

The Society, 1995–2004

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This is the third review of the Society's progress to have been published in the Journal. The first, in 1979, covered its formation and subsequent development for the first 25 years, and the second, in 1994, surveyed the next fifteen.

The administrative structure of the Society has not altered significantly during present ten-year period, though the occupancy of most posts has changed; only the Membership Secretary, *Bulletin* Editor, Book Review Editor and Marketing Officer have stayed the course.

Council, the Society's governing body, meets annually in April, but its policies are based on advice from the Managing Committee, which meets at least three times a year.

Because no significant organisational changes have occurred it may reasonably be concluded that a satisfactory *modus vivendi* has been achieved. Nevertheless, confirmation was sought by a Membership Survey early in 1995, and a Working Party on the Future of the Society reported early in the following year. It concluded that although the number responding to the survey was disappointing in comparison with previous surveys, most members were well satisfied and had only minor improvements to suggest. Among these were the need for Society publications to receive more publicity and reviews in other journals, and for stronger links with academic organisations interested in transport and archaeology. There was concern, however, at the increasing average age of the membership and with the need to attract more younger entrants prepared to assume administrative responsibilities.

More recently, the Society has set up a Research Panel, as a 'friendly consultative service' to assist members wishing to embark on a research project, by providing advice on any aspect of research and writing.

The number of individual members rose from 663 at the end of 1993 to 792 ten years later. It fell only once, during 2001, following an increase in the annual subscription from £12 to £15, but recovered during the next two years.

The Journal

For most of the past ten years the *Journal* was edited by Dr Janet Cutler, who took over from Pat White

after his death in 1994. It was then a thrice-yearly publication of 48 pages but under her direction thereafter increased to 80 or so. In March 1999 a change of format was made, enlarging the page size by over 40% but at the same time adopting a larger sans-serif typeface, a more spacious layout and retaining the same number of pages. Three years later Peter Brown succeeded Janet Cutler as editor and started volume 34 with a smaller typeface, a two-column text and a simplified cover. He also introduced a fully computerised production process. As a stimulant for aspiring contributors, and to reduce the need for editorial effort, the new editor distributed with the *Bulletin* a ten-page leaflet entitled 'Guidance on Writing for the *Journal*'. At around 72 pages, current issues of the *Journal* contain more material than ever before, including an average of 30 book reviews.

The compilation of an annual Bibliography of the History of Inland Waterways, Railways and Road Transport in the British Isles has continued under the co-ordination of Grahame Boyes. The most recent issue, for 2002, appeared as a supplement to the *Journal* for November 2003.

The Bulletin

The *Bulletin* has continued to appear every two months under the idiosyncratic editorship of Tony Jervis, keeping the more active and gregarious members informed of forthcoming meetings and visits arranged by the local and specialist Groups, the appointment of officers, membership changes, the reprinting of ancient maps and other topics of current interest in the transport world, often presented in the editor's very personal and humorous style.

Like the *Journal*, the *Bulletin* is an invaluable form of the adhesive which binds the Society's membership together.

Publications

The Society has continued to support the production of books on transport intended for both the casual

and the systematic purchaser. During the past ten years the Publications Committee has overseen the process of bringing nine new volumes to the market and to the enthusiast's bookshelf. These are listed in the Appendix, and include second editions of two reference books, on British passenger stations and on railway engineers.

In 1995 the Publications Committee started the year in fine style with a ceremony at the Gloucester Waterways Museum to launch Wendy Freer's book *Women and Children of the Cut*. The following year saw *The Hay and Kington Railways* join the list, but three years elapsed before the next publication (*The Eleven Towns Railway*) was unveiled at a special event in Bury. Although the sales were described as 'encouraging', the Publications Committee later reported that sales of Society books in general as well as the profits from trade sales had been diminishing, and even if new manuscripts were forthcoming their publication could not be financed at present. The Society's policy is to publish titles considered worthy of publication but which might not be considered commercially viable. While profit is not the motive, income from sales must be sufficient to provide capital for the next venture.

