Chester via Foregate Street, a main shopping street with Marks & Spencer, BHS, C&A, etc. There they set down and picked up the majority of their passengers, a lesser number travelling on to or starting from the Bus Exchange. Since pedestrianisation, after a circuitous journey from the Bus Exchange, they still pick up in Foregate Street outwards, but inwards they have to deposit passengers at the end of the street, leaving them with a significant walk to the main shops.

All three political parties, with minor nuances of emphasis, supported pedestrianisation. Only the market traders in the covered market behind the Town Hall saw it as unhelpful to their principal customers, the bus passengers. The Chamber of Trade supported it, but wanted better access for motor cars.

In "Movers and Shakers of the Bus Industry" summarised on another page of this Newsletter, John Hibbs remarked on the concensus in favour of regulation in 1929-1931. He also called the bus "a middle class form of transport". Forty-five years ago, both these points remained true. But now, in 1995, the atmosphere is very different. Concensus (= three political parties + Chamber of Trade) has it that pedestrianisation is good for us. And the bus is now the transport mode only of the disadvantaged: not of the middle classes.

### Maps

(Upper left and lower left): These maps illustrate the public transport penetration of Warrington in 1902 and 1995. At a glance, the 1995 situation seems the better, but remember the central streets in 1902 were very narrow, and the population was used to walking, while the less mobile had other shops close to their homes if they lived in town. In the intervening years, 1913-22 to 1995, trams and buses entered the central area after the widening of most of the streets, and from 1935-1980 all local bus routes met at Market Gate (the central crossing)

(Right): The situation in Chester also leaves the town centre in isolation, but the ring road is much more congested than the one at Warrington, where through traffic is diverted elsewhere, and also lacks priority bus lanes.

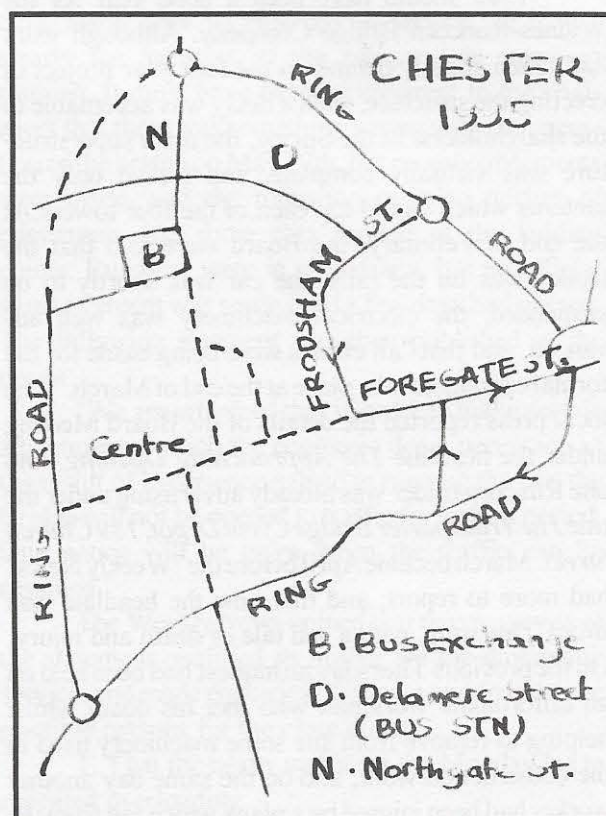
Thus the grumbles arising from pedestrianisation in Chester have not mentioned the inconvenienced bus passenger, but have concentrated on traffic congestion in Northgate Street, the blame being laid squarely on the buses, there have been calls for buses to be banned from anywhere within the inner ring road, for the Bus Exchange to be demolished and replaced by a concert hall (with massive car parking), to be funded by the National Lottery, and for buses outside the inner ring road to be routed along a disused tangential railway track, raising protests not at the futility of running buses where there would be no passengers, but from "environmentalists" and house owners bordering the old railway track.

".....these roads would be for use by the clapped out, deregulated vehicles whose obnoxious fumes are currently choking our city to death...."(Letter in local paper, 30th November 1995)

Pressure groups for the disabled have expressed detectable concern only for access for motorists: none for the disabled bus passenger who now has to walk a significant distance from bus stop to shops.

