



Fiftieth Anniversary Journal

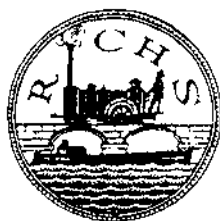
of the

Railway & Canal Historical Society

Volume 34 Part 8

No 188

May 2004



The Railway & Canal Historical Society

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Editorial

For the 50th anniversary of the foundation of the Society, the Council decided that a special extra issue of the *Journal* should be published.

The first part contains articles celebrating the Society's history and achievements.

These are followed by contributions by Grahame Boyes and Malcolm Reed looking back at significant transport developments, whilst David St John Thomas considers transport publishing.

Because the formal aim of the Society is to encourage the study of the history of transport, I decided to reproduce a number of articles previously published in the *Journal* which discussed

how to do research. Although most were written over thirty years ago, the advice and encouragement are still generally relevant.

I've also reprinted a few other articles, and I wish I'd had space to reprint many more. The choice is entirely personal, topics which particularly caught my fancy, though with a bias towards articles by leading members of the Society in the early days.

Finally, the keynote article from the Society's 100th Anniversary *Journal*.

I hope you enjoy reading this special issue as much as I have enjoyed producing it.

Peter Brown

50th Anniversary Journal of the Railway & Canal Historical Society

Volume 34 Part 8

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A Message from the President

David Joy

When the Society celebrated its last Jubilee in 1994, the president John Gough was writing under difficult circumstances that were bound to cause doubt and some dismay. Neil Cossons, the then Director of the Science Museum, might almost have had the RCHS in his sights when a few weeks earlier he declared that railway history was 'in serious if not terminal decline', there was 'a lot of fact collecting but precious little analysis' and 'virtually no scholarly research or publication'.

Unbowed, the Society held its 40th Anniversary Meeting, which like all the best such occasions looked backwards as well as forwards. One result was a letter in the Journal arguing that future research must contribute to the wider knowledge of people and their part in railway and canal history. If this challenge was not grasped the RCHS would be 'regarded at best as too esoteric, and at worst, a group of grown up, self indulgent, train spotters, canal cruisers and tram car buffs, out of touch with the wider world of interest in its subject'.

As if reeling from this twin fusillade and doubting their own sense of direction, several members duly attended a Hull University symposium 'The History and Practice of Railways: A New Research Agenda'. It may not have helped. There was much heady talk about bridging the perceived gulf between 'professional' and 'amateur' history, but some of those present found this terminology divisive and unhelpful.

It was an attitude described as 'insufferable bigotry' when *Backtrack*, the magazine I then published, celebrated its 100th issue in 1999 and looked at future directions in the study of railway history. Many other thought-provoking issues were raised. It was argued that the subject should not be seen as a large flat jigsaw but an ever-changing kaleidoscope, with childhood memories enveloped in a golden glow having their place alongside accounts of company finances and labour relations. Narrowing the scope was a sure way to stagnate, as had already happened with the obsession with the 'golden age' of British Railways steam. We had to

look outwards from the minute books and convey to society at large the importance of the railway in shaping today's world. Yet at the same time facts must not be trivialised merely to gain spurious popular appeal in the form of 'hamburger heritage'. Looking ahead, there was the need to appeal to young historians, many of whom saw railways as unfashionable and hence displayed an almost fanatical objection to studying them.

These obviously are not necessarily the views of the RCHS, which happily is more than just a railway society, but they are certainly relevant in considering the broad thrust of our current endeavours. One of the privileges of the President is to get to the heart of the Society by visiting the Groups. My overriding impression has been that our subject is certainly not in 'terminal decline' nor are we 'self indulgent' or 'out of touch'. Groups offer an impressive and varied programme of meetings and there is no sense of a divide between so-called professionals and amateurs.

Recent published work by members has frequently been outstanding, reflecting those goals — simple to state, difficult to achieve — set down in the early days of the Society by Michael Robbins: 'We want railway histories that can both be read with satisfaction and consulted with confidence. The product of the railway historian's craftsmanship should be something that is accurate, comprehensive and readable.'

Yet there is still a nagging doubt. The meteoric rise of interest in history as a whole does not seem to have been reflected in the world of transport. Family history has mushroomed because we all apparently need to know our roots, and local history has assumed an impressive vigour and volume in what has been described as 'a voyage of discovery and recovery of the past'. What can be done to give transport history a larger following is a question that the Society could well consider in its Golden Jubilee year. Researching railway and canal history can also be a voyage of discovery and there is certainly no shortage of topics waiting to reward the discoverer.

In the Beginning

Gordon Biddle

The editor has suggested that, fifty years on, I might like to recall something of the Society's early years when I was its first Hon Secretary, and some of the personalities who played leading parts. The inaugural meeting of the founder members in September 1954 was recorded in the *Journal* of July 1994: Bertram Baxter, C R Clinker, R A Cook, M D Greville, K P Seaward and myself, with Charles Hadfield and G O Holt *in absentia*. All the founders agreed to serve as a Council, although Baxter subsequently changed his mind due to heavy other commitments, and H A Vallance of *The Railway Magazine* took his place. What follows are personal recollections aided by early Council minutes — handwritten in a hardback exercise book for the first five meetings — the *Journal*, and a detailed account of the first four years by the then Hon Treasurer, G O Holt, given to me by his wife Margaret who died last August, aged 86.

One over-riding impression is the practice of addressing everyone by surname, even close friends, which in the present call-centre age ('Hello! I'm Cheryl') must sound very odd. I was already on Christian name terms with Geoffrey Holt and the youngest Council member, Ray Cook who, two years my junior, I had known at school. I soon became on first name terms with Charles Hadfield, Jeffery Spence and, after he joined the Council, Charles Klapper, but between everyone else it was always surnames.

The Secretary was expected to deal with everything other than finances, including organising events and collaborating with the leader of an outing, who on occasions was also the Secretary! Looking back, I am amazed that in the first full year we put on five events country-wide, including two weekends. With no car, I well remember reconnoitring the 1957 AGM weekend at York by public transport, including getting a bus to reach the remains of the obscure Heck & Wentbridge Railway. Another vivid memory from the same year was of a tour of abandoned sections of the Oxford Canal in Warwickshire, an area I knew well. As we approached Hawkesbury Junction to see the Newcomen pumping engine, now at Dartmouth, the driver of our Midland Red bus thought that with care he could get under the low wooden

bridge on the Wyken Colliery branch railway. He realised the truth when the bridge beam gently pressed itself into the vehicle's roof, making a large dent. To his relief — and mine — it sprang out again when he backed out, leaving hardly a mark.

A particular memory from a few years later is of our trip through Standedge Tunnel on the Huddersfield Canal in the engineer's inspection boat, organised, I think, by Alan Voce. The craft was a dumb buttoy powered by the simple device of taking a portable pump on board, dropping the suction hose over the bow and the discharge hose over the stern, and slowly proceeding through the lamp-lit darkness by jet propulsion. Smoke drifted in from the parallel railway tunnels, while water fell from the reservoir shafts in the roof. Some members returned by boat, but I joined the others to walk back over the top and see the shafts and reservoirs.

Another early task was editing the first three *Journals*, having them professionally typed and duplicated, and mailing them. The first ran to six pages and No 2 to seven, but No 3 was a disaster. An ambitious 17 pages, it was typed, duplicated and despatched by a member who offered to do it at cost, thereby making a considerable saving, but it contained so many typing mistakes that it was decided that I should reissue it with an apology to members. I still have the offending number. After that Jeffery Spence began his long stint as Hon Editor.

At first, members were allocated a membership number, but we soon dropped that. Greville asked to be No 1, where I was happy to oblige, W J Skillern who also became a Council member was No 2, and Clinker was No 5. At each meeting new members' names were read out for election, and we were greatly encouraged when we reached the 100 mark within a year. The age range was much wider than it is now, from teenagers to septuagenarians, with a good number of twenty- and thirty-year-olds. The idea was that any undesirables could be rejected (with a refund), not that we had any, and we soon abandoned the practice. Robert Aickman, Charles Hadfield and L T C Rolt had just formed the Inland Waterways Association, followed by a split with Aickman who carried on alone. I recall Hadfield passing me a note



*Above: Standedge Tunnel, 15.4.1961 — Biddle, left; Voce, centre, wearing beret [M'chester Guardian]
Below: Sankey Bicentenary, 17.9.1955 — Sheldon, far left; Clinker, 5th from left [G Biddle]*



suggesting that if someone called Aickman applied for membership it should be referred to the Council first. Aickman didn't.

Holt was a professional railwayman, and Clinker had been one. Most of the founders already knew one another. Holt and I knew Clinker well, Holt from 1943 when he was seconded by the LMS and Clinker by the GWR to wartime military liaison duties at Oxford. Clinker was an only child whose father, a distinguished electrical engineer and an FRS, died in a North Wales climbing accident before the war. He retired from the Great Western at the age of 40 — Holt thought after a disagreement — having served the minimum 20 years to earn a pension, and went to Cornwall to live with his mother, a charming, gentle old lady. There he devoted himself to building up Locomotive & General Railway Photographs with two partners. Commercially the business was a failure, but I've always regarded the assembling of such a vast number of historic railway photographs, many by well-known photographers, as Clinker's great achievement. After passing through several hands the collection is now at the National Railway Museum at York.

It was through LGRP that I first met Clinker in 1950, and through him Greville and Spence, both of whom Holt also knew. In turn I introduced Clinker to Cook. Hadfield had just published his *British Canals*, during which he had contacted Clinker on related railway questions, and it was he who suggested that canals should fall within the Society's remit. Ken Seaward none of us knew, although it was his letter to *Railway World* which began it all. After some years on the Council he left to work overseas, rejoining the Society on his return.

The first Annual Meeting weekend at Leicester included coach tours of the Leicester & Swannington Railway and the Ashby Canal and Ticknall Tramroad, at fares of 4s.7d and 5s.7d respectively. The next year's was based on Gloucester, where two days' hire of a Bristol Carriage & Tramways Co saloon coach cost us £15.10s.0d. Despite some well-founded reservations by one or two of us, the Council boldly decided in 1955 to invite the public to travel by special train on a Sunday from Manchester Liverpool Road to Liverpool Crown Street, to mark the 125th

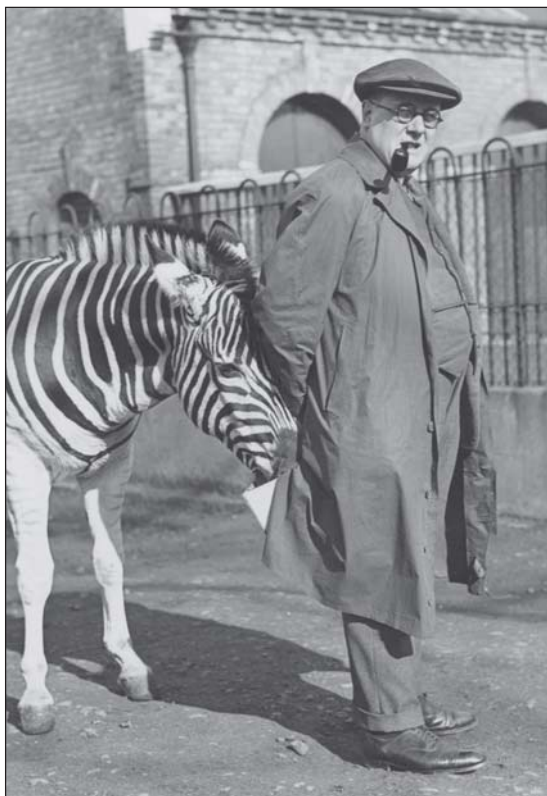


C R Clinker (left) with W A Stern and P Caldwell at Gotham curve on the Cromford & High Peak line, 20 August 1956 [A E Bennett]

anniversary of the opening of the Liverpool & Manchester Railway. After lengthy negotiations British Railways agreed to provide a train, and tickets were printed, but shortly beforehand it was cancelled owing to lack of support. After all, most of the journey could be made by ordinary train. By contrast, the previous day's celebration of the 200th anniversary of the Act of Incorporation of the Sankey Brook Navigation was an immense success. The civic heads of Widnes and St Helens accompanied us on a nine-mile trip along the St Helens Canal from Widnes to Winwick lock in the ex-Leeds & Liverpool shortboat *Leo*, including a civic reception at St Helens Town Hall. Strangely, a few years later we had a trip in the same vessel on the Lancaster Canal, where she operated as a trip boat named *Shelagh*. As it happened the cancelled rail tour did produce two positive results. Holt expanded his tour notes to form the Society's first publication, *A Short History of the Liverpool & Manchester Railway*, 22 duplicated foolscap pages of typescript, which a few years later went into a printed second edition. Further, I made a short recording about the anniversary on BBC radio by landline from their Leeds studio to Manchester. After I had finished, Manchester said they could hear the rustle of my script, so I had to do it all over again.

Clinker, Greville and Hadfield recruited a number of well-known names, including D S M Barrie, Michael Robbins, Charles E Lee, Vallance, T S

Lascelles, H P White, C L Mowat and Theo Barker. Later, Clinker gained new members from his evening classes on railway history held at various centres in the Midlands — he then lived at Rugby — in which I believe he was a pioneer. As president, Clinker took the chair at Council meetings. Most new organisations have teething troubles, and it must be admitted that he was something of a trial. He had a ponderous manner which at times could be overbearing and pompous, a trait which put off one or two potential members who would have been very valuable to us, including Jack Simmons. Clinker and Spence kept each other well at arm's length. Like Greville, both were bachelors (Clinker married later in life after his mother died), and as well as being a good cook Spence was an excellent character actor. He delighted in mimicking CRC, as we called him, and I had many a hilarious meal with him at his house in Caterham.



*M D Greville, who was fond of animals,
pictured at London Zoo in the 1950s.
This was not an RCHS outing!
[G Biddle]*

Both Holt and I had reservations about accepting office. We had young families, and Holt lived at Penrith where he was on call during alternate weeks, and periodically spent time at Derby as a visiting lecturer at the Railway Staff Training College. I was undertaking professional exams and knew I was likely to be moved in my job. In fact I had three different addresses during my term as secretary. The officers were bombarded with presidential memos, at times several a week. Spence called them 'directives', and characteristically ignored most of them. But Holt and I had no option but to reply. Some of Clinker's memos were critical to the point of being objectionable, sometimes copied to selected Council members as well. Twice we decided to resign, but were persuaded by Greville to carry on.

Greville was a short, stocky man, always wore a cap, smoked a pipe, and had a great sense of humour. He was very knowledgeable about all kinds of topics, and was very fond of animals. But underneath he was also very shrewd, and obviously had a quiet word with Clinker at times of tension. He was the oldest Council member, a former marine underwriter who devoted his retirement to researching closed lines and stations, through which he became close friends with Spence. A lot their work went into Clinker's *Register of Closed Passenger Stations and Goods Depots*. I always felt rather sorry for Greville. He had no home of his own, preferring to rent rooms on a board-and-lodging basis. Consequently he moved a number of times, and for a time lived with the Clinkers at Rugby.

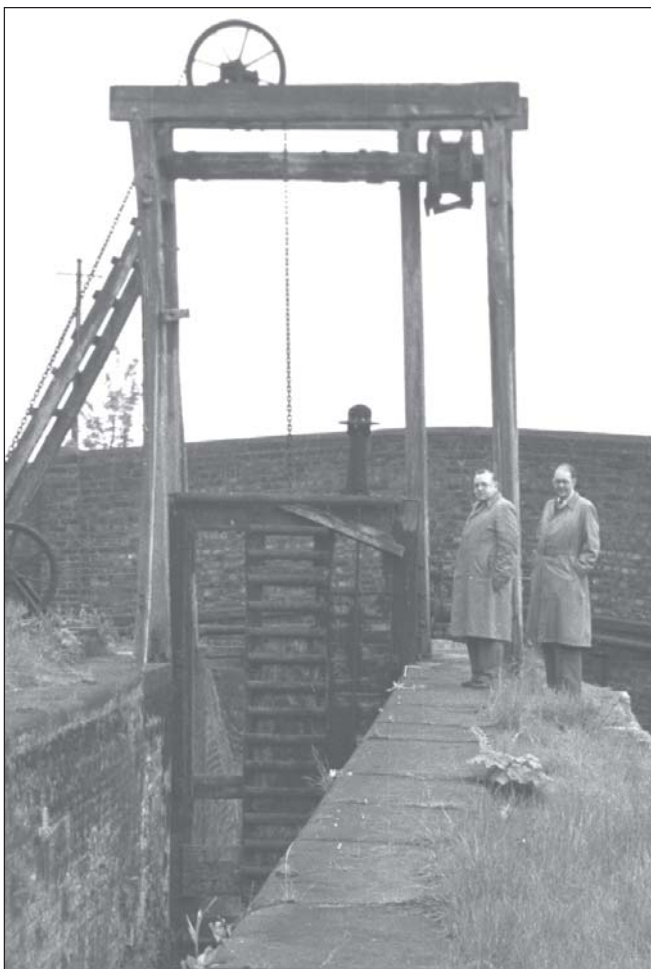
CRC also had a proprietorial inclination to take unilateral action, thereby causing more trouble. Fairly early he decided I needed an assistant and without telling anyone he invited John Sheldon to take on the publicity work and bookings for events. The Council and I accepted it with the best possible grace, but the arrangement lasted barely twelve months, and later Sheldon confessed to me that he had found the work too time-consuming. He went on to become the long-standing chairman of the very successful East Midlands group. Early in 1956 Greville quietly proposed separating the positions of President and Chairman, to which the Council agreed, and after the AGM Greville took the chair with Hadfield as vice-chairman. Thereafter there was much less presidential interference and harmony reigned.