In 2002 a new venture was announced: an 'in-house' comb-bound production of *The Chronology of Passenger Stations* by Michael Quick, later to be available as a compact disc. Its format (over 400 A4 pages) permits easy updating and printing in small batches as orders come in. The Society compiled a second supplement to Ottley's *Bibliography of British Railway History* published under the auspices of the National Railway Museum in 1998, and has also revised and recently republished John Marshall's *Biographical Dictionary of Railway Engineers* on a limited subscription basis, including a printed list of the subscribers' names.

Until the end of 1993 the Society, in the person of its Sales Officer, undertook the distribution of its own publications. This responsibility was then transferred to a professional company, Alan Sutton Publishing Ltd, which at the time was seeking to build up its reputation as a publisher of transport books. In 1996 Alan Sutton transferred its distribution activity to a separate part of its organisation, Littlehampton Book Services. Because its storage charges were geared to quick turnover, the Society in turn transferred responsibility for distributing its books to Atlantic Publishers, a company owned by David Joy (later to become the Society's President), publisher of *Back-Track*, the leading monthly railway history magazine

and also a specialist publisher of railway books. At the same time, Society member Mike Clarke offered to accommodate the book stock so that storage charges could be avoided.

The Publications Committee suffered the loss of its long-serving secretary, Oliver Smart, who died in January 2002. He will also be missed by members in general for his unobtrusive provision of useful services such as the copying and distribution of papers for the special interest groups and out-of-print articles from the Journal.

The Website

The Society has its own website [<http://www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/external/rchs/>] giving a brief description of its activities with links to pages dealing in more detail with its Regional and Special Interest Groups, the *Journal* and the various events planned to take place in the future. Advice is provided about the location of primary and secondary research resources, as well as to the national bodies concerned with transport records and historic structures.

RCHS members were instrumental in creating the internet newsgroup //groups.yahoo.com/group/railwaycanal for the exchange of 'notes & queries' on railway and canal history. This is not formally part of the Society and is open to non-members.

Events

For the first half of the period under review the Annual General Meeting was moved from May to September, in order to allow the Hon Treasurer more time to prepare the previous year's accounts and submit them to audit. In 1999 however, Peter Davis retired from the treasurership after 20 years of continuous service; his successor, Graham Wild, felt able to revert to the earlier practice, and the AGM for 2000 was held in Derby in May. As has been usual since the early 1970s the AGM has become the nucleus of a weekend of excursions, talks and meetings of specialist groups covering three or four days, centred upon a hotel of moderate size with conference facilities. Since 1995 it has generally included the Clinker Lecture, successor to the annual public lecture on a topical transport subject and given by a prominent Society personality. The organisational responsibility is taken in turn by the local Groups (excepting South West & South Wales), each keen to demonstrate its ability to find new sites of transport interest and to find distinguished speakers

on topical subjects.

Generally a second weekend event takes place each year: in the autumn if the AGM has been in May, or vice versa. This will generally have been centred on some particular topic or place of special interest at the time. The precedent set in 1990 for visits overseas has been followed during the period of the present review: Belgium in 1995, Ulster in 1997, Cork in 2001, and Germany in 2004. The Irish expeditions owed their success to the efforts of Pat McCarthy, and those to truly foreign parts to Ron Oakley.

Conferences and co-operation with other Associations

Conferences on specialised subjects have been a feature of the past ten years, often organised in conjunction with other societies. Of those sponsored by the Society alone, the first dealt with freight transport ('Moving the Goods', at Bristol University in 1996), and the next was a 'Research and Writing Workshop' (Nottingham 1999), continuing the function begun by the very successful 'Writers' Forum' at Morecambe in 1991. Both were weekend events. A series of one-day 'Waterways History Conferences' at the Birmingham Central Reference Library and organised by the Waterways History Research Group began in 1997, and the fourth took place in 2004.

Concurrently, Canal History Workshops are organised by the Society's West Midlands Group in partnership with the BCN Society. For the second Early Railways Conference the Society joined as sponsor with the Institute of Railway Studies, the Newcomen Society, the Locomotive Trust and the Beamish Museum at Manchester in 2001, and for the third at the National Railway Museum in York in 2004; the papers given have been published by the Newcomen Society, adding considerably to our knowledge of the early history of railways and railway technology. The RCHS, along with the Institute of Railway Studies, promoted the York conference on 'Co-operation and Competition' in 1999.