Perhaps there is scope for an historical study of the changing attitudes to buses from the early 1950s, when the middle classes still used them and held them in some surviving pride and affection, through the 1970s when it became socially degrading to be seen standing at a bus stop, to the 1990s when, to the local press and to an element in the articulate population, they are not even perceived as a public service, but only as objects of hatred.

RA





# The Grand Fiasco

by Ron Phillips

*The Channel Tunnel is not unique in being subject to delays in opening, and making a loss. In fact, engineers and backers of grand engineering works ought to know by now that pioneering schemes are very unlikely to be trouble free at first. This article tells the story of the first year of the Widnes-Runcorn Transporter Bridge, the largest such bridge in the world. Less than 20 such bridges were built, of which four were in Britain. Two were municipal, one was privately owned and not for public use, (and all these three still exist), whilst the Widnes-Runcorn Bridge was privately funded, with a certain proportion of public money subscribed by the municipal authorities whose towns it was to bring together. At first linked by a primitive ferry, the two towns were joined more firmly by the LNWR high level railway bridge in 1865. The terms governing the construction of this bridge demanded that a footpath be provided, but the ferry survived as a means of moving goods or live-stock across the River Mersey and the Manchester Ship Canal, until the transporter opened. But, as they say, what goes up must come down, or should it be "what goes across does not necessarily come back".*

## The First Opening

1905 should have been a good year for the Widnes-Runcorn Bridge Company. Although work had fallen slightly behind on the four year project of erecting the structure, such a delay was acceptable to the shareholders. In the Spring, the main superstructure was virtually complete, and lacked only the lanterns which would top each of the four towers. At the end of February, the Board were told that the trolley was on the rails, the car was shortly to be suspended, the electrical machinery was well advanced, and that "all efforts were being made for the formal opening to take place at the end of March." The local press reported the details of the Board Meeting under the headline *The Approaching Opening*, and one Runcorn trader was already advertising under the title *The Transporter Bridge Cycle Depot, 139 Church Street*. March became April before the "Weekly News" had more to report, and this time the headline was *Black Thursday*, with a sad tale of death and injury. On the previous Thursday an inquest had been held on an unfortunate workman who met his death whilst helping to remove from site some machinery used in the construction work, and on the same day another worker had been injured by a plank which fell from the superstructure, and an employee of Mather & Platt,

the electrical engineers, had been burned in an accident in the power house. No mention was made of an impending opening!

The Company was clearly getting getting anxious about the delay, and was no doubt very pleased indeed when it was able to announce an "Unofficial Trial Trip". As this trip was well photographed, and certain technical details were released to the press, it is clear that it was really an "official trial trip", and it is almost certain that the car had been tested under power before this heralded event took place. On the afternoon of Tuesday 9th May, a group of invited guests, chief of whom were the project engineer John J. Webster, the resident engineer L.H. Chase, and the Company Secretary F.H. Stables, made the first recorded trip from Runcorn to Widnes, and return. The passage from Runcorn took 4 minutes 10 seconds, and it was pointed out that this modest speed could have easily been increased by the application of more power, but that the test was not for speed, but for smoothness. Mr. Webster declared the crossing to be "quite satisfactory, there was very little sense of motion." Indeed, there would not have been much sense of motion, for 250 seconds to travel 1000 feet represents about two and three quarter miles per hour!

Various dimensions and other data were supplied to the press, and the following statements made about the control of the car.

"...it can be brought up within its own length when travelling at full speed. The regulation time for crossing the river is two and a quarter minutes."

In the light of what is to follow, it is best to consider these two statements now. It is clear that the Company intended the car to cross at the higher speed of just over 5 mph, and considered the method of braking the car to be similar in all respects to that of a tramcar fitted with the same system. Most tram cars running in British towns and cities in 1905 had a power controller of similar design as that fitted to the bridge car. When the handle was turned clockwise, power was fed to the motors, which were connected in series for starting, and in parallel for high speed running. To stop a tram, the driver would apply a mechanical hand brake, after having switched off the supply of power, but in an emergency, he would continue to turn the controller anti-clockwise from the "off" position to apply the "emergency brake". The effect would be to bring some 15 tons of tramcar and passengers to an abrupt halt by switching the motors of the car into dynamos, whose generated current was dissipated in the form of heat in the starting resistances. This could be described as an electrical transmission brake, with no friction being applied to the running wheels. In theory, a good idea; in practice, not to be recommended, and a method of braking which, as the years went by, was found to have