Greville saw his chairmanship as a stopgap. Charles Klapper was co-opted on to the Council and

he began a long and fruitful period as Chairman, consolidating the early work. A genial and avuncular figure, he edited the weekly *Modern Transport*, was widely experienced and had a good business brain. One of his first acts was to stop the exchange of memoranda and leave day-to-day management to the officers' discretion. We now had 220 members, and towards the end of 1957 Holt and I, quite independently, felt that we could hand over to someone else without undue disruption. I was about to move yet again, and he had been offered a permanent post at Derby. So we gave six months' notice of our intention to relinquish our posts at the 1958 AGM. At the same time the Council accepted my suggestion that there should be a separate programme committee, and for some three years Kathleen Stephens acted very ably as Programme Secretary. I succeeded her, and eventually local groups took on society events other than the Annual Meetings. Meanwhile Maurice Berrill followed me as Hon Secretary, and F G M Watson became Hon Treasurer.

Charles Hadfield became President in 1961. A former senior civil servant, he was an even better diplomat than Greville, and later I learned of how he had helped to keep the young Society on an even keel. He devised the present system of a separate Council and Management Committee which has stood us in such good stead, instituted a two-year term for the presidency, and instigated the Publications Fund.

Although Charles E Lee declined a seat on the Council he made valuable contributions to the Society, not least proposing that it should become incorporated as a company limited by guarantee, paying for the registration and printing of the Memorandum and Articles of Association from his own pocket. Immensely knowledgeable on all manner of subjects, his somewhat ascetic aspect belied a warm and kindly nature. Unfailingly, he always dressed in a grey suit, with a wing collar, grey Homburg hat, spats and patent leather shoes. An abiding memory from before the formation of the Society is of Clinker, Cook and I taking him to see



*Charles Hadfield (on the left) at Trench Lock
on the Shrewsbury Canal; date unknown
[R A Cook Collection]*

the Ticknall Tramroad, including some stone sleeper blocks in the long wet grass of Lount Wood. By the time we put him on a London train at Leicester his feet were soaked.

My most lasting impression of early members will always be of their dedication to the Society, which has been continued by their successors ever since. I doubt whether they envisaged the standing the Society would have achieved in fifty years, or even whether it would last that long. Those who are still with us have cause for pride.

The Society, 1995–2004

Geoff Gwatkin

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 Boughiey 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	Jeoffry 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	Jeoffry 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

The British Road Haulage Industry since 1954

Grahame Boyes

A useful history of the road haulage industry up to the Second World War was published in 2001,¹ but there is no equivalent for the years since the war, except for the *Companion to British Road Haulage History* (2003), which contains most of the ingredients in the form of short articles on some 600 topics.² This paper attempts to pull together some of the key themes of the past fifty years into one coherent account.

The industry in the early 1950s

For the road haulage industry, most of the first decade following the end of the Second World War was a period of recovery and consolidation from the effects of the war. Horse-drawn drays and steam lorries could still be seen in the early 1950s. Both had been declining rapidly before the war, but their life had been prolonged by wartime petrol rationing, which did not end until 1950. At the end of 1954 British Railways, the last major user of horse transport, other than the breweries such as Whitbreads and Youngs that retained them mainly for publicity reasons, still had 468 horses for parcel delivery work and retired the last ones only in 1958. Steam lorries had almost disappeared by 1954 (44 steam vehicles were registered in that year), but some were brought out of retirement when fuel rationing was temporarily re-introduced in 1956–7 during the Suez Crisis. Certainly there had been investment in new vehicles, and from 1946 to 1954 the number of lorries³ grew by 50%, but the new vehicles were subject to the same maximum dimensions and weight limits that had been in force since 1931; the speed limit was still 20 mph, as it had been since 1934. The growth of road transport had only just started to cause an absolute decline in the freight traffic carried by Britain's railways from a peak of 22,902m ton-miles, the highest figure for any peacetime year, recorded in 1951.

These early post-war years were also a period of upheaval for the industry. The Labour government's Transport Act 1947 had begun the process of nationalising all road transport firms involved predominantly in 'ordinary long distance carriage for hire or reward'. It excluded firms that operated fleets

of specialised vehicles for bulk liquids, explosives, furniture removals, meat, livestock, felled timber or abnormal indivisible loads. Also excluded were local haulage firms operating within a 25-mile radius and own-account operators — otherwise known as ancillary users or private hauliers, firms that operated C-licence vehicles for carrying their own goods as an adjunct to their manufacturing or trading businesses. As from 1 January 1948, Carter Paterson & Co, Pickfords, Wordie & Co and the other road haulage companies that had been purchased by the railways before the war, became the nucleus of what was to become the Road Haulage Executive (RHE), operating under the trading name of British Road Services (BRS). Over the next four years the RHE acquired 3,766 undertakings, with 80,212 staff and 41,265 vehicles, but there were still several thousand small firms waiting to be taken over when the Conservative government, elected in 1951, brought the process to a halt and subsequently, with its Transport Act 1953, put it into reverse. BRS ceased to have a monopoly of long-distance services from 1 January 1955, but the process of denationalising its assets continued until August 1956.

The formation of the Railway & Canal Historical Society coincided with the end of this era of post-war recovery and upheaval and with the beginning of the era of road haulage development that has been the central feature of freight transport history over the past fifty years.

28 April 1954 was a key date in the history of the industry, although not one that is generally recognised. Statistics of the numbers of goods vehicles had been available since they were first taxed in 1921. Statistics of the numbers of carriers and their fleet sizes had been published since the licensing of goods vehicle operators was introduced in 1934. Yet neither gave a measure of the industry's contribution to the country's economy. On this day in 1954 K F Glover and D N Miller, two statisticians working for the Ministry of Transport & Civil Aviation, read a paper to the Royal Statistical Society entitled 'The outlines of the road goods transport industry'.⁴ This contained the results of the first statistical survey and analysis (albeit one based on a sample of only 7,243 vehicles for one week in September 1952) of the work under-

taken by the goods road transport industry, for comparison with the equivalent statistics for railways that had been available since 1913. For the first time the government had a proper basis for transport planning.

What picture did this paper present of goods road transport in 1952? Overall it was carrying 72% of the total tonnage of goods transported, compared with 24% by rail, 3% by coastal shipping and 1% by canal. However, this included a large quantity of short-distance traffic, including that carried by railway cartage vehicles. In terms of ton-miles — a better measure of the work undertaken — rail was still the largest carrier with 43%, compared with 37% by road and 20% by coastal shipping, but road overtook rail in 1955.

Nationalisation had resulted in a massive increase in own-account operation by businesses that felt they could offer their customers a better or cheaper service by setting up their own transport operations. The extent to which their fears about nationalised transport were justified is not clear, but there is no doubt that BRS pushed up the rates charged by many of the haulage firms that it acquired. Some businesses that made the change were undoubtedly motivated by political objections to the principle of nationalisation. Between 1947 and 1952 the number of own-account vehicles grew by 72%, while the numbers employed by public hauliers increased by only 1%. By 1952, 83% of all goods vehicles were operated on C licences, although this included the majority of light delivery vehicles; for lorries over 2 tons unladen weight the proportion in own-account operation was 65%. Of the total tonnage of goods carried by road, public hauliers carried 40%, while their share of ton-miles was 46%. BRS's share was 6½% of tonnage and 22% of ton-miles; thus, even at its peak before it was partially de-nationalised, it represented no more than half the public haulage industry. Nevertheless BRS had built up the first truly national road transport networks for both general goods and parcels and now dominated the long-distance market. The haulage distances undertaken by BRS vehicles were typically three times those of other public hauliers and own-account operators. The average length of haul of

BRS's largest lorries was 100–120 miles, with a significant number exceeding 200 miles. The average weekly mileage of these BRS vehicles was also high — 677 miles, compared with 464 for the equivalent C-licence lorries. When considering these mileages, it must be remembered that the maximum speed was nominally still only 20 mph.

At this period Britain still had a large lorry-manufacturing industry, with AEC, Atkinson, Bedford, Commer, Dennis, Dodge, ERF, Foden, Guy, Leyland, Scammell, Seddon and Thornycroft all still independent companies, plus the nationalised Bristol Commercial Vehicles Ltd, which built only for BRS between 1952 and 1964, and others that built only light goods vehicles. Because it was one of the major exporting industries, it was treated relatively generously (compared with the railways, for example) during the early post-war years when supplies of raw materials were controlled by the government and it was quickly able to resume manufacture of civilian models. By 1950 production of goods vehicles had reached twice the pre-war level. In consequence, over 60% of goods vehicles on the roads in 1952 had been built since the war. About 15% were of wartime construction, chiefly ex-army vehicles in the medium/heavy range, but still about a quarter, mainly lighter vehicles, survived from the pre-war years.

Development of the lorry since 1954

Before considering how the haulage industry has changed since 1954, it is necessary to examine how the lorry itself has developed, as the two were often closely inter-related.

In 1954 the maximum permitted weight, dimensions and speed of lorries were all unchanged since the early 1930s. Most commonly, the largest vehicles on long-distance haulage work were the eight-wheel rigs, of classic British designs such as the AEC Mammoth Major, Foden DG6/15 and FG6/15 (popularised by the Super Dinky model) and Leyland Octopus. These were limited to 22 tons gross weight and 30ft length. Articulated lorries were also limited to 22 tons, but an overall length of 33ft was allowed.



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At that time they were favoured by only a few operators, although they were sometimes preferred for their manoeuvrability in confined premises, as petrol tankers for example. Lighter articulated vehicles, however, were used in large numbers on local collection and delivery work, particularly by BR which had a fleet of 10,000 'mechanical horse' tractor units in the mid-1950s, because the tractor and driver could be kept working productively with a second trailer while the first trailer was left standing at the depot for unloading or re-loading. The third configuration for long-distance haulage was the drawbar unit — a rigid lorry hauling a 2-axle trailer — which was allowed a combined laden weight of 32 tons and was thus often the most economical way of moving heavy loads, despite the extra cost of the compulsory 'statutory attendant' or assistant driver to control the brakes on the trailer. (This requirement was eventually withdrawn in 1969 for trailers equipped with suitable brakes.) Lorries of 2½ tons unladen weight or more were restricted to 20 mph. The 30 mph limit for light vehicles encouraged their use for shorter-distance movements. Many of these light vehicles had van bodies, but the majority of lorries had flat or drop-side bodies, with tarpaulin sheets and ropes to protect and secure the load.

Since 1954, the story has been one of progressively increasing limits on weight, dimensions and speed. Modest increases in permitted weight (to 24 tons) and artic length (to 35ft) in 1955, were followed in 1964 by a radical review of the Motor Vehicles (Construction & Use) Regulations. By relating gross weight to wheelbase (a longer wheelbase spreads the weight better on bridges) and by specifying standards for braking systems, it was considered possible to increase the weight and length limits for rigid lorries to 28 tons and 11m (36ft 1in) and for artics to 32 tons and 13m (42ft 7in); the last figure was further increased in 1968 to 15m to avoid 40ft ISO containers being classified as abnormal loads. In 1964 maximum width was also increased from 7ft 6in to 2.5m (8ft 2½in). Meanwhile the maximum speed was increased in 1957 to 30 mph and in 1967 to 40 mph. The increased size of the new lorries that appeared on the roads following publication of the 1964 regulations was apparent even to the casual observer. For most purposes the maximum weight of a 4-axle artic had been raised to only 30 tons; to take advantage of the 32-ton limit for a general-purpose lorry, 5 axles (with a third axle on either the tractive unit or the semi-trailer) were needed to conform with the complex new regulations. Both the 4- and 5-axle

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artic now had a clear advantage in most haulage work over both the eight-wheel rigid and the drawbar unit (the latter was still limited to 32 tons and its speed limit had only been increased to 30 mph). The heavy-duty fifth-wheel coupling had been developed, enabling the driver quickly to couple and uncouple the trailer, and allowing the potential for higher productivity of tractors and drivers to be extended to the heaviest lorries. Articulated lorries thus soon began to dominate the long-distance market at the heavy end of the range. Their use has continued to grow and now accounts for 76% of tonne-km carried in lorries. The 'rigid eight' enjoyed a subsequent revival, fitted with a tipper body for transporting bulk materials such as coal, stone and spoil. New 2- and 3-axle rigid vehicles, which covered the middle of the range, were also now noticeably wider, longer and heavier.

Although these changes were long overdue, the UK lorry manufacturers had done little to anticipate them. Their models had fallen way behind what was available from Continental lorry builders, such as Mercedes-Benz, Scania and Volvo, which now took the opportunity to gain a foothold in the UK market. They were later joined by DAF and MAN. Their

products were not only seen as technically more advanced, but they also provided a much superior environment for the driver, which made them attractive to owner-drivers and to operators keen on good employee relations. As import tariffs fell under the influence of the European Free Trade Association (of which the UK and Sweden were founding members from 1959) and the European Economic Community (to which the UK acceded in 1973), these Continental manufacturers were able to exploit their position to become major suppliers to the UK haulage industry. The UK manufacturers were also suffering loss of their traditional export markets in the Commonwealth. AEC, which had previously acquired Crossley and Maudslay in the early post-war years, took over Thornycroft in 1961 and was itself taken over in 1962 by Leyland Motors, which was then re-styled the Leyland Motor Corporation. Leyland had previously absorbed Albion and Scammell. In 1968 Guy became part of the British Motor Corporation, which was shortly followed by the disastrous amalgamation of BMC and Leyland to form the British Leyland Motor Corporation. This is not the place to discuss the failure of these attempts to turn round the fortunes of the British motor industry.⁵ Suffice it to say that in 1974 the new Labour government rescued British Leyland by nationalising it; then in 1987 it was sold under the Conservative government's privatisation programme to the Dutch truck builder, DAF. DAF was acquired in 1993 by the Paccar company of the USA, which had taken over Fodens in 1982. The Leyland factory is now the only builder of heavy lorries in the UK, producing both Leyland-DAF and Foden models. Of the other builders, Atkinson joined Seddon in 1970 to form Seddon Atkinson, but its remnant, now part of Iveco, has been moved to Spain; Commer and Dodge merged in 1965 and ceased production in 1993; manufacture of ERFs ended in 2002; while Dennis survives, but only as a builder of specialised vehicles. Production of lorries, which reached a peak of 199,000 in 1969, had fallen to 15,000 in 2001. Some are still exported, but there are nearly four times as many imports.

The first 8-mile stretch of motorway, the Preston bypass, was opened in 1958 and the first 72-mile section of the M1 in 1959. In the mid-1960s, the motorway and trunk road construction programme was still in its early years and many trunk roads still passed through the centres of towns and villages, some of them notoriously difficult to negotiate even with modest-sized vehicles. At the end of the decade

there were still only 599 miles of motorway and 1,006 miles of dual carriageway trunk road, compared with 2,160 and 2,622 in 2002. It is perhaps not surprising that the general public's response to the new bigger lorries was overwhelmingly negative, with vociferous complaints, particularly from historic towns, about the damage they were causing to buildings through vibration or direct impact, about the safety of pedestrians in narrow streets and about air pollution. 'Juggernaut' became the popular derogatory term for the new 30- and 32-ton articulated lorries. This built up into one of the first big 'environmental' campaigns in this country, led by the Civic Trust (which produced several influential reports on the subject)⁶, the Council for the Protection of Rural England and a new environmental pressure group formed in 1971, Friends of the Earth.

The government responded by introducing a series of measures to improve the safety of lorries and reduce their environmental impact: annual testing of lorries and trailers, and noise limits for all motor vehicles in 1968; and a smoke emission standard for diesel-engine vehicles in 1973. Initially, the low power of contemporary lorries greatly limited their speed on motorways, to the extent that special 'crawler' lanes were provided for lorries on long climbing gradients. However, when the manufacturers responded by building more powerful vehicles, it was deemed necessary in 1971 to place a 60 mph limit on heavy lorries. In the following year minimum power-weight ratios were specified for new vehicles, which eventually eliminated the problem of slow-moving vehicles. In order to keep large lorries out of town centres, the Highways Act 1971 allowed local authorities to provide 'lorry areas' where goods could be transhipped to smaller delivery vehicles (although none seem to have been built), while the Heavy Commercial Vehicles (Controls & Regulations) Act 1973 allowed them to specify through-routes for heavy lorries and to prohibit or restrict access to specified zones or roads. The first major 'lorry ban', the Windsor Cordon scheme, was eventually introduced in 1978. The Road Traffic Act 1974 allowed an objection to be made to the granting of an operator's licence (see below) on the grounds that the firm's operating centre, where vehicles were to be based, was environmentally unsuitable.