Roads & Road Transport History Conferences began in 1992, the groundwork having been done by the Society in the previous year, and are now supported by nine other organisations involved in vehicle construction, passenger and freight movement, while RCHS members take a prominent part in the administration. The Conference now calls itself the Roads & Road Transport History Association.

In 1998 the Society became affiliated to the Association for Industrial Archaeology.

Local Groups

For practical purposes the membership continues to be organised geographically in six Local Groups, each with its own committee and officers and each arranging its own activities.

The *London Group* has continued to meet monthly from September to April, attracting good attendances for evening lectures on varied subjects of railway and canal interest, sometimes extending into other aspects of transport and industrial history. Having tried various venues over the past ten years, the Group seems now to be settled at the Rugby Tavern in WC1, which has comfortable facilities for pre- and post-meeting discussion over food and/or drinks. Occasional meetings are held in the outer parts of the Group's territory, most recently at Dorking. There are excursions in summer, usually on foot, but a recent tour of North Buckinghamshire, which included the Brill Tramway and Verney Junction, using members' cars, may well be repeated elsewhere.

The *East Midlands Group* has continued to meet at Beeston Library every month from September to April for evening talks and presentations on a wide range of transport topics, attended generally by 30 or more members. In the summer months the meetings are held outdoors, with visits to waterways (such as the Ancholme Navigation), disused railways (the Derby Friargate line), tramways (the new system in Sheffield), docks (Grimsby), museums (Crich Tramway) and canal cruises (on the Grantham Canal), but with markedly smaller attendances. The Group has been responsible for hosting the Society's AGM Weekends on two occasions, and the East Midlands Industrial Archaeological Conference on three.

Some members have arranged the manufacture of sweatshirts bearing the Society's logo. The Group Committee has owed its inspiration to generally the same individuals during the past ten years, though it mourns the loss of such stalwarts as Terry Malbon and Brian Dobbie.

The *West Midlands Group* has used seven different venues for its sixty or so winter meetings during the past ten years, covering such subjects as the Rio Grande, County Donegal, and French railways during World War 1. Day visits have included the Gas Street Basin, Nottingham and Llangollen, whilst longer periods of up to a week have been spent in Mont-

gomery, Machynlleth, Fort William and Llandudno. On three occasions the Group hosted meetings on behalf of the full Society: the Birmingham and Worcester AGMs and the Lichfield Weekend.

The *North Eastern Group* reports a continuing growth in its membership and improving attendance at summer activities, ascribing the effect largely to personal recommendation. It is fortunate in possessing an energetic and much-travelled secretary, Brian Slater, who in turn pays tribute on the Committee's behalf to the example set for the past 40 years by the leadership of Dr Arthur Barnett. The Group enjoys a close relationship with the North Eastern Railway Association and the Railway Ramblers, and indeed with its neighbours in the North Western Group. Of its many recent forays a visit to inspect the Falkirk Wheel, connecting the Union and Forth & Clyde canals in Lowland Scotland, attracted members from further afield.

The *North Western Group* has each year six or seven indoor meetings in Manchester during winter months, and two or three summer outdoor visits at weekends. In 1996 monthly visits on Thursdays, called 'Explorer' trips, were introduced, to cater for active retired members, and these quickly became an established part of the Group's activities. As well as visiting sites of historic interest, members have observed history in the making, seeing various stages in the restoration of the Huddersfield and Rochdale canals, for example. Memorable occasions of the last ten years include walking along the Ashton Canal towpath a few days after a canalside murder, and trying to locate the route of the Kinder reservoir railway (Hayfield) at dusk. On a sadder note, the Group has lost some stalwarts of earlier years, including William Skillern, one of the Group's founders who arranged the initial meetings in 1958 and was one of the Society's Council for many years; Pat White, a long-serving Group Treasurer who became RCHS President and then Journal editor; and Cyril Boucher, who gave many talks to the Group, having the rare ability of making any subject sound interesting. The Society was represented at the unveiling of his memorial on Marple Aqueduct in April 2003. Most recently a weekend in south Cumbria, based on Grange-over-Sands, was a model of careful and detailed planning by Gordon Biddle.