many disadvantages, of which a frequent one was the burning out of the motors. The engineers of the transporter saw great advantages in having the car controlled like a tram. With such a long span, there were disadvantages in having the usual cable haulage, not only because of the length and weight of the cable, but also because of the difficulty of having the vehicle under the command of a man not on board. It was essential that the car be driven from on board because in darkness or poor daytime visibility, a winchman on land could not see vessels in the river nor canal, nor could he respond to an emergency on the car. All other transporter bridges were half the length or less than the Widnes-Runcorn Bridge, and spanned but one shipping channel.

To return to the matter of braking, it must also be borne in mind that a tramcar had a hand brake, which could still play a part in slowing or stopping a vehicle, although with less force than the electrical brake. The bridge car had no such brake, as such was impossible to rig between a 32 wheeled bogie and a control car suspended some 70 feet below on wires. Also, the bridge bogie had motors and controllers similar to those of a tram, and yet was a much heavier by far. It must have been immediately apparent to the engineers that the system of traction adopted was not quite so good as it had seemed on paper. It is also notable that the chief engineer, Mr. Webster, when he commented upon the "smoothness" of the first crossing, was probably not comparing the passage of the car with that of a rowing boat on a blustery day, but had in mind another inherent problem with the bridge. The power generator, situated inside the east tower on the Widnes side, was driven by a gas engine, which transmitted a noticeable vibration throughout the whole structure when in operation. It was necessary for the Bridge Company to generate its own power, as in 1905 there was no public electricity supply available.

Shortly after the trial run, the official opening date was fixed as Monday 29th May. Full civic support was given to this event, streets were decorated, and there was to be a large civic party invited to make the first trip, to be followed by a banquet at Runcorn. The local paper, until the opening of the transporter, carried a weekly commentary on local affairs entitled *Local Observations by the Man on the Bridge*, but from the edition of June 3rd 1905, this was changed to *Observations from the Transporter Top*. The first words under this new heading were as follows:

"At last 'tis over! After wearying delays, the great structure which is henceforth to constitute my observatory has been thrown open to the patient and long suffering public. Considering the magnitude of the interest involved, and the absolutely unique nature

of the occasion, it was only to be expected that there would be a brilliant display, especially in the vicinity of the approaches, and the most was made of the opportunity."

Elsewhere in the same edition, however, was the headline *The Transporter. A Brief Career*, which carried the news that the bridge had been closed to traffic indefinitely at the end of the first day. It also revealed that the glitter of the day's ceremonies had been tarnished by two other incidents: the behaviour of some of the marshals on the bridge approaches, and the fact that the first car, carrying the official party, had "hit the buffers". The actual wording used was carefully phrased:

".....the car glided across (it took 3 minutes 55 seconds), but stoppage at Runcorn was a trifle abrupt, the buffers not acting with the same ease as had been the case on trial trips, or on those taken at subsequent hours during the day."

The official party at the ensuing luncheon was 270 strong, so it is probable that well over 300 persons were aboard the car, and it is probable that the driver was anxious not to stop the car short of land on such an important trip, with the result that he misjudged the point at which to cut off the drive force and to apply the braking force. He had probably not practiced with a full load, and a full load would increase the braking effort required to bring the car to a halt.

The art of public relations is something adopted in the latter half of this century, and it was a skill quite unknown by the Widnes-Runcorn Bridge Company. It was not announced in advance that the bridge would close again after its first day in service, so it was clearly the intention of the company to carry on running. It must have become apparent to the engineers that there was something wrong with the operation of the bridge on May 29th, but no announcements were made, and the following morning queues of passengers and some cars formed at the landing points. Rumours were in abundance, but no official announcement was made until a few days had passed. The following statement was then published in the press:

"We are informed that in order to make certain adjustments, which the engineers deem necessary as the result of experience gained in running the car, the Bridge will not be opened to traffic for a short period. Due notice will be given when the traffic can be resumed."