However, the government was also under pressure from the Freight Transport Association (FTA) and Road Haulage Association (RHA), the principal trade associations representing UK road freight transport interests, to allow further increases in lorry weights

and sizes, in line with Continental practice. The FTA and RHA jointly commissioned their own report, which argued the need to consider the consequences, in terms of making transport more costly and wasteful, as well as the benefits of proposals for reducing the environmental impact of the lorry.⁷ The UK's accession to the EC in 1973, which boosted the movement of lorries between the UK and the Continent, added further pressure. In seeking to find a way through the problem, the government sought advice from three groups of experts. The first, a committee chaired by Daniel Pettit, chairman and chief executive of the National Freight Corporation (NFC), reported in 1973 on ways in which the haulage industry might itself help to find solutions to the environmental problems.⁸ Then in 1978 the report of a committee of inquiry on road haulage operators' licensing, chaired by Professor Christopher Foster, made 91 recommendations aimed at tightening up the licensing system, increasing enforcement activity against illegally-operated and unsafe vehicles, and giving greater powers to the licensing authorities to penalise errant licence holders. Finally, as one of its last acts, the Labour government appointed Sir Arthur Armitage, then vice-chancellor of Manchester University, to consider the causes and consequences of the growth of road freight traffic, the impact of the lorry on people and their environment, and the question of maximum lorry weights.

The Armitage report,⁹ published at the end of 1980, recommended a wide range of measures to reduce the lorry's impact: ensuring that taxation on each category of lorry covered the full road track costs, including the public costs of accidents; an accelerated programme of building bypasses; stricter control of the location of haulage depots and lorry parking (including an end to the practice of drivers taking vehicles home); and more stringent technical standards for lorry suspensions, noise and smoke emission, braking and safety features. It also concluded that a 44-tonne weight limit on a suitably-designed 6 axle lorry, would have less impact than some existing lorries, particularly as fewer of them would be needed. The government announced its response a year later in a White Paper.¹⁰ The recommendations for reducing the impact of the lorry were generally accepted. In 1982 the basis for taxing lorries was changed from unladen weight to gross weight, as a step towards ensuring that each category was appropriately taxed; noise limits were reduced as a first step towards halving noise levels; and the tachograph was made compulsory for lorries after a

long battle with the drivers' unions. Side-guards and rear under-run guards were introduced in 1983, and spray suppression in 1985. As regards weight, the extent of bridge-strengthening work was too great for the government to consider 44 tonnes (it probably judged that this was also a step too far for public opinion at this stage), but it did propose to increase the limit for 5-axle articulated lorries to 40 tonnes. In the event, however, the new Construction & Use Regulations issued in 1983 increased the limit to only 38 tonnes, so that, even with 5% over-loading that the police allowed before prosecution, vehicles would still be within 40 tonnes. The length limit for artics was increased to 15.5m (but without any increase in trailer length) to allow for longer, more-stable, tractive units, having more space for improved driver's accommodation (including sleeper-cabs) and for the extra equipment required to meet safety standards and noise suppression. Armitage had also recommended increasing the speed limit for lorries on unrestricted non-motorway dual-carriageway roads, as the wide difference between the speed of lorries and cars on such roads was not conducive to safety. Accordingly in 1984 there was an upwards adjustment of many goods vehicle speed limits; the limits for heavy lorries were now 40 mph on single-carriageway roads, 50 on dual-carriageways and 60 on motorways.

The Single European Act of 1986 was designed to remove non-tariff barriers to trade between EC states. From this time onwards, changes made to the Construction & Use Regulations were dictated by standards agreed in Brussels. EC Directive 85/3 of 1985 contained the harmonised standards for goods vehicles employed in international transport, effective from 1986 for 5- and 6-axle vehicles and from 1993 for 2-, 3- and 4-axle vehicles. Directive 96/53 of 1996 extended these standards to domestic transport. However, Britain and Ireland were allowed a derogation from the higher weight limits in Directive 85/3 until the end of 1998 to allow time for major bridge-strengthening programmes. Other changes introduced during this period were: an increased maximum length of 12m for rigid vehicles (1986) and 16.5m for artics (1990); a further increase in maximum width to 2.55m (1996), with extra for 'reefers' (refrigerated vehicles) to allow for the thickness of the body insulation; and compulsory fitting of speed limiters (1992) to prevent speeds in excess of 60 mph by lorries over 7.5 tonnes and 56 mph by those over 12 tonnes gross weight. In 1990, 1993, 1996 and 2001, the EC introduced a series of

Directives that dramatically reduced the waste gas emissions from lorry engines. Although articulated lorries have retained their dominance in this country, drawbar-units are more popular in some other European countries and were coming over to Britain in increasing numbers. In 1994, the weight limits for drawbar-units were brought into line with those then applying to articulated lorries, that is, 35 tonnes on 4 axles, and 38 tonnes on 5 axles. At the same time a special 44-tonne limit on 6 axles was introduced for road/rail 'combined transport' movements under a government policy of encouraging use of rail. At the end of the period of derogation, the UK weight limits were duly brought in line with the EC standard, with a maximum of 40 tonnes on 5 axles and 41 tonnes on 6 axles. Finally, in 2001 the 44-tonne 6-axle vehicle, which had been advocated by Armitage and long campaigned for by the haulage industry, was authorised for general use. Public reaction to these increases was muted, because the road improvements and other measures to civilise the lorry since 1980 had been so effective. The rate at which lorries were involved in fatal accidents fell from 9.9 per 100m vehicle-km in 1960 to 2.0 in 2002. There was some concern about rail freight being attracted onto the roads as a result of these changes, but by now the high-profile campaigners had turned against the building of new roads.

Road supplants rail

Over the fifty-year period here reviewed, the productivity of the largest lorries and their drivers has increased enormously. Vehicle capacity in terms of both floor area and payload has doubled. For low-density products the gain in volumetric capacity has been even greater, through the development of small-wheel, low-floor designs. The maximum speed has also broadly doubled, from a much-ignored 20 mph limit to a speed-limited 56 mph on motorways and 50 mph limit on other dual carriageway roads. Moreover, even though delays can arise on motorways and trunk roads, long-distance lorries are now much less affected by congestion delays than 50 years ago, so journey times have improved to an even greater extent.

Productivity has also increased through the development of mechanical-handling techniques to reduce the time spent loading and unloading. Boxes are now handled in pallet-loads, rather than individually, using fork-lift or pallet trucks. Lightweight wheeled cage-pallets are commonly used for

deliveries to supermarkets and shops. The great majority of lorries now have van or box bodies, often with ingenious designs of doors, curtain-sides or retractable roofs to facilitate access, according to the type of goods being carried, and often with built-in straps to secure the load. For most purposes, the time-consuming practice of sheeting and roping loads on flat lorries has disappeared. Tail lifts allow the driver to unload and deliver pallet-loads without assistance and without sustaining lifting injuries.

The increased productivity of drivers has been offset to a small extent by a reduction in the length of time they are allowed to drive without a break and in one day. In 1970 the length of a six-day working week was reduced from 66 to 60 hours, but under the EU Working Time Directive is set to come down dramatically to 48 hours (averaged over a period) in 2005 for employed drivers and 2009 for self-employed drivers. The cost of drivers has obviously increased substantially in real terms; on the other hand the overall cost of diesel fuel has fallen by 25% in real terms compared with 50 years ago (even though the tax component is virtually unchanged).

For much of this period these changes have been reflected in year-by-year reductions in real haulage rates (ignoring inflation). There are several other major factors behind the decline of rail freight — for example the collapse of the coal, steel and heavy engineering industries, the growth of the petroleum pipeline network and the post-war location of new factories remote from the rail network — but this relentless pressure on haulage rates progressively weakened the railway's competitive position.

Between 1953 and 2002 the tonnage carried by road almost doubled, slightly less than the index of manufacturing output. One might have expected it to grow faster as road won traffic from rail, but this reflects the trend for goods traffic to become lighter, as, for example, manufactured industrial and domestic products became smaller and of lighter construction. Over the same period ton-miles (or tonne-kilometres) increased nearly five-fold — 2½ times faster than the tonnage. Partly this was the result of winning longer-distance traffic from the railways, but another factor has been the changing patterns of distribution. Fifty years ago manufacturers often had several factories each supplying their own region. Where national distribution was required it was done through an extensive network of distribution warehouses. As road journey times improved, a better and cheaper service could be

achieved with fewer regional warehouses and it is now possible to cover the whole country from one distribution centre in the Midlands. However, the effect of this concentration has been a substantial increase in the distance that goods are carried. The most striking example is that of food, for which the average length of haul increased from 75 to 127 km between 1974 and 2002. The benefits have thus come with an environmental penalty. It should be noted that the numbers of lorries have not multiplied. From 1953 to 1967 their number increased from 446,000 to 593,000, but as the size of lorries has increased their number has fallen to 425,000. This effect was indeed one of the arguments put forward for allowing the successive increases in weights and lengths.

In 2002 road transport was credited with 71% of the total tonne-kilometres of freight traffic in Britain, rail with 9%, coastal and inland shipping with 15% and pipelines with 6%.

Regulation of the hauliers

Underlying the way that the industry has developed is the system for licensing goods vehicle operators, first introduced in 1934 under the Road & Rail Traffic Act 1933. Licences were granted in three classes. Public (hire-and-reward) carriers were granted A licences. B licences, known as 'limited carriers' licences', were issued in a variety of circumstances, but were subject to the specific conditions attached to them. For example, they were issued to own-account operators, such as coal merchants, who also undertook short-distance carrying for others. C licences were for private (own-account) operators. There were also Contract-A licences for carriers who operated vehicles for a specified customer under a contract of at least one year duration; and there was a separate class of licences for farmers' vehicles. Applicants for new or additional A and B licences had to provide proof of need, while existing transport operators, including the railways, could object on the grounds that they already had services and capacity to fulfil the need. The intention of the system was to regulate growth of the industry, in order to prevent excessive supply reducing transport charges to an unprofitable level and thereby subjecting the investment already made by the railways and existing public carriers to what was called wasteful competition. This system, known as carrier licensing, was therefore characterised as a 'quantity' licensing scheme. There was, however, no restriction on

issuing Contract-A or C licences, which were available as of right.

It was therefore very difficult for new public hauliers to enter the industry, other than by buying an existing business and its licensed vehicles. There were, however, two ways in which entry might be achieved 'by the back door'. A new entrant could start by accepting a B licence with strict operating conditions attached that avoided objections from existing operators. Or he could obtain a Contract-A licence to carry goods under contract for a single customer and after some time apply for a full A licence using the contract work as proof of need.

The desirability of preventing wasteful competition was a concept widely supported by economists, politicians and, of course, industrialists in this country throughout the 19th century and up to the Second World War. By the end of the war, however, attitudes were changing, following the example of the anti-trust legislation in the USA. The Monopolies & Restrictive Practices Commission (later renamed the Monopolies & Mergers Commission) was set up in 1949 and was slowly beginning to weaken restrictive practices. It was against this background that in 1963 the Conservative Minister of Transport, Ernest Marples, appointed a committee under the chairmanship of Sir Ross Campbell (later Lord) Geddes to examine the operation and effect of the licensing system 'in the light of present day conditions'. Its report, submitted to what was now a Labour government and published in 1965¹¹, concluded that the carrier licensing system encouraged use of less-efficient own-account operation and was ineffective in controlling safety standards. At least since the end of the First World War, there were many 'cowboys', particularly, but not exclusively, among the owner-drivers and small firms, who operated on the margins of legality. They survived by accepting unprofitable rates and then turning them into profit by overloading, speeding, exceeding legal hours of work, ignoring the minimum rest periods, failing to undertake proper vehicle maintenance and breaking the conditions of their licences. In theory licences could be revoked, suspended or curtailed for these offences, but the Geddes Committee said that these sanctions were so rarely applied that operators were able to ignore the law almost with impunity. It recommended replacement of 'quantity' licensing by a system of 'quality' licensing, applicable to public and own-account operators alike, whose sole objective would be to ensure safety.

The new system, known as operator licensing, brought in during 1969–70 under the Transport Act 1968, applied only to vehicles over 1½ tons unladen weight. The emphasis was now on ensuring that the applicant had appropriate facilities and sufficient financial backing to maintain his vehicles properly. This was strengthened in 1977 when EEC Directive 74/561 was implemented, requiring that those undertaking public road haulage must be of good repute and that the applicant or his transport manager must have a recognised qualification indicating professional competence. Over the years since then several steps have been taken to strengthen enforcement of the regulations, for example through the introduction of portable weighbridges for spot-checking axle weights. In 2001/2, 1,700 operators (1.6%) had their licences revoked, suspended, reduced or restricted, or received a formal warning.

The public sector, from denationalisation to privatisation

Denationalisation of road haulage was much less successful than the Conservative government expected. It had always intended to leave a nationalised rump of about 3,559 vehicles, equivalent to the unladen tonnage of the vehicles taken over from the former railway-owned companies, plus 25% to allow for the growth that had taken place subsequently. The number to be disposed of, either in operating units that also included a depot, or as small vehicle-only lots, was 31,459. Demand was much weaker than expected — many of the former operators had no enthusiasm for re-entering the industry — and when the government decided to end the sale (by which time some of the lots had been put up for sale three times), the number of vehicles sold was 20,640. This left BRS with 14,378, comprising what became three distinct businesses: a national general haulage and contract-hire business; a national parcels service, BRS (Parcels) Ltd; and the specialist heavy-haulage, tanker, furniture-removal and (until 1966, when it was sold) meat haulage services, which had been built up around the former Pickfords specialist services.

Each of these was many times larger than the largest of their private-sector competitors and they continued to exert a widespread influence over the industry. In 1963, between them they owned 16% of all A and Contract-A licensed vehicles. Following the 1964 general election, the Transport Holding Company (THC), to which BRS had been transferred when the British Transport Commission was dissolved in 1963,

was given freedom by the incoming Labour government to expand its road businesses through voluntary acquisitions as well as by expanding its existing fleets. Some criticised this as backdoor nationalisation. In 1969 the National Freight Corporation (NFC) was established to bring under one umbrella all the nationalised road freight interests of the THC and British Railways. The latter comprised the former Freight Sundries Division of BR, now titled National Carriers Ltd (NCL), and a controlling interest in Freightliners Ltd (until this was returned to BR in 1978). NCL also took over BR's parcels and freight road cartage fleets and became BR's cartage agent under a contract-hire agreement.

The NFC took over a total of 29,000 vehicles and 66,000 staff, but its policy of de-centralising management proved to be an increasingly successful way of managing what could have been an unwieldy organisation. As a result, the NFC was well prepared when the Conservative party returned to power with a policy of transferring non-government state functions to the private sector. The NFC was the first of the big state corporations to be privatised. Unusually, this was achieved through an employee buy-out, in which present and retired employees and their families were encouraged to buy shares, and was one of the most successful privatisation schemes. The National Freight Consortium plc, later shortened to NFC plc, duly gained its independence in 1982.

The private sector

As mentioned earlier, some specialist public road hauliers continued to operate normally through the period of nationalisation because they were excluded from the provisions of the Transport Act 1947 — furniture removal firms, tanker operators, meat hauliers and 'heavy hauliers' of round timber and abnormal loads. One example was Bishop & Sons' Depositories Ltd, established in 1854 in Pimlico, next to Victoria station, and still operating today as the Bishop's Move Group, owned and run by the fifth and sixth generations of the Bishop family, almost certainly the oldest family transport business in Britain. Another was Beck & Pollitzer, also established in the 1850s, which undertook a variety of specialised work, including removal and installation of heavy machinery. The Crow Carrying Company, with its 'As the Crow Flies' logo, was an example of a specialist tanker operator that maintained its independence; it had started at Barking in 1920 and grew to cover most of the country, with a fleet of 200 when it was taken over by the Transport

Development Group in 1965.

Other firms survived nationalisation by giving up their long-distance work and concentrating on local work within a 25-mile radius until de-nationalisation, when they were able to buy back their A-licensed vehicles. Examples are Bassetts of Tittensor in Staffordshire, which celebrated its centenary in 1997, and Hanson Haulage, which can trace its history back to 1830.

Another group of long-established firms sold out to the Road Haulage Executive in 1948/9, with their owner sometimes staying on as manager, but took advantage of denationalisation to buy back their businesses, usually at a lower price. Examples are Jempson & Son of Rye, founded in 1924, and Welch's Transport of Stapleford, founded in 1934, both still in business.

Some new types of specialist carriers have emerged since the war to exploit new market opportunities. For example, Tibbett & Britten developed the technique of carrying clothes on hangers, eliminating the cost of packing and the risk of creasing. In the 1970s it established a nationwide hanging-garment service and won a major contract from Marks & Spencer, subsequently diversifying into the distribution of other consumer goods and becoming one of the leading international logistics service providers. Car-delivery agents originated in the 1930s, employing trade-plate drivers to deliver cars individually, but the modern car-delivery firms with fleets of double-deck car transporters are a post-war phenomenon. The first delivery agent to use such vehicles was Silcock & Colling in 1956. Although small numbers of lorries equipped with mechanical refrigeration plant were used for transport of meat and ice-cream before the war, refrigerated road transport developed largely after the war to cater for the new frozen food industry. SPD, Unilever's road distribution subsidiary, established a network of cold stores and refrigerated distribution services for the first Birds Eye frozen vegetables in 1947/8. Christian Salvesen, now another large European logistics operator, first diversified into road transport in 1969 as an adjunct to its frozen fish business, quickly becoming a leading specialist frozen-food distributor.