The *South West & South Wales Group* presents organisational difficulties because its members are thinly spread over a wide area, and its convener, Alan Richardson, deserves much credit for offering even

as much as one visit each year. Of the eight visits made during the current period six were centred upon canals (including Gloucester Docks) and one covered all the stations and station sites in the Bristol area. The eighth was a high-level visit to the Newport Transporter Bridge. Attendances have been disappointing, despite occasional visitors from neighbouring groups.

Specialist Groups

Independent and optional groupings of members cater for particular specialised interests. They function chiefly by the distribution of occasional papers and newsletters, and depend for their continuance on the knowledge and enthusiasm of their initiators and contributors.

The *Road Transport Group*, restarted in 1992 as the successor to the Roads History Group, has maintained its annual output of three Newsletters and three sets of Occasional Papers for the whole of its fifteen years. Its enviable record is very largely due to the enthusiasm and scholarship of its co-ordinator, Philip Scowcroft, who is the author of a large number of the 233 papers published to date. The Group has 50 members.

Philip Scowcroft was also instrumental in salvaging the *Docks & Shipping Group* in 1992. For the first four years, until 1996, A D Nicholson was its co-ordinator and secretary while Philip remained its principal contributor, keeping it afloat until it was rebranded as the Docks & Shipping section of the *Waterways History Research Group*. This was formed in 1998 after the second Waterways History Conference, with Joseph Boughey as editor, providing the impetus for progress. Papers are distributed under different headings: Notes & Queries, Profiles, Sources, Reprints, and Occasional Papers; there is the option for members to receive and to contribute to the Group's output by e-mail, as well as a website created by the present editor, David Foster.

Ted Cheers has recently taken over the administration of the *Railway Chronology Group* after the retirement of its first co-ordinator, Don Steggles, who established a quarterly Group Newsletter in 1995. This publication now reaches the 52 members and three interested external bodies; it serves as a platform for sharing information within the Group and as a source for the production of papers for the Society and other publications. Although there is no Group database at present, several members run

their own specific databases which they share through the newsletter, and it is expected that the Group will become involved with the commercially based 'Railway Record of the British Isles'.

The *Air Transport Group* had been temporarily grounded as the Co-ordinator succumbed to the pressure of work exerted by his professional career, but now the indefatigable Philip Scowcroft has taken over as pilot.

The *Tramroads Group*, founded by Paul Reynolds, now led by its Co-ordinator Michael Lewis, has 63 members and expects to have produced 185 papers by the end of 2004.

Research

When Harry Paar retired in 1990 the Society's Research function was divided between several volunteers. Tony Warren became Research Officer, with a co-ordinating role and special responsibility for railway enquiries. Hugh Compton dealt with canals, and Geoff Knight took over the Research Index, which expanded rapidly and was computerised successively by André Gren, Graham Wild and then Geoff Oxley. Sadly Tony Warren died in 2002, and as the number of enquiries was diminishing they were routed directly to the Index keeper who thus became Research Officer. In addition to familiarising himself with the contents of the Index, Mr Oxley has to assess its future role in the light of recent developments, including the PROCAT and A2A online catalogues and particularly the Tracking Railway Archives Project (TRAP) contribution to the latter. TRAP is chaired by Grahame Boyes, recently the Society's President.

Conclusion

This paper is the third in a series of progress reports with a diminishing time-scale: the first covered 25 years, the second 15 and the present 10. It may thus be expected that the progress reported will be less spectacular at each stage, but it can at least be claimed as steady.

The most notable feature to emerge from a study of a list of the events of the past ten years is the proliferation of conferences arranged with similar bodies having shared interests. It began in 1991 with the first Roads & Road Transport History Conference, in which the Society played a leading part, and in later years spread to Waterways History and to Early Railways. The opportunity to observe the

workings of other organisations with parallel aims in different fields is surely of practical value, as well as leading to a broadening of interests.

A less encouraging but inevitable trend discernible from accounts of Society meetings is that the membership is getting older. There is no statistical basis for this assertion but it is consistent with the observation that attendance at outdoor meetings is less than it used to be. It may also explain why there is occasionally delay or difficulty in filling vacancies in the official hierarchy.

All things considered, the Society may regard itself as in good health, able to confront the future with confidence but mindful of the need to attract younger members.