The Weekly News opined that the vagueness of the statement qualified its author for the diplomatic service, and made enquiries of its own and found three possible reasons for the close down:

1. That the heavy traffic on the Monday led to repeated overloading.



### Naming of Parts

The novel nature of transporter bridges, part vehicular, part nautical, led to some confusion as to what names should be applied to the parts. This article keeps to the terms used by the Widnes-Runcorn Bridge Co. and its eventual successor, the Widnes Corporation.

**The trolley** is the wheeled carriage running on rails attached to the overhead gantry, and from which hung by cables the moving platform, locally referred to as **the car**. On the first transporters (and the British one at Newport) which were of French design, the car was called **the gondola** (la nascelle).

The man who operated the car at Widnes was referred to as **the driver**, although his kiosk like shelter was known as **the pilot's cabin**. Adorned with navigation lights, lifebelts, and nets (to catch anything falling from the trolley) and equipped with bells and hooters, it is easy to see why one if not more of the transporters in France was known as the "flying ferry". The floor of the car was naturally called **the deck**, the passenger shelter **the cabin** or **the saloon**, but the general appearance of most cars was reminiscent more of a seaside pier than a boat.

At Widnes the car departed from The Promenade (which pre-dated the bridge) and which had a bandstand where regular concerts were held. The space between the towers where the car came to rest was known as **the dock**. This was a little unusual, as the four towers of the Widnes-Runcorn bridge were built on the river bed, rather than founded on terra firma, so that the car ended each crossing by nestling between them. In windy conditions, the car service was suspended, as lateral swaying would have caused the car to strike one of the towers when attempting to dock. "Conventional" transporters, with towers planted on land, would require mooring ropes to hold the car steady against the shore in bad weather.

*(This could mean that staff allowed too many passengers on the car, or that the electrical system was subject to overloading. Both are possible.)*

2. That the iron work had not "found itself", and had suffered a strain.

*(A source consulted by the newspaper said that strain on the structure was unlikely, and pointed to the excessive velocity with which the car came into Runcorn dock on the inaugural trip as a more likely reason.)*

3. That the bridge had been opened a week too early.

*(There is a lot of truth in this. Neither the structure nor the electrical gear had been officially accepted by the Bridge Company from the contractors, nor had the bridge been given an inspection by the Board of Trade. Railways and tramways could not be opened for public service without a rigorous inspection, but there seems to have been no rules nor precedents for transporter bridges, which were a new-fangled (and foreign) invention. In the special article written to commemorate the opening of the Widnes-Runcorn bridge, reference was made to the transporter at Newport, then being built to the design of the French engineer, Arnodin. The writer was at pains to point out that although the design was French, "there will not be an ounce of foreign material in it".)*

A week later, on June 10th, the local paper carried the headline *The Transporter Fiasco*, and complained that the engineers still declined to take the public into their confidence. The gloom of the paper was tempered by an item immediately below the news of the transporter. The headline *Worse than Widnes* told of a disaster at Kilmarnock, where a suspension bridge had given way under the weight of people released upon it after the opening ceremony. Fortunately, none were killed. (Can any reader throw any further light upon this?) The Observer, from his perch atop the towers of the bridge, mused on the wild rumours which abounded, the **silence of the engineers**, and some facts he had discovered about the rate of rusting in metallic structures!

On a lighter note, the local paper ran a weekly competition, in which readers were invited to submit limericks on local themes. The suggested theme appeared one week, the entries appeared the next week, and the readers communicated their preferences by filling in a coupon which could be handed in at the newspaper offices, or to certain local agents, and the winning poem was then repeated on the third week. "The Transporter" was an obvious subject for the competition in the last week of May, but the subject for the second week in June was, wickedly, "The Transporter Breakdown". Here are the winning entries:

#### The Transporter

The Transporter's been opened by Brunner, (1)

In build and design it's a stunner,

May it bring both renown

And trade to our town,

And of better times be the forerunner.

(A. Garner)

- (1) Sir John Brunner was Chairman of the Widnes-Runcorn Bridge Co., and he invested a large sum of money in it, which he eventually lost.



### The Transporter Breakdown

The opening passed off with eclat,  
And thousands went o'er in the car,  
But, alas, to our sorrow,  
We had on the morrow,  
To use the LNWR.