The experience of nationalisation seems to have encouraged many more large firms to emerge from the process of denationalisation, compared with the pre-war years. A notable example was the Wilkinson Transport Group, which was formed in 1954 and rapidly grew into a national parcels carrier quoted

on the London stock exchange, but it failed in the 1980s. The biggest group to emerge from denationalisation was the Transport Development Group, a metamorphosis of the Thames wharf- and barge-operator, the General Lighterage Co. It grew by acquiring a large number of haulage subsidiaries which were individually of only a modest size, by the 1970s having a combined lorry fleet of over 5,000. It has recently been re-structured as a contract logistics service provider operating under the name of TDG plc in several other EU countries as well as the UK and Ireland.

In terms of fleet size the pattern has remained relatively constant over the past forty years, with 300–400 fleets (public and private) with more than a hundred lorries. Fewer than one per cent of operators have fleets of more than 50, but between them they own around a quarter of all lorries.

At the other end of the scale, by far the largest group of hauliers is the owner-drivers. Although, in theory, those operating beyond a 25-mile limit were to be nationalised, the Road Haulage Executive gave them little priority, as they owned little of value other than their lorries, which were often second-hand. Most of them were still independent at denationalisation. Their numbers had probably declined during the war, as lorry drivers of eligible age would have been called up for service in the armed services. However, they grew again when denationalisation provided experienced drivers with the opportunity to buy an A-licensed lorry and set up their own business. From the 1960s to the present time owner-drivers have continued to represent 53–59% of all operators, while operators owning five vehicles or fewer are 85–90% of the total. Their traditional customers were small manufacturers and traders who served local and regional markets. Today many of these customers have disappeared and owner-drivers have survived in large numbers because of the growth of sub-contracting in various forms. Some company transport departments have given up their own fleets (or have retained only the trailers) and rely entirely on sub-contracting for drivers and vehicles. Many hauliers supplement their own fleets with sub-contractors, to provide flexibility in meeting fluctuations in demand.

When the licensing changed in 1969–70, the easier entry encouraged many newcomers to set up haulage businesses, while some own-account operators took advantage of the new freedom to carry back-loads for other firms. The original 121,000 firms given

operator licences grew to 143,000 in 1975, with a corresponding inflation of the numbers of lorries. The market could not sustain this growth in capacity and many smaller firms failed. The number of licences then settled down at around 130,000, but has declined since 1993 down to about 105,000.

Own-account operation continued to grow even after denationalisation, by 1962 accounting for 70% of lorries. However, public carriers, who typically employed larger vehicles and used them much more intensively, were carrying 41% of the tonnage and 51% of the tonne-km. The trend since then has been for firms to cease providing their transport needs in-house and to buy them in from specialist contractors. The proportion of traffic carried by public hauliers has steadily increased and now accounts for 65% of tonnage and 75% of tonne-km.

The way that the NFC successfully adapted itself to the changing market opportunities epitomises how the general haulage sector of the public haulage industry has transformed itself, and revolutionised the distribution of goods, over the past thirty years. From 1971 BRS began to withdraw from its declining and less-profitable general haulage business and to build up its profitable contract work. Meanwhile, from 1974 National Carriers Ltd began to diversify from what might be described as its 'industrial parcels' business into more profitable specialised distribution services for particular industries, operating under brand names such as Fashionflow for the clothing industry, Chinaflow for china and glassware, and Newsflow for newspaper distribution. From there NCL became a market leader in 'total distribution' or physical distribution management, in which the transport contractor provides and manages the associated warehousing and related functions, such as stock control and order picking in response to delivery instructions from the client. The 'added value' provided by the transport company to the client, and hence the profit potential, is thus considerably enhanced. The large high-street and out-of-town retail chains, with their massive demands for transport and storage, were the leading clients for this type of service. A parallel development was the 'just-in-time' concept, pioneered by the car manufacturers, which reduces inventory costs by delivering components in quantities and at times that match the production process. These two approaches came together under the name of 'logistics', which integrates the supply and movement of goods from the original source of the materials, through production, assembly, packing, storage, handling and

distribution to the final customer. In 1985 NFC bought SPD Ltd, Unilever's distribution company, then over the next few years brought together the BRS contract-hire business and the NCL and SPD contract-distribution businesses under the name Exel Logistics Ltd. The incorporation of the word 'logistics' in the name, now common for such companies, is somewhat misleading as they only provide part of the much wider logistics process. Nevertheless it does reflect the way that these companies have become integrated into their clients' businesses, particularly in the case of the large retail chains. Exel Logistics went on to establish subsidiary businesses in North America, Europe and the Far East, and then in 2000, having sold off its parcels and Pickfords furniture removal businesses, NCL plc itself was renamed Exel plc and continues to be one of the leading international logistics contractors.

Parcels, or express, carriers

The NFC's experience may also be quoted as fairly representative of the UK's home-bred parcels industry. During the 1970s, BRS Parcels Ltd, still operating a complex network of direct trunk services linking an extensive network of local depots, reduced delivery times from 2–4 days down to 24–48 hours. TNT was an Australian company that had set up in Britain in 1972, initially as a European express delivery carrier using a network of air and road services. In 1980 it established a domestic parcel service covering the whole of Britain from a sophisticated, mechanised, sorting hub-depot at Atherstone in Warwickshire, with trunk services radiating out to the local collection and delivery depots. This set a new standard by offering next-day delivery nationwide and next-morning delivery over most of the country, with refunds for failure to meet guaranteed delivery times. BRS Parcels' resulting losses led the NFC to close its home delivery service in 1986 and merge what remained into NCL's business parcels service to form the Lynx Express Delivery Network. Trying to emulate TNT, this incurred major losses in setting up a hub-and-spoke trunk network and in 1997 was sold to its management. The major US carrier, United Parcel Service, first came to the UK in 1988 as an international carrier service with its own airline, but in 1992, through purchase of an existing UK nationwide parcels carrier, it became a leading domestic parcels carrier too. It was the first to issue its drivers with hand-held computers, linked to the company's parcel

tracking system, to scan the label barcodes of delivered parcels and capture proof-of-delivery signatures. After the Post Office's Parcelforce, which continues to struggle financially, UPS is the main provider of home delivery services for the mail-order (and now internet-order) industry. TNT was taken over by the Dutch Post Office in 1996 and, having opted out of home deliveries in 1999, claims to be the country's leading business-parcel carrier. While the established national parcels companies struggled, and generally failed, to catch up with these large international carriers, new smaller-scale enterprises emerged to compete alongside them. Courier services, employing light vans even for long distances, compete at the premium end of the market by offering transit times measured in hours and tailored more closely to the customers' requirements. Another type of service to appear in the 1990s was the pallet distribution network. Catering for pallet-sized consignments, it offers customers that do not generate full lorry-loads of traffic a service that is more

economically priced than a parcels service. They are operated by co-operatives of smaller regional hauliers, which between them can provide nationwide coverage by exchanging pallets at hub depots.

The industry today

There are three essentials for a society that lives largely in cities and large conurbations: a fresh water supply, a sewage disposal system and a transport system for bringing in food and fuel supplies. Everything else is of secondary importance. The road haulage industry not only makes a considerable contribution to the nation's economy, but its role in the food supply chain is literally vital. Food is in fact the biggest class of goods carried by road. The tonnage of minerals and coal is slightly higher, but this is relatively short-distance traffic. In terms of tonne-km, the classification 'food, drink and tobacco' accounts for 29% of all traffic carried in heavy lorries.

Notes and references

The illustrations are reproduced from 1954 issues of *Modern Transport*, that for the range of lorries produced by Guy Motor Vehicles being in the month of the formation of the Railway & Canal Historical Society.

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2. John Armstrong, John Aldridge, Grahame Boyes, Gordon Mustoe & Richard Storey, *Companion to British Road Haulage History*, 2003. I am grateful to my fellow authors and editors for much that I have learned during the past five years about the road haulage industry, which has provided the basis of this paper. Further information and references on most of the matters dealt with can be found in this volume, which also contains an extensive bibliography of books and pamphlets.
3. Government statistics distinguish between Light and Heavy Goods Vehicles, the latter being at first defined as exceeding 1½ tons unladen weight and, later, as exceeding 3.5 tonnes gross (that is, laden) weight. Unless the context indicates otherwise, the term lorry is used here to mean a vehicle that exceeds these limits. 'Heavy lorry' is used to mean a lorry exceeding 7.5 tonnes gross weight. The fact that, within the industry, the American term 'truck' has largely superseded the English word 'lorry' since the 1970s, has been ignored in this paper.
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Who Runs The Railways?

The relationship between the government and the operators

Malcolm Reed

Introduction

The relationship between the railways and government in Great Britain has been a policy issue and the subject of political and economic analysis almost from the outset of the railway's emergence as a significant mode of transport. Political interest in this new form of transport was inescapable, because railway schemes needed the sanction of Parliament for the compulsory purchase powers that were required in virtually every instance to enable a line to be constructed. In a legal and political culture which attached a high importance to the rights of private property, interference with those rights was not lightly conceded. Consequently, the parliamentary Private Bill procedures obliged railway promoters to make a public interest case for their proposals, and if necessary to defend their case against hostile petitioners under Committee scrutiny. And because a company's enabling Act provided the statutory basis for all of its activities, the authorisation processes gave Parliament the opportunity to shape the framework not only for the building of each railway but also for its subsequent operation.

In principle, this was no different from the way in which canals, turnpikes, and other undertakings such as gas supply companies had been established, and indeed early railway Bills borrowed from canal precedents. Since parliamentary authorisation itself created specific rights, railways could share in the expectation of similar statutory undertakings that those rights would not subsequently be abrogated. However, it quickly became clear that railways differed significantly both in scale and scope from other existing forms of inland transport, and this made railway companies a unique focus of attention and criticism. While the railway interest soon became well-represented in Parliament, as the 19th century progressed the weight of the opposing constituency was sufficient to erode the railways' own political defences and leave them open to significant government interference.¹

The development of railway regulation

During the later 1830s and early 1840s government and Parliament built up their competence in their dealings with railways. Their understanding of this new industry and its impacts was informed through a succession of Select Committee inquiries, and once it was appreciated that the nature of steam railway technology gave the owner of the track an effective monopoly control of the traffic which it carried, the case for greater intervention in the affairs of this new industry could be justified on the grounds of protecting users against unreasonable charges and behaviour, and because of the economic effects of railways on other forms of transport and their users. Other reasons for intervention included public safety and amenity, and the environmental impacts of steam traction.

Initially, parliamentary process was used to increase the extent of regulatory control over railways. By applying increasingly stringent Standing Orders to the consideration of railway Bills and by requiring the inclusion of standard clauses in such Bills, Parliament obliged their promoters to accept a number of specific conditions.² These regulated matters as diverse as the manner in which railway companies could raise finance, smoke emissions from locomotives, and the manner in which railway lines could cross public roads.

These early methods of intervention were followed by general legislation which took two forms — the *Clauses Consolidation Acts* of 1845 which brought together a range of obligations which railway companies were obliged to accept as part of the authorisation process; and specific Acts which imposed new requirements or controls on the industry. The first of these was an 1838 Act which authorised the Postmaster General to order any railway to carry mail and to provide special trains or carriages for this purpose if required. This was followed by the *Regulation of Railways Act*, 1840, which gave the Board of Trade powers to inspect new lines before opening, to approve companies' bye-laws, to regulate the

connection of private sidings to existing lines, and to require railway companies to submit statistical returns. A further Regulation Act in 1842 strengthened the Board of Trade's powers, and also obliged railway companies to provide transport for troops and police when required to do so.

The best known of the general railway legislation of the 1840s is Gladstone's 1844 Regulation of Railways Act.³ This gave the government potentially sweeping deferred powers over railways authorised in that or subsequent sessions, enabling the Treasury to revise such a company's charges after 21 years if for the three preceding years its dividends had averaged 10 per cent or more, and also empowering the Treasury, after the same lapse of time, to acquire compulsorily any railway authorised in 1844 or later. In addition, the Act also required all passenger railways to provide at least one train in each direction daily calling at every station and conveying third-class passengers in covered seated accommodation at a fare of no more than a penny a mile and at an average speed of at least 12 miles per hour. Among other provisions, the Act also amended earlier legislation about the carriage of mail, troops and police, and obliged railways, if required to do so, to permit telegraph lines to be erected along their routes or to make their own telegraph lines available for government use.

Following the reconstitution of the small railway department of the Board of Trade into a Railway Board, there was a brave attempt in the parliamentary session of 1844–5 to intervene in the actual shaping of the network. This was done by grouping Bills geographically and providing the Committees considering them with the Railway Board's view of the merits of competing schemes. However, this experiment foundered, partly because of the weight of parliamentary business generated by the Railway Mania, but principally because of the lack of Cabinet commitment to supporting its own Railway Department's findings.⁴ At probably the last point in the development of Britain's railway systems where sustained intervention might have been effective in influencing the subsequent network map, the dynamic of economic trends and political events conspired against this attempt to nudge the promotion and parliamentary authorisation processes away from an ostensibly *laissez faire* approach.

Despite the failure of this attempt to strengthen government influence over railway schemes at the authorisation stage, virtually all of the remaining

agenda which defined the continuing relationship between the railways and the state in Britain had been established by the mid-1840s. The power of the legislature to determine the conditions under which railway proposals would be authorised was self-evident; in addition, government had asserted its right to regulate the operations and charges of railway companies and to require the provision of particular facilities in the public interest. It had also articulated its ultimate ability to take railways into public ownership.

While the option of state purchase was not exercised when it first became available in 1866, it was taken seriously enough for the Royal Commission on Railways which was appointed in 1865 to give consideration to this question when it reported in 1867. Though the majority of the Commissioners were against state purchase — partly on the practical grounds that the 2,320 miles of line authorised prior to 1844 were excluded from this part of Gladstone's Act — a minority report by Sir Roland Hill argued that the state should utilise its purchase powers. Interestingly, both the majority report and Hill assumed that if railway undertakings were acquired by the government, the actual operation of the resulting national system would not be retained in the public sector but leased out 'in convenient groups' to private companies:⁵ an early expression of the concept of railway franchising!

So far as the other provisions of the general legislation of the 1840s were concerned, most of the subsequent dialogue between government and the railways was about the extension of the scope of regulatory principles that had already been established. The only significant addition — the increasing involvement of the government in railway employment matters — was reflected in legislation in 1893, the Railway Regulation Act. While partly a response to wider changes in the accepted range of state intervention, in the railway sector such intervention could also be justified in the interests of protecting the public: the 1893 powers stemmed from concerns about the effects of excessive working hours on the performance of safety-critical staff such as signalmen and drivers.

The government's right to requisition railway transport in time of war was strengthened by two further Acts, of 1871 and 1888. The former, the Regulation of the Forces Act, gave the Secretary of State for War the power to take full possession of any railway in the United Kingdom in a national emergency. Safety regulation was gradually made more prescrip-

tive, extending into areas such as brake and signalling systems, while economic regulation was also progressively strengthened. Gladstone's initial foray into the field of social passenger transport was modified in 1883 with the Cheap Trains Act, which replaced the obligation to run one 'parliamentary' train daily with a requirement for a 'due and sufficient' proportion of accommodation at fares not exceeding a penny a mile. The Act also empowered the Board of Trade to require the provision of workmen's trains.

The statutory regulatory framework governing freight traffic required railways to act as common carriers by conveying any non-dangerous goods offered and to provide due facilities for such traffic (including facilities for through consignments between different railways). It also obliged them not to discriminate between customers in terms of charges or facilities. These requirements were given greater operational effect through the establishment in 1873 of a specialised court to deal with complaints about such matters, the Railway Commission (later the Railway & Canal Commission). In 1888 the Government took powers completely to abolish the maximum freight rates embodied in companies' enabling acts and to replace them with a standard classification of charges. Additional legislation in 1894 limited the companies' commercial freedom further by requiring them to justify to the Commission any increases in charges above 1892 levels even when these were within the new statutory maxima.

The ability of railway companies to manage their own businesses in their shareholders' interest was also curtailed through Parliament's increasing reluctance in the second half of the 19th century to sanction further railway amalgamations, or at least those involving substantial existing undertakings. Instead, the Select Committee appointed in response to a wave of such proposals in 1852 suggested that the national interest would be better served by permitting regulated working agreements between companies.⁶ The legislature was never entirely consistent in its approach to such matters: the amalgamation which created the North Eastern Railway was approved in 1854, even though this had been one of the proposals which had led to parliamentary concern in the previous session. However, it is significant that the two mid-Victorian waves of major amalgamation proposals — in the early 1850s and in the 1870s — both provoked a wider parliamentary scrutiny of the railway industry which was followed by a statutory strengthening of existing regulatory arrangements.

The acceptance of regulated monopoly

At one level, Parliament's strong influence on the outcome of the railway amalgamation movement of the mid-nineteenth century reflected the relative balance between the legislature and an executive which was only slowly developing the bureaucratic apparatus of modern government. It also appeared to imply a continuing belief in the efficacy of competition in protecting railway users against the companies, a belief which the railways themselves had done nothing to discourage by the periodic outbursts of price or service competition between rival routes and by their continuing willingness to promote new lines to invade the territory of another company.