Principal Society Events, 1995–2004

	AGM	Clinker Lecture	Other
1995	Lincoln	Peter Stevenson	Belgium
1996	Canterbury	Paul Vine	Bristol conf
1997	Llandudno	Barrie Trinder	Ulster
1998	Birmingham	Joseph Boughey	Lichfield
1999	York	John Hibbs	Halifax
2000	Derby	Alan Rimmer	Swansea
2001	Southsea	Basil Tellwright	Cork
2002	Wigan	Ian Moss	Exeter
2003	Worcester	Peter Robinson	Grange-o-s
2004	Ellesmere Port	Angus Buchanan	Cardiff

Publications, 1995–2004

1994	Brian Lewis, <i>The Cabry Family, railway engineers</i>
1995	Wendy Freer, <i>Women and Children of the Cut</i>
1996	Gordon Rattenbury & Ray Cook, <i>The Hay and Kington Railways</i>
1999	Michael Tutton, <i>Paddington Station 1833–1854</i>
2000	Jeffrey Wells, <i>The Eleven Towns Railways: the story of the Manchester and Leeds main line</i>
2002	M E Quick, <i>Railway Passenger Stations in England, Scotland and Wales: a chronology</i> (2nd edition and Supplement to 1st edition, published 2003)
2003	John Marshall, <i>Biographical Dictionary of Railway Engineers</i> (2nd edition)
2004	Wendy Freer & Gill Foster, <i>Canal Boatmen's Missions</i>
2004	Gordon Rattenbury & M J T Lewis, <i>Merthyr Tydfil Tramroads and their Locomotives</i>

Principal Officers of the Society, 1954–2004

Presidents

1954–61	Charles Clinker
1961–63	Charles Hadfield
1963–65	Charles Klapper
1965–67	Charles Lee
1967–70	Geoffrey Holt
1970–72	Gordon Biddle
1972–74	John Norris
1974–76	P A Stevens
1976–78	Michael Lewis
1978–80	Pat White
1980–82	Arthur Barnett
1982–84	Harry Paar
1984–86	R H G Thomas
1986–88	Theo Barker
1988–90	Alan Jackson
1990–92	Rex Christiansen
1992–94	John Gough
1994–96	Edwin Course
1996–98	Ian Moss
1998–2000	Stephen Bragg
2000–02	Grahame Boyes
2002–04	David Joy

Chairmen of Council

1956–57	M D Greville
1957–63	Charles Klapper
1963–64	Bertram Baxter

Chairmen of Managing Committee

1964–66	Bertram Baxter
1966–69	A P Voce
1969–77	Michael Reading
1977–97	Grahame Boyes
1997–	Roger Davies

Hon Secretaries

1954–58	Gordon Biddle
1958–60	M I Berrill
1960–62	A P Voce
1962–64	J Bryant
1964–67	P A Stevens
1967–74	J R Harding
1974–76	A P Voce
1976–79	M R Prew
1979–83	M P Bertinat
1983–89	R E Kilsby
1989–99	Geoff Gwatkin
1999–	Matthew Searle

Vice-Presidents

1960–61/76–96	Charles Hadfield
1960–67	H A Vallance
1961–76	Charles Clinker
1972–77	M D Greville
1977–83	Charles Lee
1978–2001	Theo Barker
1978–84	Geoffrey Holt
1981–90	Gordon Rattenbury
1981–92	Jeffrey Spence
1982–89	H V Borley
1986–92	R A Cook
1986–	Arthur Barnett
1986–94	David Tew
1990–2001	Michael Reading
1991–	John Gough
1992–	Rex Christiansen
1993–	Gordon Biddle
1994–	Ken Seaward
1997–	Grahame Boyes
2002–	Alan Jackson
2002–	Michael Lewis

Hon Treasurers

1954–58	Geoffrey Holt
1958–60	F G M Watson
1960–62	M I Berrill
1962–64	C P Weaver
1964–78	John Broadhurst
1978–99	Peter Davis
1999–2002	Graham Wild
2002–	Robin Welton

Chairmen of Publications Committee

1978–82	Harry Paar
1982–94	Michael Messenger
1994–	Ian Markey

Journal Editors

1955	Gordon Biddle
1955–81	Jeffrey Spence
1981–90	John Gough
1990–94	Pat White
1994–2001	Janet Cutler
2002–	Peter Brown

Bulletin Editors

1974–83	Rhodes Thomas
1983–	Tony Jervis