### The Second Opening

It is interesting to note the *double entendre* in the second poem: the French word *eclat* can have several meanings (to go off with a bang/brilliance or a scandal). The scandal was to last for nine weeks. On 15th July, the *Weekly News* carried an item reporting a recent meeting of the Widnes Town Council, at which Samuel Owens had been pressed, in his capacity as Council appointed Director on the Board of the Bridge Company, to give an official opinion on the continued closure. He gave what the paper called a "semi-official statement" to the effect that the bridge would open shortly, as practically all the defects had been put right, and that a regular public service would not take place until all the adjustments had been made. The 15th July was also the date of a Board Meeting of the Company, but there was to be a further two weeks of inaction before the service was restarted, on Monday July 31st.

The Company was now very cautious, and stated that the bridge would run at the discretion of officials, and described the re-opening as "informal". The resumed service lasted for just nine days, and then three passengers were injured when a plank fell onto the car from the superstructure. On August 12th it was announced that the bridge would remain closed for further safety work to be undertaken. The Company Board, however, was given a more lengthy and frank explanation of why the bridge should remain out of action, at the meeting on August 9th, the day after the accident. The directors were told that Mr. Webster (the engineer) was to consider the fitting of double driving wheels, which is an indication of lack of adhesion by the existing driving wheels. The running of the car was said to be still under Mr. Henderson (the engineer of the Arrol Bridge Company) and it was emphasised that the car operated at Arrol's risk, and that nothing was to be said to the press about the accident. The adhesion of the driving wheels was not the only problem. Mr Wade Deacon (a director) made reference to an half-hour stoppage "due to a breakdown in connection of an electrical current". The Secretary referred to a new ruling that drivers were not to take the car across "if a ship in the Canal is within 200 yards". Does this indicate that until then there had been no rules drawn up concerning rights of way for shipping? A much later meeting with the Ship Canal

Company suggests there had not! Another matter discussed was the expenditure of £69 to fit gates on the bridge car, instead of the previous waist-high chain. But this meeting came to a close with a very contentious and unilateral decision: the Board declared that responsibility for the accident of 8th August, when three passengers were injured, should fall upon the Arrol Bridge Company and Mather & Platt. This decision, when communicated to the two contracting companies, brought a very swift reaction!

The Board had to be convened again three days later. There had clearly been a lot of knocking together of heads, and the Company was more or less forced to announce the closure of the bridge, and draw up a list of all matters which had to be put right before it could re-open. As for the question of responsibility, the Company was obliged to issue a certificate of acceptance of work done, back-dated to 25/7/05, to the Arrol Bridge Company, although this document was not actually signed and sealed until September 26th. A similar certificate was not issued to Mather & Platt until November, as clearly there were problems with the generating plant and wiring, as can be seen below. As for the accident, the Directors gave instructions that the claims made on behalf of the injured passengers should be settled (A remarkable decision considering the accident took place only four days earlier.)

The list of ten faults to be put right before the bridge should run again is as follows:

1. New wheels should be fitted to the trolley.
2. The unsteadiness of the engines and the vibrations they caused in the structure should be eliminated.
3. Imperfections in electrical insulation to be made good.
4. There should be hand-gear available for use should the electrical current fail, and the car be stopped in mid-passage.
5. The car should be fitted with emergency oil lamps, foghorns, and bells, for use in the event of a breakdown in mid-passage.
6. Alterations should be made to the insulators situated awkwardly under the main girders, and a procedure defined for when they should require repair.
7. The wires below the gangway along the upper girders should be properly fixed and stretched.
8. Properly fenced gangways should be fitted at both ends of the bridge for access to the wheels on the eastern side of the trolley.
9. The single gates proposed at the meeting three days earlier should be cancelled, and double gates fitted.
10. Wire netting should be fitted under the trolley to catch any falling objects, and the same should be done under the main girders at the docks.



It is clear that the Board was very concerned (at this stage) with the lack of safety precautions, as well as with various mechanical shortcomings. When viewed from the present day, it is inconceivable that only a waist high chain was slung across the open ends of the bridge car, and that there was no safety rail between the vehicle area and the pedestrian area. As for protection of the employees, the designers of the bridge were not accustomed to a suspension bridge with aerial walkways, let alone aerial walkways with handrails. This was Britain's first transporter, and the need to attend to running rails and live wires across the top of a suspension bridge had not arisen before.