But from the early days of the network there had been a recognition among thoughtful parliamentarians and Ministers, government officials, and railway companies themselves that the outlay of additional capital to dilute existing traffic flows did not make economic sense, and had ultimately to be paid for by railway customers as well as by shareholders. Consequently, the doctrine of 'equivalents' emerged, whereby established undertakings would be given a degree of protection in return for voluntary concessions on matters such as charges and facilities. Such a concept underlay Gladstone's negotiations with company representatives during the passage of his 1844 Act, and formed part of the Railway Department's dealings with the promoters of railway Bills.⁷

The notion that the public interest might be better served by a reduction in a railway's underlying costs than by perpetuating competition was slow in gaining general acceptance. However, once government began to interfere with railway charges and then with railway labour costs, by default it started to involve itself more directly in the financial performance of the industry. It then became more difficult to resist proposals which would have the effect of lowering the cost-base of railway undertakings, and this enabled working agreements and pooling arrangements between companies to be considered in a different light. Parliamentary approval in 1899 for the working agreement between the previously competitive South Eastern and London Chatham & Dover railways was the first significant indication of a shift in public policy, and this was followed by a number of substantial traffic pooling agreements in the first decade of the new century. A Board of Trade departmental committee examined the issue between 1909 and 1911, and reported that

the natural lines of the development of an improved

and more economical railway system lie in the direction of more perfect co-operation between the various railway companies, ... and the growth of co-operation and the more complete elimination of competition [is] a process at once inevitable and likely to be beneficial to the companies themselves, and, if properly safeguarded, to the public also.⁸

Railway companies themselves were prepared to accept modifications of their existing statutory powers and to make other concessions to users and indeed their workers if this was the price for accessing the benefits of working agreements. Such benefits could arise, for example, by sharing cartage resources, diverting trains on to more direct routes, and eliminating overlapping services.⁹ However, once the trend towards railway consolidation in the interests of greater efficiency had begun, it became more difficult to exclude from serious consideration the option of amalgamating all the companies into a single national network.

While railway nationalisation had formed part of the programme of the Labour Party from its formation in 1906, the issue subsequently gained currency more for pragmatic than for ideological reasons. The Liberal government secured an end to the first national railway strike in 1911 by agreeing with the companies that their charges could be increased to meet the resultant higher labour costs. But when the railways insisted on delivery of this commitment, which was implemented through the Railway & Canal Traffic Act of 1913, there was such hostility from their freight customers that the government set up a Royal Commission to examine once again the relationship between the railways and the state. It was generally understood that nationalisation would be one of the topics that the Commission would consider.¹⁰

The outbreak of war in August 1914 led to the suspension of the Royal Commission, which never reported. However, the application of the powers of the Regulation of the Forces Act brought the national network directly under government control, which was exercised through a Railway Executive Committee of ten leading railway managers. The effects of this unified control were so positive that there was a wide consensus that a return to the industry's fragmented pre-war structure of ownership and management was unthinkable, and before the general election of 1918 leading members of Lloyd George's coalition government gave strong indications that nationalisation was the favoured option.¹¹

The need to settle future policy, coupled with the

requirement to establish an acceptable basis for compensating the owning companies for the backlog of wartime maintenance, resulted in an extension of the emergency control arrangements until 1921. The Ministry of Transport Act, 1919, which authorised this extension, also established the new department of that name, with an elaborate initial structure which could indeed have lent itself to the supervision of a state-owned network.¹² However, during parliamentary debates on the Bill Ministers also made it clear that there was as yet no firm commitment either in favour of or against nationalisation, but that this issue would be resolved before government control was ended.¹³ In the event, the White Paper published in 1920 rejected nationalisation but instead proposed the compulsory grouping of the railway industry into seven area groups (one of which would be the London underground railways).¹⁴

There was undoubtedly a shift to the political right within the coalition, and this was coupled with a growing national mood that government should withdraw from its close involvement with industry that had become necessary during the war. But it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that one of the specific factors which influenced Lloyd George's cabinet to proceed with railway grouping rather than nationalisation was a wish to limit its financial exposure to the companies' shareholders. Initial estimates had suggested that the compensation that was due to the railways because of wartime control could be as high as £150 million;¹⁵ to this, of course, would have to be added the costs of buying out existing shareholders. For their part, the companies (or at least the larger undertakings) were prepared to negotiate about the actual level of wartime compensation in return for a more acceptable group structure. The same legislation which established the four eventual grouped mainline railways, the Railways Act of 1921, also fixed the wartime compensation at £60 million.

In one respect the Grouping was simply an extension of the principles of traffic pooling and working agreements that were becoming established before the war. Its underlying logic, which was accepted by the industry as well as by government, was that the rationalisation and savings that should result would enable all parties — shareholders, railway workers, the industry's customers, and the government — to benefit. The Act initiated a complete overhaul of the railway charging structure, supervised by a new Railway Rates Tribunal, with the object of allowing the grouped companies to earn pre-

established standard revenues. The legislation also revised the industry's collective bargaining system, to the extent that ultimate control over the wage rates of railway employees rested with the Central and National wages boards rather than with their employing company.¹⁶

But while many of the policies embodied in the Railways Act carried forward trends that had already been established prior to the war, in one fundamental respect the Grouping demonstrated how far the pre-war framework for determining the balance between the railways and the state had been superseded. While both the composition of the Groups and the modified regulatory apparatus within which they would work was on the face of the Act, the four grouped companies which it created owed their detailed constitution and financial structures not directly to Parliament, as had been the case in every previous statutory amalgamation, but to secondary legislation in the form of schemes submitted to the Minister and approved by an appointed body, the Railway Amalgamation Tribunal. The LMS, LNER, GWR and SR were, therefore, in a very real sense creatures of the state as well as of statute.

Such an outcome might ultimately have been more acceptable to the long-suffering ordinary shareholders of the grouped companies if the state had subsequently recognised how far the railways' operating environment had also changed from pre-war days. Besides the greater economic uncertainties of the inter-war years, the railways had to cope with new and vigorous competition from a road transport sector that was largely unregulated until 1930,¹⁷ and with profound changes in the political, industrial, and social geography of the British Isles.

These factors undermined the revenue assumptions that had formed the basis for the financial reconstruction of the railway industry into the grouped undertakings,¹⁸ but the Big Four companies were left within a regulated financial framework which was more appropriate to the railways' virtual monopoly of inland transport prior to the first world war than to the competitive realities of the inter-war years. The only significant advantages which the railways gained from their changed relationship with the state were the 75% reduction in their rates burden in 1929, the belated abolition of Passenger Duty the same year, and access to grants and cheap loans in the 1930s which were aimed at stimulating employment by encouraging investment in public works.

The achievement of state ownership

In 1914 the railways had been plunged into wartime government control from the peak of their pre-war prosperity. In 1939 they were at a financial nadir when the outbreak of the Second World War saw the reimposition of control on virtually the same basis, with a largely similar outcome. Traffic multiplied in response to wartime demand and the reduction in competing road transport and coastal shipping, but at the same time renewals and maintenance expenditure was curtailed to meet other priorities, while the railways' pool of male labour was depleted by the demands of the Forces and of wartime manufacturing.

As in 1918, government control was extended after hostilities ended, but this time there was an explicit postwar political agenda for the railways. Attlee's Labour government, elected in 1945, had a clear ideological commitment to nationalisation, but in the case of transport this commitment was also founded on the belief that unrestrained competition between different modes was essentially inefficient and that the public interest would be better served by a coordinated approach in which passenger and freight transport was undertaken by the mode that was best suited to meet the particular requirement. The London Passenger Transport Board, established in 1933, already provided a model of successful public sector passenger transport integration.

Accordingly, the 1947 Transport Act nationalised not only the railways (and the private-owner wagon fleet), but also most canals and road haulage. (Own-account road haulage and some local carriers were excluded.) Nationalisation of the railways also brought with it the substantial stakes in bus companies which the Big Four had built up between the wars, and the British Transport Commission (BTC) which was established by the Act used its powers to acquire other bus undertakings by agreement.

At vesting day on 1 January 1948 the British railway network became part of a publicly-owned national transport system. The former shareholders of the nationalised companies were compensated with fixed interest securities which were a first charge on the revenues of the BTC but which were guaranteed by the government. After more than a century, the issue of who runs the railways had apparently been unequivocally resolved in the state's favour.

That is not to say that the transfer of ownership resolved all the issues between the nationalised railway industry and successive governments — relations between British Railways and its sponsoring

government department and Ministers were complex and at times fraught.¹⁹ The doctrine that a publicly-controlled railway network should be managed at arm's length from government was well established,²⁰ and the wartime Railway Executive Committees provided a precedent for professional management of a nationally-controlled system that was echoed in the title of the Railway Executive, one of the BTC's six functional agencies. The 1947 Transport Act also perpetuated separate economic regulation of the nationalised railway industry, in the form of the quasi-judicial determination of passenger fares and freight charges by the Transport Tribunal. The interface between the state and railway operations therefore remained fertile territory for dispute even when the government was the railways' sole shareholder.

Despite the rhetoric of integration which underpinned transport nationalisation and which formed part of the BTC's statutory duties,²¹ the BTC's Executives were organised on modal lines, with the exception of the London Transport Executive, which took over the responsibilities for London's buses and underground network that had previously been exercised by the London Passenger Transport Board. Strategic policy direction and coordination therefore rested at BTC level, and although limited progress was made in some parts of the country in rationalising and integrating the respective roles of rail and road transport, Labour's political aspirations for the nationalised transport sector were interrupted by the change of government in 1951. The Conservative's Transport Act of 1953 partially denationalised road haulage and abolished the Railway Executive, making the BTC directly responsible for the railways but superimposing appointed Area Boards on the regional management structure which had been established at nationalisation.²²

The sale of much of the BTC's road haulage interests exposed British Railways to renewed competition for freight at a time when increasing car ownership was also beginning to undermine rail's market share of passenger traffic. In addition, during the 1950s the railway system had still to recover from the investment and maintenance backlog of the war years and the period of austerity which followed. In 1956, the BTC made an operating loss on its railway activities for the first time, and the problem of railway deficits increasingly became a political issue.

The response of the Conservative government to the problems of the nationalised railway industry which it had inherited was consistent with the switch

of political ethos from a coordinated to a competitive approach to the transport sector. It significantly liberalised the railway freight charging regime, and in 1962 abolished the railways' historic common carrier obligations. The government also eased BTC's debt burden, and in 1955 approved its £1,240 million railway modernisation programme, designed to overcome the investment backlog and to equip Britain with a faster and more efficient railway system which could compete on better terms with road transport.

This 'dash for freedom' failed for two reasons. Firstly, it was probably too late in the trend towards the increasing use of road transport for both passenger and freight traffic for even a modernised railway to compete more effectively in purely financial terms with these alternatives. Secondly, despite a reappraisal of the modernisation programme in 1959, the BTC failed fully to grasp the strategic opportunities presented by the long-awaited availability of investment funds. Some of the more massive monuments of the modernisation programme can still be seen in the redundant acreage of the new freight marshalling yards of that period.

In a penetrating report in 1960, the Select Committee on Nationalised Industries criticised both the BTC and its government sponsors for the state of the railways. Most fundamentally, however, it pointed out that the lack of clarity in the Commission's objectives, and in particular the failure to distinguish between social and economic aims, had contributed significantly to the financial and policy confusion in which the industry found itself.²³

This report was the prelude to another government-inspired financial and structural reorganisation of the nationalised railways. In 1962 the BTC was replaced by the British Railways Board (BRB) and its other transport interests hived off into separate undertakings, thus ending the last vestiges of the coordinated approach adopted in 1948. These changes also led to the large-scale line and station closure programme associated with Dr Beeching and which continued even after the return of a Labour government in 1964, resulting in the biggest reduction in the physical extent of the network in the 20th century.

More positively, however, the report of the Select Committee moved the debate about the national role of the industry back into an area that had been largely sidelined since the 1840s. By emphasising that transport had social as well as economic functions, it paved the way for Barbara Castle's seminal transport

white papers of the mid-1960s²⁴ and for the further reorganisation of the bus and railway industries in the 1968 Transport Act. The coordination objective enjoyed a revival in the merging of the BRB's cartage and Freightliner businesses into the road-based National Freight Corporation and also in the facilitation of passenger transport integration in the main conurbations. However, the new policies also restated the rationale for state intervention in the transport sector in terms of the need to address issues which were not fully reflected in the commercial transactions of individual transport users, or which arose out of the wider social case for ensuring adequate mobility.

Using the techniques of formal cost-benefit analysis, this approach justified explicit subsidy for particular transport operations on the basis that the value of doing so outweighed the costs of the alternatives, whether in terms of road congestion, environmental damage and accidents avoided, or the time savings and other welfare benefits that would result from retaining a rail service rather than a bus alternative or nothing at all. In common with earlier interventions in the affairs of the railway industry, it took market failure as its justification. In this changed world, however, the relevant market failure was not the monopoly power of a dominant railway industry that without state intervention was in a position to extract high charges from users and could suppress alternatives such as canals and local carriers. Instead, it was the failure of road user charges to reflect the wider external costs of car and lorry transport. This new approach also amounted to an explicit acknowledgement, which would have been unthinkable in 1921 or 1947, or even in 1953, that Britain's railway system could no longer hope to finance itself completely from passenger and freight revenues, except at the cost of service withdrawals on a far larger scale than the Beeching cuts.

The new transport policy orthodoxy of the 1960s had a sound pedigree in the economic literature. It was also consistent with the underlying approach of the European Community, which the United Kingdom joined in 1973 and which required that any form of state aid had to be for explicit purposes. The formal relationship between the government and the railways therefore moved closer to that between a client and a contractor, in which the state at both national and local levels purchased non-commercial railway services or facilities in pursuit of other policy objectives, allowing the BRB to get on with the core business of running the 'commercial' railway in

competition with other modes of transport as efficiently as possible.

This was the theory. Inevitably, however, a large state-owned railway could not be entirely ignored by government in its wider management of the economy. Consequently, during the 1970s and 1980s the commercial interests of the BRB had to be subordinated at different times to the government's need for price or wage restraint, or to contain public sector borrowing. In addition, the new grant arrangements did not wholly eliminate deficit financing, particularly in times of economic downturn.²⁵ Nevertheless, within these parameters, the policy framework that was established by the 1968 Act proved in practice to be remarkably stable. In particular, it soon largely stemmed the trend of passenger service withdrawals that had preceded it: the Serpell report of 1983 was the last significant overt review of the size of the network, and was effectively pigeon-holed.²⁶ The more 'commercial' and less politically visible railway freight business, however, continued its decline, as a consequence of industrial change, the progressive liberalisation of the road haulage sector, and the growth in the motorway network.

The return to a private sector railway

As noted above, the post-1968 railway remained in practice part of the apparatus of the state. But the purchaser/provider basis of the new financial arrangements between government and the BRB could apply equally to a private sector contractor that was supplying transport services to a government. The monolithic status of the nationalised railway industry began to be eroded during the 1980s for a number of reasons: the prevailing political attitude of the Thatcher government; the BRB's increasing focus on what it regarded as its core railway business; and the opportunities to generate disposal proceeds (and avoid public sector investment) from selling-off peripheral activities. During the 1980s several large ancillary functions that had traditionally been associated with the railways were sold to the private sector. These included the BRB's shipping subsidiary, Sealink, sold in 1984; its hotel portfolio, disposed of individually between 1982 and 1984; and British Rail Engineering Limited, sold in 1989.²⁷

During the 1980s the Thatcher government developed its programme of privatising the nationalised utilities. However, while the concept of denationalising the core rail business was already being discussed in some political and civil service circles,

it did not form part of the Conservative's manifesto proposals in either of the two general elections of that decade, apparently because of the Prime Minister's personal caution about adopting such a policy.²⁸ The BRB, in the throes of reorganising into business-led sectors, instead put its faith in improving its own commercial efficiency and in attracting private investment partners into those areas of the railway which provided suitable opportunities for 'privatisation from within', such as the provision of freight rolling stock and terminals, or airport rail links.²⁹

In 1988 railway privatisation began to be discussed publicly by Ministers, and in 1990 became a firm government commitment, assisted by the change of Prime Minister in that year. However, despite the experience that had been gained from earlier privatisations, there was at that stage no agreement within government about the form or objectives of railway privatisation. In particular, given the complexities of the railway industry and the inevitability that it would continue to require public subsidy, there would be difficulties in reconciling various conflicting objectives. These included maximising privatisation proceeds; minimising ongoing subsidy needs; retaining network benefits; and delivering customer and efficiency benefits through competition and market liberalisation. Options ranged from the selling-off of British Rail as a whole or the sale of vertically-integrated track and operating businesses on either a regional or sectoral basis to the separation of infrastructure from train service provision and the disposal of the latter in a manner which would encourage competition between different operators.³⁰ Whatever the form of privatisation, however, a continuing role for the state would be required, in managing subsidy and the passenger service obligations that subsidy was intended to purchase (including the delivery of network benefits); in regulating competition within the industry; and of course in continuing to oversee railway safety.

In the event, having somewhat unexpectedly won the general election of 1992, the Conservatives were forced to crystallise proposals rapidly in order to achieve rail privatisation within the life of the new parliament. A white paper in 1992 set out the intention to separate infrastructure from train operations and sell these to the private sector.³¹ The necessary legislation, the Railways Act, followed in 1993.

The privatisation process has been described in a number of studies,³² and it is not the purpose of this article to discuss in detail how BRB's engineering and operating activities, and its remaining ancillary

businesses, were transferred to the private sector between 1993 and 1997. However, four key aspects of the Conservative government's chosen privatisation model had a significant influence both on subsequent events and on the nature of the relationship between the state and the privatised railway.