The transporter bridges in Spain and France, built by Arnodin, at Bilbao, Nantes, Rouen and Marseilles, all had flights of stairs leading up to the main girder and an aerial walkway, and these were open to the public for sightseeing.<sup>(2)</sup> In addition, the Marseilles bridge was provided with restaurants at each end of the main girder, which one source says were renowned for their gastronomy. Clearly, the French saw a way of gaining extra revenue from the necessary provision of a means of gaining access to the trolley running gear (these bridges were cable hauled), but such a course would not have been considered by the Widnes-Runcorn Bridge Company, as the local people had been walking on high across the LNWR bridge for almost two generations, and were not in the habit of dining out at ground level, let alone eighty feet up in the air.

### **The Third Opening**

After the meeting of August 12th, the Board met at fortnightly intervals. In mid-September, it announced that traffic staff, the toll collectors and deck attendants, had been discharged, and that the engine house in the Widnes east tower had been flooded in a rainstorm. This wooden structure held the gas engine and dynamos which provided power for traction and lighting, and required a new design of louvres to prevent the ingress of storm water. At the end of the month the long delayed and backdated certificate of acceptance was delivered to Arrols, and it was disclosed that the car was now making regular practice crossings, with loads of up to 20 tons, between 6 am and 6 pm each working day. Daily reports of power consumption per trip were being kept. A contractor was engaged to instal wire netting beneath the trolley, to catch any falling debris. It is interesting to note that rope netting, draped rather like fishing nets hung out to dry, was carried on some of the French transporters for the same purpose, but that the Widnes netting was metallic and of the industrial variety, and therefore in keeping with the locality.

At the Board meeting of 17th October 1905, held at the Liverpool office at 2.30 pm, the directors listened to a report by the project engineer, John J. Webster, and then telephoned to Widnes to order that the bridge be re-opened immediately. At the same time, as if to wish away the past problems, they authorised settlement of the claims made in respect of the accident on August 7th. At last, things seemed to be going better. In November, the Board agreed to issue a certificate of acceptance to Mather & Platt, and attention was turned away from engineering matters to that of earning some money. A traffic sub-committee was formed, and such mundane issues as providing lights in the lanterns which crowned each tower, at a cost of two shillings an hour, were debated. It was also resolved that a bell should be rung, one minute before the departure of the car, as a warning to would-be passengers.

Maybe as a result of the recent experiences, the Board refused to publish a timetable for the running of the car for the time being, although it was intended to run at intervals of 20 minutes from approximately 6 am until midnight. One troublesome matter remained to be resolved, and engineers Webster and Chase (the latter now taken on as General Manager on a six month contract) were both invited to work on the design of a "two-wheel trolley", which referred to an arrangement to drive four wheels in tandem at either end of the thirty-two wheeled trolley from which the car was suspended. This indicates that the performance of the direct drive system was not yet giving full satisfaction. Since the grand opening in May 1905, the bridge worked on 84 days, and was closed down on 131 days during the rest of that year. It goes without saying that it had not earned a penny profit, and that it had a huge overdraft.

As 1905 came to an end, the Widnes-Runcorn Bridge Company began a five and a half year struggle to repay its debts and make a profit. It never succeeded and it continued to be dogged by technical failures, accidents, and even death. John J. Webster was engineer to another project, a tramway from Southport to Lytham, crossing the Ribble estuary by a transporter bridge of similar concept to Widnes-Runcorn. The Act of Parliament to authorise this line was enacted in 1905, at which point no more was heard of it. Probably news of the Widnes experience played a part in this.

(2) Baedekers "Spain & Portugal" (1908) states "Intercourse between Portugalete and Las Arenas is carried on by the Puente Vizcaya, a transporter bridge constructed in 1893. The flying ferry, about 16 feet above the water, can accommodate about 70 persons and crosses the river in 1 minute (Fare 10 cts.). Lift to the platform (144m. high) 25 cts. View similar to that from the lighthouse"

The view upstream, of docks and blast furnaces, would not be dissimilar to that from the Widnes-Runcorn bridges!