First, the government embodied its political views and its experience of previous privatisations by disaggregating the new industry structure wherever possible in order to provide opportunities for competition and the potential efficiency gains and widening of customer choice that would result. This was seen, for example, in the disposal of the BRB's track maintenance and renewal activities in the form of regional companies which would have the scope to compete between themselves and with new entrants to the market when their 'dowry' of initial contracts expired, or in the transfer of passenger rolling stock assets to three leasing companies.

However, this model failed when it came to the disposal of the BRB's main freight business: this was divided into three companies, but market conditions dictated their sale to a single purchaser, which under the title of English Welsh & Scottish Railways (EWS) re-integrated the three businesses, together with its separate purchases of BR's mail and express parcels division and Railfreight Distribution. This left Freightliner as the only substantial competitor to EWS, although since railway freight was privatised on a notionally commercial basis the market was open to competition from new entrants, which did in fact emerge.

Secondly, the passenger business, although disaggregated into 25 franchises based on the regional or line-of-route profit centres into which the BRB had restructured its passenger sectors in preparation for privatisation, carried with it a number of specific obligations to which the government had committed itself in order to secure the passage of its privatisation legislation. Chief among these was the understanding that passenger train services would not be reduced as a result of privatisation, but undertakings were also given that key fares would be pegged at an annual rate of increase of 1% less than inflation; that tickets would be interavailable between different operators; and that service quality standards would be maintained. In addition, the statutory rights of the Passenger Transport Executives in the major conurbations to specify fares and the level and quality of passenger services in their areas was confirmed in the privatisation legislation.

Unlike rail freight, the passenger businesses there-

fore brought with them some very specific service delivery obligations when they were privatised. Virtually all of them would also require government financial support, which would need to be increased if the threat of additional competition increased their riskiness as business propositions. So while the subdivision of BR's passenger businesses ensured that there would be competition for some point-to-point traffic (eg between London and Birmingham), and also over shared sections of common route (eg between Newcastle and York), the government decided that the existing passenger businesses would be generally protected from new entrants until 1999.³³ Consequently, the point at which competition would be secured would be when the individual passenger businesses were disposed of to the private sector. Financial orthodoxy dictated that in order to maintain the effectiveness of such competition, the operation of passenger services should be retendered periodically.³⁴

In contrast with the disposal of BR's freight businesses as an outright sale, the state therefore retained ultimate 'ownership' of passenger services. What was sold were franchises to operate groups of services under specified conditions for given periods, in return where necessary for public subsidy. These franchises were offered to the market in a competitive bidding process, which was handled by a new government agency set up for this purpose, the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising (OPRAF). OPRAF laid down the minimum Passenger Service Requirement that bidders were obliged to operate, and financially-based performance regimes were put in place to incentivise franchisees to maintain service quality. The other requirements for each franchise were either likewise directly included within the specifics of that franchise agreement or formed part of the general licence conditions that all operators had to satisfy.

Despite initial doubts about the feasibility of the timescale, all 25 franchises were let between December 1995 and February 1997, and the last passenger services operated under the auspices of the nationalised BRB ran at the end of March 1997. The franchises were sold to a variety of private sector owners,³⁵ among which bus companies predominated. The financial terms varied from the payment of a premium by the franchisee to OPRAF, either from the outset or over the life of the franchise, to ongoing (but generally declining) financial support. Some of the new owners, such as National Express Group, Prism, and First Group, had interests in several franchises, though these were often geographically

dispersed. In three cases (Anglia, Chiltern, and GNER) the franchise went to an owner with no other franchises.

The freight companies and passenger franchises were sold with rights to use the track, depots and stations which they needed to operate their services. This reflected the third distinct element of the Conservative's approach to railway privatisation: in order to ensure the opportunities for on-rail competition that were built into the disposal plans for the BR freight business, and remained the longer-term objective for passenger services (and also, in its view, to meet European requirements for international train movements and the financial separation of railway infrastructure provision from train operation) the government considered that it would be necessary to have a separate track authority. Consequently, Railtrack was created on Ministerial instruction from within the BRB organisation in 1993–4 and established as a separate government-owned company on 1 April 1994.³⁶ Unlike the disaggregated approach to the BRB's other functions, Railtrack was created as a single undertaking covering the whole of Britain, with ownership of all operational land, track, structures, signalling, stations and depots, together with responsibility for managing, maintaining and renewing these assets.³⁷

The fourth element of the government's railway privatisation policy resulted from its decision to establish Railtrack as a monolithic undertaking. Because Railtrack would be a single supplier, with a range of potentially competing customers seeking to use its assets, it would be necessary for the sale of access rights to be regulated in the public interest, to ensure that the network operator did not abuse its monopoly power or discriminate between its customers. It would also be necessary to put in place and monitor a performance regime, to incentivise Railtrack to deliver the necessary quality of outputs to its train operator customers and to ensure that there was correspondence with any penalties or incentive payments arising out of the OPRAF performance regimes when Railtrack's under- or over-performance affected TOC performance. Accordingly, the Railways Act provided for the appointment of a Rail Regulator, primarily to oversee the price and conditions for network access, but also with responsibilities under competition legislation and for licensing railway operators, and with some consumer protection functions.

The British rail privatisation model was therefore

complex, and involved striking a balance between public interest considerations and the free play of market forces — an almost constant theme of the state's relations with the railway industry from the outset. Issues of public finance also played an important part, again a significant element of the relationship from the 1920s onwards. To manage these balances and deliver railway privatisation the Conservative government created two new public bodies, the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising and the Office of the Rail Regulator. It also maintained the long tradition of state safety regulation of the railway industry through the Railway Inspectorate, now part of the Health & Safety Executive.

A further complication in the privatisation programme arose from the fact that the original political intention had been to retain Railtrack in the public sector in the medium term at least, albeit as a lean business which would access private sector efficiency gains by outsourcing most of its engineering activities. This would have enabled Railtrack to add value in the public interest by taking a strategic view of the network as a whole, in a role which had some similarities to that of the Highways Agency in England and Wales. State ownership would also have made Railtrack a perhaps more appropriate custodian of the railway industry's group standards, certain system obligations such as the maintenance of the published national timetable, and of delegated responsibilities in the safety case processes. Finally, its retention in public ownership would have had the additional advantage of returning a significant portion of the subsidy paid to the private sector TOCs to the public sector in the form of track access charges and station lease payments.

However, at relatively short notice the Major government decided to privatise Railtrack in 1996. While the immediate motive may have been the short-term benefit to the Exchequer that would result from an additional asset sale before a general election that could not be delayed beyond May 1997, another political advantage was that this would complicate any attempt by an incoming government to reverse rail privatisation.³⁸ While ostensibly implacably opposed to the Conservative's railway policy, the opposition front bench's attitude became increasingly ambivalent as the privatisation programme proceeded. Railtrack's prospectus contained a statement from the shadow transport secretary which merely warned prospective investors that a Labour administration would use regulatory and contractual mechanisms to increase government influence over the network

and made any extension of public ownership and control over Railtrack 'dependent on the availability of resources and as priorities allow'.³⁹

Railtrack was duly floated in May 1996, and the rapid increase in its share price from the initial offer price of £3.90 not only appeared to confirm the criticisms of those who argued that the network, in common with other railway assets, had been disposed of too cheaply, but also put the cost of renationalisation more firmly beyond the financial reach of an incoming Labour government which was committed to fiscal prudence. More seriously from the longer-term perspective of the railway industry, it transformed Railtrack from being a public interest steward of the network into a profit-maximising commercial player in the market, with a regulatory regime and financial structure that in the view of a later Rail Regulator was not fit for purpose for the undertaking's changed status as a private sector company.⁴⁰ Somewhat ironically, the changed status of Railtrack also created a new role for the British Railways Board, which had been left with mainly residuary functions after the disposal of its main operational activities but which the Labour government was able to utilise as a source of strategic advice on the future role of Britain's railways within an integrated transport strategy.

Despite the gloomy predictions of some of the opponents of rail privatisation, and expectations within government that the railways were a static or declining industry, the new freight and passenger operating companies were able to achieve significant traffic growth after privatisation, aided by a track access charging structure which enabled extra services to be operated at marginal cost, and by a generally buoyant economy. Railway passenger-kilometres grew by 30% between 1995 and 2000, and freight tonne-kilometres by 38%.⁴¹ However, not surprisingly, this rapid growth in the volume of traffic handled by a network that had a history of under-investment resulted in a deterioration in punctuality. This, coupled with the profits that were enjoyed in some parts of the privatised industry either as the result of business growth or as a consequence of the resale of franchises or privatised assets, fuelled political demands within the government for greater intervention in the railway industry. In particular, there was felt to be a need to provide more effective strategic direction for a mode of transport that was seen as central to the delivery of government transport objectives but at the same time continued to absorb substantial amounts of public funding.⁴²

This new direction was to be provided by merging the functions of OPRAF and the BRB into a new Strategic Rail Authority, which was ultimately legitimised by the Transport Act, 2000 but operated in 'shadow' form after the appointment of Sir Alastair Morton as chairman of the BRB and chairman-designate of the SRA in April 1999. Sir Alastair's vision, however, remained that of a private sector railway, in which the state provided a more stable environment for investment by lengthening franchise periods. By this means network and rolling stock capacity would be enhanced to give long-term performance benefits; in the shorter term, alterations to the performance regimes would incentivise franchisees and Railtrack to deliver better operational performance.

Unfortunately, before progress could be made in delivering this vision, the fatal high-speed accident at Hatfield in October 2000 led a crisis of confidence in the railway industry. The widespread imposition of speed restrictions across the network for safety reasons had a catastrophic effect on performance and passenger patronage, adding to the financial problems that a number of franchisees were already experiencing as a result of difficulties in containing costs within the levels forecast in their franchise bids. The additional liabilities and costs faced by Railtrack following the Hatfield accident, together with other problems, principally the cost overruns on the West Coast Main Line project, led ultimately to that company's financial collapse in October 2001. Substantial additional funding was required for a number of franchises, to the extent that the value-for-money offered by the passenger rail industry began again to be called into question.⁴³ The freight businesses also suffered financially and in volume terms from post-Hatfield disruption of the network.

Despite its policy stance when in opposition, the Labour government has persisted with the privatised model it inherited from its predecessor, choosing to establish Network Rail (Railtrack's successor) as a private sector company limited by guarantee, and maintaining the franchising of passenger services, albeit that the SRA has adopted a more prescriptive

approach to new franchises and has taken one franchise back into direct operation pending the creation of the Integrated Kent Franchise.⁴⁴ More recently, following the Rail Regulator's Interim Review of track access charges, which has identified the requirement for a substantial increase in Network Rail's income over the next five years (much of it because of the financial consequences of Railtrack's collapse), the Secretary of State for Transport has announced a further review of the structure of the railway industry.⁴⁵

At the time of writing, the outcome of this review cannot be anticipated. It is clear, however, that privatisation has not reduced the interaction between the state and those who operate Britain's railways — if anything, the railway industry is currently higher up governmental agendas than during much of its life as a nationalised undertaking. Terry Gourvish commented in 2002 that 'the demands of public policy ... made it inevitable that privatisation would be at best partial, and that whether through regulation or subsidy the government would continue to play a major role in the railways' fortunes'. He added: 'Government intervention is still with us; only the hoops are different.'⁴⁶

Those hoops have continued to evolve over the life of the railway industry, reflecting changes in its status and economic power, in the expectations of its direct customers and of the wider community, and in the requirements of government. Present concerns arise primarily from the scale of the financial demands that the railway is now making on public funds, and from questions about its ability to deliver the objectives that it has been set as part of the government's wider transport policies. This is, however, just the latest demonstration of the political importance of railways in Britain, and in one particular respect the wheel has come full circle. Once again, any change in the existing framework which the state has set for the railways could have profound effects on the financial interests and outlook of private sector investors whose resources are currently committed to this industry and to its future development.

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 30. For detailed analysis of these issues, see Gourvish, *British Rail 1974–97*, 365–400, and Shaw, op cit.
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 35. There was political controversy over whether the BRB should itself be allowed to bid, since the legislation effectively left it as operator of last resort. In practice the Board was debarred from bidding, but BR staff were encouraged to submit management-employee buy-out proposals for franchises. See Shaw, op cit, 117; Gourvish, *British Rail 1974–97*, 411, 442.
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Varieties of Railway and Canal History

David St John Thomas

Once one was proud to call oneself a railway historian. In today's world the term is hardly recognised. There were never many who could claim to be railway historians, and most, including Jack Simmons, the best of all, have left the scene. Much the same can be said of canals. Nobody has even partially replace Charles Hadfield, the Pevsner and much more of the waterway world.

It is often said, and even more assumed, that today's book buyers prefer pictures. Reading is confined to captions and 'short takes' of text. In truth, even if they had not previously been published, it would now be economically impossible to produce either of the two series that brought Charles Hadfield and myself together to form David & Charles: 'The Canals of the British Isles' and 'A Regional History of the Railways of Great Britain'.

Yet from the 1950s until the mid-1980s, the books in these series were bestselling profit makers that helped David & Charles take a more relaxed attitude towards the slow sales of the histories of many individual railways and canals. Moreover, the first volume in each of them, *British Canals* and *The West Country*, achieved sales of a level unheard of today. While the canal volume (a key general volume which the railway series alas lacked) probably reached an even higher figure, I can recall from memory that *The [railway] West Country* achieved 50,000.

It is worth pausing a moment to ask how that was then possible and is not today? A vital factor is the

number of other titles published. Both *British Canals* and *The West Country* were rarities. Anyone even vaguely interested in railways and/or canals bought them. But so did those more generally interested in social and economic history. The publication of *The West Country* was a regional event of some note. The book was seriously reviewed on radio and in all the regional papers, and even nationally in papers such as *The Times Literary Supplement*, which certainly would not happen today. Whenever (then working as a journalist) I visited the homes of local people who had at least a small selection of local-history books on their shelves, there it was. Again, that simply would not happen today.

The over-production of reduced quality of railway books has destroyed the whole genre. The last-ever railway history — I'll discuss that phrase later — title to reach bestseller status was possibly my *The Country Railway*, first published in 1976. Well over 160,000 copies were sold, again reaching an audience well beyond railway enthusiasts. Significantly, the Railway Book Club had not yet been born. Book Club Associates promoted it through their general clubs. Today it would probably be seen as exclusively belonging to the Railway Book Club. Penguin did a paperback edition, something that has rarely if ever happened to a railway title since.

Another example, in local history but with a railway content, might be cited to show how totally things have changed. After his classic study of *The Somer-*

set & Dorset Railway, Robin Athill wrote a volume of local studies which we called *Old Mendip* and made the first of a series of 'Old ...' of regional studies. None of the later ones sold anything like as well as his. Yes, it was well-written by a loveable character who really knew his Mendips, but most of the initial sales were made purely on title, with at most the supporting evidence of an advance jacket. Because there had never been such a book before, booksellers throughout the land bought it. I recall selling a dozen copies to a Manchester bookseller. Try asking today's book sales rep to do this and he would laugh. It even sold well in Canada and Australia.

While Charles Hadfield sensibly provided a key, national volume for his canal series, at the time I thought the task of writing one for the railway series was beyond me. 'You have to be at least sixty really to understand railways,' was one of my sayings as a young man. Moreover, synthesis of the fifteen regional volumes does not make a national one. Curiously I had just reached this point when I read 'British Railway History: Jack Simmons's Last Thoughts' by Gordon Biddle in the July 2003 issue of the *Journal*. Astonishing is it not that there has never been a single history of Britain's railways as a whole? Would that Jack Simmons had lived to complete it, but even he would have found it a formidable task. Indeed, it is flattering to note that he described the 'Regional History' series as the 'one serious and valuable attempt ... to break down the barriers that company histories set up'.

Returning to the phrase 'real railway history', what is it? If one word sums it up, it is perhaps perspective. No, some readers might say. It has to be accuracy. I disagree. The most accurate work is useless if it lacks perspective — saying why the railway was built, and describing its overall character, achievement and failures. Of course accuracy is important, but a characterless chronology is not history.

The chronological approach is something we used often to argue about at David & Charles. I have always strongly favoured thematic history. Of course chronology cannot be ignored, but it was when I first studied the 1930s *A History of the Southern Railway* by CF Denby Marshall that I realised how utterly lacking in perspective a strictly chronological approach can be. For example there is nothing of substance about the South Western's North Cornwall line, but a series of isolated statements as the route was steadily opened over the years. It goes without saying that one cannot totally ignore the passage of

time, but a 300-word summary of a section of route can include a variety of salient facts in perspective to bring it alive. Charles Hadfield compromised in his canal books with a number of sections devoted to different periods of history but using a thematic approach within each. Because of his mastery of the subject, it worked quite well.

Alas, much of today's outpouring of railway literature lacks discipline, chronological, thematic or anything else. Though sometimes there is the geographical following of a route, some so-called picture histories seem to result from the photographs being placed randomly, maybe in the order in which they were acquired or picked up, as confusing as the numbering of a Japanese street by the order in which homes and offices were built. Pitiful is a word that often comes to mind when I see yet another disorderly album devoid of perspective and with captions talking about steam locomotives 'patiently' and 'proudly' doing this and that. In truth many authors are only interested in locomotives, giving the impression that routes were built and given gradients and junctions for the sole purpose of glorifying them running up and down.

One problem has been the extremely poor quality of much railway book reviewing. This Society's *Journal*, and that of the Friends of the York Railway Museum, alone provide balanced, critical but fair coverage. *The Railway Magazine* book review coverage had often been, and occasionally still is, lamentable, inconsistently damning a new printing of a book whose first edition it praised, and often homing in minutiae. In the past the formal details were sometimes only followed by: 'We have noticed the following errors,' which were anyway not always errors for the reviewer was not always as well informed as the author. The sole comment that 'We have seen several of the pictures before' attacks one of my principles of railway history, that the re-use of an excellent photograph which happens to make several interesting points is much better than newness for its own sake — and especially so in the case of a branch-line history whose local readers are unlikely to have seen the pictures before.

What a difference there is between the best and worst branch-line histories! The Middleton Press sets a high standard. Many of today's self-published books are self-edited with no professional critical eye. Yet in most local and technical publications, good and bad are given equal treatment.

In transport, as in other publishing, I have always

thought that there were three main parties involved: the author, the publisher and the subject, and of these the last is the greatest. A good subject deserves a good book. Is it not wicked to spoil the market for a good one by rushing out an ill-researched, poorly-written one? Authors are not automatons and a healthy difference in treatment is to be expected, but pure inadequacy is not a matter of taste.

Good history is something that has perspective and brings what it is describing to life, etching itself on the mind of the reader. While the British book trade, book reviews and even library buying do not do enough to sort out the wheat from the chaff, there is one vital respect in which quality is rewarded: readers enjoy and remember the best, and often recall it in their own work. Thus, whether they care to acknowledge it or not, most recent writers on canals owe a debt to Charles Hadfield. My *West Country* in the 'Regional Railway History' series was locally nicknamed 'the bible', and much of its research has been echoed in dozens of later titles. However, it is a moot point whether any new title would now make a significantly big impact to achieve that in the first place.

Today any older title naturally seems out of date, for book production has moved on significantly. In particular, picture reproduction has improved out of recognition as well as become cheaper. For a reasonable run, colour is now little more expensive than — in real terms — black and white used to be. Anything involving hand work has however become excessively expensive, so good maps, and especially the large folding maps of yesteryear, are scarce.

Television and video as well as better print production of pictures have naturally made today's reader more visually aware. Some of us have tried to combine good history with lively pictorial presentation, such as in the '150' series and other large-format books Patrick Whitehouse and I produced, with some of the more interesting words displayed in 'bite-size' boxes. But while there has been a revival of the long literary novel, and travel writing is better displayed in bookshops than ever, to most people railway history no longer means a good read. Railway videos indeed mop up much of the spending there used to be on railway literature. The editorial expenditure David & Charles and other good publishers used to incur is utterly out of the question for today's books of much shorter print runs.

It is trendy to say (or at least think) that today we have the wrong kind of readers. There is however

another major factor to take on board — that the market has passed long passed its peak because all obvious subjects have been covered, many several times over. It is far harder to be original. The large-format, profusely-illustrated titles such as the '150' series and *The Great Days of the Country Railway / Express Trains* was in a sense a last hurrah to present traditional history in a contemporary way. The law of diminishing returns works even with bright new ideas.

A further consideration is that during our writing lifetimes the Railway Age has slipped further and further back into history. As a young man I heard first-hand of what trains were like on the broad gauge, of the building of cut-offs and the Great Central into London, and was as familiar with the lingo of pre-grouping companies as of their successors. Most of the best railway writers had deeply-rooted memories full of anecdotal material. It would now be impossible to assemble a team of contributors such as Patrick Whitehouse and I used for the '150' books on the four railways of the Grouping Age. Even a generation ago it was hard enough finding qualified authors for the 'Regional Railway History' series.

Of course railway history does not stop with nationalisation or the abolition of steam — indeed one problem has always been to persuade authors of historical works to pay sufficient attention to later periods — but we are now so much more remote from the epic days of building and knitting the country together with faster trains and goods traffic that revolutionised the way people lived.

The contents of a good history

At which point it might be appropriate to analyse in more depth what good railway and canal history might include but so often does not.

The essence of the route. Often lacking is a summary of what a route was all about, its unique factors, how it fitted into the wider scheme of affairs, and so on.

Incorporation. Political issues might be considered along with the kind of landscape and its economy through which it was proposed to build the route, and of course the dates of Acts of Parliament. Though it is sometimes helpful to quote from newspaper reports of public meetings — they often reveal tell-tell titbits, especially about local trade — most readers are interested in what actually happened, not the planning. For this reason, most of the best

histories only touch briefly on schemes that never happened.

Building. There is usually fascinating material to be unearthed, but a world of difference between good writers skilfully selecting and ordering it and those merely compiling a catalogue. A short quote by a contemporary observer, the engineer or contractor, helps bring things to life. Major engineering works should of course be mentioned. Was completion delayed, possibly by difficult terrain, a failed contractor, or economic crisis (such as that of 1866 which brought much construction to a halt)? Were there labour disturbances, accidents?

Openings. Too many transport histories tell us that opening date was such and such when the directors enjoyed a feast and the workers a cold collation. Though such details should be included, more purposeful authors start by emphasising the practical difference that a new route made. What were the immediate effects by the local economy (such as often halving of the price of coal and doubling that of milk in the countryside)? Did the telegraph come with the railway, and were London newspapers available locally for the first time? Any particular industry helped, or indeed wiped out, as sometimes happened when local mills and breweries could not face competition from outside?

The route. Some historians prefer to describe this around here, though others to leave it until near the end of their book. Whichever, special characteristics, such as gradients and operating problems, major engineering works and station facilities need covering. How convenient were key stations for the places they served? Station architecture, loop lines, where engineers were stationed, private sidings or docks, signalling ... the choice of ingredients is vast, but emphasising unique characteristics is especially valuable.

Mid-history. What social and economic trends were established, and how did traffic fare? What improvements were made, such as doubling or quadrupling track and replacing wooden viaducts? Did the local population rise or fall? How were agriculture and industry affected, for example, by specialising for distant markets, and what about tourism?

Later history. Roughly a third of railway history is post nationalisation. Even on routes subsequently closed, there were lively times and in many cases new works. What traffic is left today on routes open, or indeed reopened? What kind of services are run on today's railways (in many cases of course more

frequent as well as faster)? What is left to see of abandoned railways and canals?

Locomotives and rolling stock. Many so-called histories are lightly-disguised locomotives histories. O S Nock was a particular offender. On locomotives and their performance he was brilliant, but he thought and wrote as though 85 per cent of railway history took place on the footplate. There is nothing wrong with a locomotive history as such, but label it honestly. Conversely, some real railway historians have felt ill at ease in locomotive matters, perhaps realising that many readers will have greater expertise than themselves. Yet history is not complete without full coverage of locomotives. After all, it was the steam engine that first took man faster than an animal and that first knit Britain more closely together. While many railway books have too many three-quarter views of trains, balance is destroyed if one does not realise that the locomotive and the carriage behind it were the most modern, stylish things seen in all parts of the land.

Passenger trains. Though sometimes these are brought into earlier sections, a detailed review is often illuminating. Increasing speeds with better motive power, the length and type of trains, through services, refreshment facilities, excursions are among topics to include. But who used the trains? Local people shopping, connecting with other trains, going to school? Visitors coming for holidays or to see buildings and other points of special interest? What was the changing ratio between express and local services? What about Saturday nights and Sundays?

Freight. Though we used to be taught that railways made their profit on freight and that passengers were the icing on the cake, goods trains are too often neglected. What were the major mineral or other flows, who were the railway's biggest customers? What about livestock flows, local cattle or sheep markets or fairs?

Parcel business. Any special flows? Newspapers, mail, milk, flowers? What was carried in the guard's van revealed much about a tract of countryside.

Signalling and accidents. What hours was the line kept open. Did peak traffic create difficulties, was it a diversionary route? Were there significant accidents? In the case of canals, any significant floods of droughts, and what arrangements for keeping the traffic moving in seriously-cold weather?

Staff. Railways and canals were major employers, yet many books on both railway and canals totally ignore this aspect. The railway station and canal

wharf were often the most important trading posts for miles around.

End features. There is a huge range of possible ‘extras’: chronology, gazetteer, dramatis personae, appendices (such as extracts from specific records or accounts of early journeys), acknowledgments, bibliography, index. Well chosen and developed, they add considerable depth to history and, moreover, can lighten the burden — such as the need to state precise opening and closing dates — in the main text. While some end features are of course optional, even in a short picture history that hardly needs indexing there is no excuse for lack of acknowledgements and simple bibliography or note on further reading.

Photographs and captions. At David & Charles we always laid out pictures and went through a check list. Had the best pictures making several points been chosen and were those points fully explained in the captions? Was there a good balance between close-ups and broader scenes? Were there sufficient showing people and goods and what purpose the railway served? Were pictures of obvious highlights included, even if published before? Were stations, signalling, locomotives, locomotive depots, rolling stock, trains in the landscape, special as well as ordinary occasions, accidents and other aspects properly represented? Was there a sound balance between different historical periods? Could captions more usefully make comparisons with other pictures? Were any pictures especially worthwhile referring

to in the main text? Gradient profile, a good map, track layouts, old notices and advertisements, timetables of several periods, tickets — they all have had a part to play. We were suspicious of authors who wanted to use too many of their own photographs.

Conclusions

Though the heyday of railway history may have passed, we should do our best to encourage good perspective and such details as the courtesy of acknowledgements even in albums, and above all to encourage authors to remember that railways and canals were businesses serving the needs of others. Different authors and readers will naturally have different preferences, and guide lines which I found useful will not necessarily work well for others. Yet even the writing of a short article on a railway or canal requires discipline to ensure that there is a wide choice of ingredients and sensible progression through them. Brave is the author who chooses a theme beyond the limits of a single route or company to portray an aspect of transport with good historical perspective against the social and economic background. If the best railway history were after all still to be written, it would surely break new ground in a thematic way to bring to life the way we used to live and work as well as the sights and sounds of yesteryear.

*Pat White, President 1978–80 and
Journal Editor 1990–94, at the
AGM visit to Whitemoor, 1986
[Allan C Mott]*



An Approach to Canal Research

Charles Hadfield

Most of this article is derived from a paper read at the Annual Meeting of the Society on 30 April 1955 and published in the Journal in July 1955. The section 'Taking Notes' has been extracted from 'Writing Canal and Railway History', published in the Journal in November 1962. A compilation from these two articles with notes of a talk given at the West London Industrial Archeological Society's Conference on Industrial Archaeology Research on 24 October 1981 was made in 1993 by Tony Warren, then the RCHS Research Officer, and published in the Journal in March 1998.

I want to start by saying some general things, and go on to say some particular things. I am talking to those who are beginners — the experts can take a nap until I have finished.

My first point is a warning against the dangers of short-sightedness, of conducting a piece of research not as a part, however small, of the great sweep of history, but as something in itself. To study the history of a canal or a navigable river is to study a small bit of the economic history of the country, and I suggest you never forget the background because of your interest in the thing itself. Why was the canal built? There must have been a real or fancied economic need. When it was built, did it fulfil that need, and did it by the fact of its existence create others? Who were the people who promoted it and put up the money? Why did they do so? What industrial interests had they, and what public positions did they hold? What other means of transport — roads, older river navigations, coastal shipping, even packhorses — were affected by the proposal to build a canal? What did they do about it, and what was the new transport pattern like when it had settled down? What effect did the canal have on the life and business of the towns and villages through which it passed? And so on. You will, I submit, get much more interest out of canal research if you try consciously to place what you do in the framework of the economic history of the time, and to disentangle the human motives, hopes and fears that were concerned with it. If this is so, start work on the history of the period, and then as much local economic history of the region where it is as you can get hold of. Then much of the detail you will find out, and the allusions you will come across in the records, will fall into place.

Second, bear in mind that canal history is only the last phase of the history of navigable waterways in this country, for canals are only artificial rivers. The story of inland navigation goes back to the Romans,

and from the Conquest onwards much use was made of the great navigable rivers like the Thames, the Severn, the Trent and the Yorkshire Ouse, and also of the waterways of the Fens. There is therefore a thousand years of waterway history to be studied, and you have before you when making a choice not only a wide variety of subjects, but a wide range of periods. My railway friends even if they include horse tramroads in their study, have a narrower scope in time, though a wider in space.

Now for some particular things I would like to say — and I hope you will forgive their being so obvious.

Sources

To begin with, remember that history is not only to be found in records. It lies on the ground. Therefore begin with the canal itself, whether that canal is derelict or still open for traffic. Here we canal men have an advantage over our railway brethren. It is much easier to explore a canal than a railway on the ground. Assuming one is careful to ask permission, one can go almost anywhere on any canal, and explore to one's heart's content. So, if I may suggest, when you have picked on a canal to study, begin on the ground by walking over its whole length, and using your eyes. If it has a basin in a town, then note the ages of the buildings round it, and of those along the street that joins the basin to the town; look for the wharfinger's house; the stables where the towing horses used to be put up; the smithy where they were shod. Look for the short branch canals into industrial premises, and work out what the premises were used for when the canal was built — and so on. If it is a village, find the old wharf, usually marked by a wharf house or small warehouse, and with a walled-off space for dumping coal. A little poking about with a stick will usually bring a small lump of coal to light, if there is any doubt. Walk over the line, and note where the old wharves were, always of course served

by a road. Look for the means of supplying the canal with water — as essential to a canal as rails to a railway, and usually the limiting factor of traffic. Search out the main engineering features, such as aqueducts and tunnels. Above all, talk to local people. Only when you have thoroughly mastered the ground itself, I suggest, should you start on other sources of knowledge.

What are these other sources? First, of course, the written records of the canal company itself, which fall into three main groups. There are the minute books of the general shareholders' meetings, which give the main facts, and those of the working committees, which provide the detail. How much or how little will depend upon the conscientiousness of the clerk at the time. Minute books usually record decisions, and omit the things which at the time everyone knew, and therefore they need to be supplemented. In or accompanying the minute books will usually be the annual accounts, and a statement of the dividends. Then there are the ledgers. These will show the details of the traffic carried — what it was, carried from where to where, in what quantities, and if you go to the trouble, they are the real basis for creating the economic history of the territory served by the canal. Lastly, there are the letter books, with copies of the letters written by the canal company, though usually without the other half of the correspondence, the letters written to it. They will give a mass of interesting information about the canal and the people who used it, and are the best source of information about its relations with other canals and other means of transport.

The main store of canal archives is in the possession of the British Transport Commission, and is freely available to the student.¹ Most canal minute books are there, though the collection is surprisingly weak in ledgers and letter books. However, many collections of records are in county records offices — like the wonderful Thames & Severn collection at Gloucester; in local museums — like the Wilts & Berks papers at Swindon; in the hands of statutory bodies of various kinds, such as the very fine collection of Upper Medway records with the Kent River Authority at Maidstone; in public libraries — like the Salisbury & Southampton Canal collection at Southampton; or even in the solicitor's offices which were their original home.²

Procedure

Begin, therefore, once you have chosen your canal or river, by finding the company's own records. These

may be full or exiguous; they may indeed be non-existent, for some were discarded when old canals became derelict, some were pulped from solicitors' offices during one of the wars, and some have just totally disappeared. Fill in your knowledge in some of the following ways.

First, get the Parliamentary history by reading the Acts of Parliament, and such supporting materials as the evidence before Parliamentary committees. Often there is a deal of useful material here.

Second, look through all the Deposited Plans in the county record office for the period of your canal. You will not only find those of your own choice; you will often come across rival schemes which you would not otherwise have heard of.

Third, go to the local newspaper file. Reading local newspapers is slow work, but fascinating, not only because of what one finds about the canal one is studying, but because of all the other distracting things one comes across, such as fires and murders.

Fourth, check what the competitors or the partners of your canal thought and said in their minute books. You will often get a different story or a different slant on a story, and sometimes be able to fill in some missing facts. Again, if tonnage records are missing for your canal, you may be able to get help from the records of a company that is connected with it, or be able to find the other half of the correspondence in your letter books.

Fifth, nearly all canals eventually came in competition with railways. Therefore use the railway minute books.

Sixth, do not forget the records of some of the businesses which made use of the canal. I fancy there is a lot to be found here, judging by my own experience.

Seventh, some canal and river schemes were prolific in pamphlets produced by those supporting or opposing them. There is a fine collection of these in the Institution of Civil Engineers, and odd specimens are to be found in most libraries near the canal that originated them.

Taking notes

Notes are the basis of most research. Therefore, it is well to get a routine going at the start, and then to take all notes in the same form. In note taking the following are important rules:

- 1 Make sure that you have clearly identified the source of every note you take in usable form, for example, that you have the correct Public Record

Office reference, or, if a published book, the correct title, author's name and initials, and the page number.

- 2 Make sure of the correct date of the source, for example, a newspaper.
- 3 Make sure that you distinguish clearly between when you are making a verbatim quotation and when you are summarising. Verbatims should be exact, that is, mis-spellings, capital letters and all. You can edit them later, but what you have noted should be an accurate transcript.
- 4 Make sure that you can understand your own abbreviations, and that they are unambiguous. I

caused myself much trouble once by noting references to the W&B Canal without realising quickly enough that there are three canals with those initials. A year or so later I could not be sure which was meant in some cases, and had to do some work again.

- 5 Use as many contractions as you like, but watch your handwriting. Nothing is more irritating than the note you can't read.
- 6 Make sure that you note everything you are likely to want. It is better to note too much while the going is good than too little. The fact you didn't note and cannot find is always the one you finally need.

Editor's notes

Hadfield's own records of canals in the British Isles were deposited in 1979 in the British Library of Political & Economic Science in the London School of Economics. They include 360 folders, and also a number of indexes. A list and further information can be got from the Archivist at the LSE; there is also a descriptive note about the material in the *Journal of Transport History*, September 1981.

1. These are now in the British Transport Historical Records Section of the Public Record Office at Kew.
2. The research branch of the Law Society will, for a fee, give the name of the present day solicitors' firm which descends from that whose name may have learned from a newspaper of 200 years ago.

Railway and Canal Records in the House of Lords Record Office

H S Cobb

First published in the Journal in November 1985

The purpose of this note is to provide a brief description of the above records, drawing attention in particular to those types of record which are not to be found in local record offices or amongst the British Transport Commission Historical Records in the Public Record Office.¹

Prior to 1794, the canal and river navigation records in the House of Lords Record Office consist chiefly of copies of Bills and the engrossed Acts (from the sixteenth century onwards), petitions to the Lords for and against Bills, and brief minutes of Lords Committee proceedings on Bills from 1660 (the equivalent Commons Bills, petitions, and committee minutes were destroyed in the fire of 1834). Some verbatim transcripts of evidence given

before the Lords on Canal Bills survive from 1789 onwards but the two regular series of verbatim evidence given before committees of each House do not begin until 1835.

In 1793 both Houses of Parliament ordered the promoters of every canal or water Bill to submit plans, sections, and books of reference (listing the owners, occupiers, and lessees of land affected) before the Bill was introduced into either House.² A substantial series of canal (and later, railway) plans deposited in the House of Lords survives from 1794 onwards, with a much less complete House of Commons series from 1796. Plans, sections, and books of reference were also, of course, required to be deposited with the Clerks of the Peace and with

boroughs through which a canal or railway was intended to pass and large numbers survive in local record offices.³ The 1793 orders also required promoters to deposit in each House (but not in the counties) estimates of expense of the intended works (detailed until the mid-1830s and continuing in summary form until the present day) and subscription lists and contracts of those promising to take out shares in the proposed undertakings (the deposit of these was abandoned in 1858). The estimates and subscription lists are to be found with the deposited plans and many also survive amongst the historical records of the British Transport Commission.⁴ A further deposit required in the Lords and Commons (but not apparently elsewhere) from 1794 onwards (until 1922) were the Lists of Consents which recorded whether the owners, occupiers, and (from 1836) the lessees of land and other property to be affected by a scheme ‘assented’, ‘dissented’ or were ‘neuter’ in respect of it. These provide some indication at least of the amount of support or opposition which projects encountered locally.

From 1853 the House of Lords (and the Commons from 1874) required promoters to deposit a ‘Demolition Statement’ for any scheme involving the compulsory acquisition and demolition of ‘thirty houses or more inhabited by the Labouring Classes in any one parish or place’. The statement was to specify the number, description, and situation of the houses and the number (so far as could be estimated) of persons to be displaced, and it was to state whether any provision was made in the Bill for remedying the ‘inconvenience likely to arise from such displacement’.⁵ Such statements are still required when thirty or more inhabitants are affected in any one area.

When changes were made by a Lords or Commons Committee to the proposed route of a canal or railway they were shown on a special plan of the affected area signed by the chairman of the committee. The

enabling Act draws attention to this, for example the Hull, Barnsley & West Riding Junction Railway Act 1882 states ‘in constructing the Railway no 1 where it will cross the [Stocks Moor] common the Company shall divert the centre line thereof as shown upon the plan signed by the Honourable William Henry Berkeley Portman the Chairman of the Committee of the House of Commons to whom the Bill for this Act was referred ... and copies of which have been deposited in the Private Bill Office of the House of Commons and the Parliament Office of the House of Lords’.⁶ It does not appear that copies of such signed plans were deposited locally.

Verbatim evidence given before committees of either House on opposed Private Bills (including canal and railway Bills) survives in two continuous series from 1835 onwards. Although much of this evidence is also to be found amongst the British Transport Commission records the two series in the House of Lords Record Office are the most complete.⁷ In addition, there are Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence given before the Examiners of Private Bills of each House who investigated the compliance of promoters with the Standing Orders on Private Bills including confirmation, or correction, of points of detail in the deposited plans and other documents.⁸ There are also the Minutes of Evidence of the Commons Court of Referees (1865 to date) which enquired into the right of petitioners to be heard before a Private Bill Committee and sometimes into the engineering and other details of a Bill.

The records of Appeal Cases heard in the House of Lords include a considerable number of cases concerning transport, many of them requiring the deposit of plans and other technical evidence. The records include the petitions and cases of Appellants and Respondents, summaries of proceedings in the printed Law Reports, and Judgments of the House.

Notes

1. See also: M F Bond, *Guide to the Records of Parliament* (HMSO, 1971) and H S Cobb, *Sources for Economic History amongst the Parliamentary Records in the House of Lords Record Office* (HLRO Memorandum, No 50, 1973)
2. *House of Lords Journal*, vol XXXIX, 556–7
3. J Simmons, ‘Railway History in English Local Records’, *Journal of Transport History*, vol 1, no3 (1954), 157
4. *Ibid*, 159
5. *House of Lords Journal*, vol LXXXV, 244
6. Local and Personal Acts, 45 & 46 Vic cap ccxlv; s8
7. Some 3,000 volumes of Commons evidence survive for 1835–99 and 1,500 volumes of Lords evidence for 1835–1970. There is access, also, to later evidence for committees of both Houses up to the present day.
8. House of Commons 1847 to date, House of Lords 1859 to date (1837–58 in the Lords Committee Books).

Railway History in Acts of Parliament

C R Clinker

This article first appeared in the Greville Memorial Issue, September 1979

When Maurice Greville came to reside with us I was about half-way through a detailed examination of all the seven thousand odd Local & Personal Acts affecting railway companies. I had, of course, used individual acts on many occasions but felt a reading of the whole in date order would be profitable; indeed, the 'profit' far exceeded my expectations.

The result of this, perhaps unique, experience was that I saw the whole academic history of the railways of Great Britain unfold steadily in front of me, new companies, incorporations, amalgamations, extensions, legal warfare, pathetic and incredible financial tangles, bankruptcies, frauds, abandonments, dissolutions, and so on, all part of an immense constantly changing pattern.

Quite early on, after a certain numbness of brain produced by this excess of reading what was at first an unfamiliar language, I came to three positive conclusions: (1) that there is a great deal more academic railway history to be found in the acts than the most avid student then realized, (2) that railway history as written over the previous seventy years or so would have been much more accurate and complete if the acts — which were available then, as now — had been consulted *and understood*, and (3) that it is unwise, indeed unsafe, to write or lecture upon any aspect of railway history without first reading and understanding the relevant acts because they are the basis of a company's existence.

A company's initial act, the Act of Incorporation, consists mainly of standardized provisions differing only in wording down the years. This act incorporates certain named persons and others into a company of proprietors under a specified style and title which is the company's own and indisputable legal name, whatever variant may appear on its seal, notepaper, etc. Power is given to make a railway or railways or other works, and to raise a certain amount of money by shares and loans for that and other specific purposes. Arrangements are made for the appointment of a receiver (judicial factor in Scotland) and the first directors are named. Certain periods are allowed for acquiring the land and completion of the works and maximum rates and fares are set out. Power is sometimes given to enter into arrangements

with another company, or companies, to work, use and manage the line and/or to lease or sell it to that company under certain conditions. A straightforward, normal Act of Incorporation from the 1860s onwards contains about 48 sections. There may, of course, be additional and special provisions; some of these are of value to the railway history students.

The preamble to the Act of Incorporation may not be of much value, but thereafter this sets the stage for what is to follow by reciting the history of the undertaking and other information relative to the powers which are granted in the body of the act.

From an historical point of view, the preamble is undoubtedly the most valuable part of the act. A large proportion contain detailed and exhaustive particulars which include dates and terms of agreements, indentures, legal proceedings, arbitrators awards, etc. Much of this information is not easily traced elsewhere because copies of some of the agreements and indentures, long since dead, were of no practical value and have been destroyed. The preamble to the Stanhope & Tyne Railroad Act (1842) shows how the company was established by Deed of Settlement in 1834 and dissolved by Indenture of Settlement in 1841, prior to incorporation as the Pontop & South Shields Railway. It appears again in the Wear Valley Act (1847) together with the Wear & Derwent Railway and Shildon Tunnel. The names of the various owners, of parties of the deeds, are shown here — Pease, Meynell, Stobart and Hopkins. Of a different kind is the preamble to the Edinburgh & Glasgow Act (1849), under which the Edinburgh & Glasgow Union Canal was transferred to the railway company. This gives much useful information on the available transport facilities, water and rail, between Leith, Edinburgh and Glasgow.

It is however, from about 1860 onwards that preambles become longer and of special value. Full particulars of the agreements which led to the London & North Western and Great Western setting up the Joint Committee of Management to take over the Birkenhead Railway are quoted at length in the Act (1861). The incorporation of the Perth General Station Joint Committee in 1865 was the occasion for a lengthy history of the origins of this joint station

such as cannot readily be found elsewhere. Six pages are required to give a detailed account of the West Hartlepool Harbour & Railway and the Cleveland Railways on their amalgamation with the North Eastern in 1865.

Perhaps the most enlightening preamble of all is that to the act incorporating the Great Eastern Railway in 1862. This goes into great detail and sets out, as the present author thinks, very clearly, all the acts and full legal and financial history of the Eastern Counties (itself a most complex undertaking), East Anglian, Newmarket, Eastern Union and Norfolk Railways. No student of the Great Eastern or its constituents will need to be told how involved and closely interlocked were the finances of this group of companies. Here may be found a short cut to all the main facts behind one of the most complicated of earlier large railway amalgamations.

The financial straits in which some of the more substantial companies found themselves, either by their own folly or from causes only partially under their control, makes rather pathetic reading. It will come as no surprise that the London, Chatham & Dover was particularly noteworthy in this respect. Three of this company's acts, those of 1867, 1869 and 1871, give, in extraordinary detail, the pitiful financial story of a railway which, in the words of the 1867 act 'is over one hundred miles long and in 1866 conveyed nearly eleven million passengers and upwards of 400,000 tons of goods'. This is followed by a reference to the validity of certain leases and working agreements and numerous proceedings in the Court of Chancery relating thereto. The company was unable to pay its debenture interest 'and meet other claims which are large and constantly increasing'. The company had assigned all its rolling stock and other chattels to trustees — it was necessary to keep the line open for traffic, and so on. The schedules to this act are interesting: Schedule I lists the company's previous acts and Schedule II the capital statements of the general and separate undertakings.

The 1869 act refers to 'the multiplicity and complicated nature of the claims brought before the Court [Chancery] ... and grave injury will continue to be inflicted on a multitude of persons unless some more speedy method is established for determining the relative rights of the parties'. Section 48 of this act mentions that Neilson & Company, Glasgow, had a contract to supply 14 locomotives at £46,900 but declined to deliver nine of these 'by reason of the embarrassed state of the company's affairs'. The

awards of the arbitrators, the Marquess of Salisbury and Lord Cairns, appear as schedules to the 1871 act and cover 98 pages. They give a vast amount of detailed history of the company, its undertakings, finance, lawsuits, etc.

Similar embarrassments on a smaller scale affected other companies including, in 1870, the Northampton & Banbury Junction some of whose land on which the line was built had been auctioned by order of the Court of Chancery towards the company's £95,000 debts.

Accuracy in dates is another aspect in which the acts are invaluable. All too often, for example, dates of amalgamations have been quoted as coinciding with the Royal Assent. In fact, there is a large number of cases where the effective date is quite different, in the range eighteen months antedated to three years post dated. Anyone requiring the dates of the agreements under which the Eastern Counties worked the East Anglian, Eastern Union, Norfolk and Newmarket Railways should refer to the preamble of the Eastern Counties Act 1861 in preference to *Bradshaw's Manual* where some are given incorrectly.

Historical complications which arose through inter-company entanglements within a small area or where the affairs of two companies became inextricably mixed up for various reasons, can often be cleared up by a careful study of all the relevant acts. Examples of this are to be found at Burton-on-Trent (involving six parties), in the North Union (five parties) and in the financial and working arrangements between the Bristol & Gloucester, Great Western, Bristol & Exeter, South Devon, Cornwall and West Cornwall, in 1871, the last five referred to in the various acts as the 'Associated Companies', being the Broad Gauge group of lines.

Another facet of accuracy is the misquotation of company names. Thus the Preston & Wyre's legal title was the Preston & Wyre Railway & Harbour Company, being an amalgamation of two companies; the Leigh & Kenyon was the Kenyon & Leigh Junction; the Oldham, Ashton & Guide Bridge, abbreviated as OA&GBJ, often has the 'J' transcribed as 'Joint' instead of 'Junction'.

Except in the very few straightforward cases, the setting up of joint undertakings usually has some interesting, and often complicated, historical background. In nearly all cases, the acts set forth the circumstances and machinery very clearly. The Bricklayers' Arms branch of the South Eastern and London & Croydon companies was the first statutory

joint committee set up by act, in 1843. Other acts followed covering nearly all the well-known joint lines — North Union, Shrewsbury & Wellington, Shrewsbury & Hereford, Ashby & Nuneaton (a particularly interesting act of 1867) and the very involved Norfolk & Suffolk Joint Railway Committee of 1898. The Committee's property consisted of lines already in use, some partly made and some only authorized. The parties in this case were the Great Eastern and Midland & Great Northern Joint Committee.

Between Newcastle in 1845 and Nottingham Victoria in 1897, nineteen jointly-owned stations were authorized, or actually set up by acts. Of these, Perth (1859), Shrewsbury (1849) and Carlisle (1861) are of particular interest. Only two joint station committees appear to have been fully incorporated bodies with their own seal — Perth (1865) and Nottingham Victoria (1897). It may be noted that at least two stations commonly thought of as 'joint' were, in fact, owned solely by one company, viz: Welshpool and Derby (pre-1844).

The acts contain a vast number of provisions covering a wide range of miscellaneous subjects, mainly inserted for the protection of someone or somebody against something, real or imaginary, eg relevance of railway architecture to the existing buildings nearby (York, Windsor and Bristol); construction powers suspended for a year whilst decision taken whether to pass in front or behind a bishop's palace (Carmarthen); building part of a line on arches so as not to obstruct the view from the country mansion (Furness); signal box not to have outside stairs and to burn only smokeless coal (North British, Princes Street Gardens, Edinburgh 1895); no shunting near Bristol Cathedral during Sunday services (1897); prevention of noise by laying the track on wood sleepers or on rubber or similar material (Esholt, Aberdeen and Leeds cemetery). So far as the present author knows, there is only one instance in which a bridge carrying a railway over a road was to be constructed 'so as to deaden the noise caused by the traffic passing over the bridge'. This was at Wolverhampton, in 1893. However, there are references in the acts to the avoidance of damage caused, or expected to be caused, by the vibration of trains, though this was not a prominent feature. The South Eastern's Bill in the 1870 session for a shorter and cheaper line between Greenwich and Woolwich was withdrawn due to Admiralty fears of possible injury to Greenwich Observatory. As passed in 1871, the act provided for experiments being carried out at the

railway's expense. At Shrewsbury the Great Western were required by their act of 1895 to underpin the gaol walls to ensure security of prisoners and submit to expert vibration tests by the Astronomer Royal. The Whitechapel & Bow, given power to erect an electric generating station in the parish of St Leonard Bromley, 'must use all reasonable care to prevent nuisance by vibration' (1897).

Legal provision of tunnels or covered ways to protect the amenity of estates is not common, not more than six such cases being noted. But others, eg Haddon (Midland) and Kemble (Great Western) were made by agreement between the companies and landowners.

The erection of protective screens between railways and adjoining roads was a common requirement in the early acts and as late as 1861 a Hammersmith & City act provided for a 'screen to be erected at Hammersmith to prevent horses being frightened by the sight of the engines and carriages travelling on the railway'. An earlier example is found in the Liverpool & Manchester act of 1842, where the company were compelled to shield New Bailey Prison by a wall or fence — but whether to shield the inmates from the passengers, or vice versa, is not stated!

In order to obtain the consent of some landowners and the support of local people of influence when planning their lines, a number of companies agreed to insert in their bills sections making it an obligation to provide stations at certain places. There appears to be only one act which provides for the erection of a private station; otherwise these seem to have been agreed by negotiation between the parties. Provision was made for about sixty public stations and goods sidings. There were usually some conditions attached to these — that a certain number of trains should call — accommodation to be for passengers and goods — that the station must be 'erected and for ever after maintained' and, in at least two cases, the name by which it shall be known. The first 'compulsory' station was Fay Gate (London & Brighton 1845), the penultimate Charwelton (Manchester, Sheffield & Lincolnshire) and the last Woody Bay (Lynton & Barnstaple) 'to be called Woody Bay Station with or without any other names, Woody Bay being the first of such names'.

During the years Maurice Greville lived with us, we discussed at length the value of the acts as a source of vital historical information and amended some of his records. I remember clearly one of his last meetings in which he commented 'you certainly opened my eyes to the value of the acts'.

Local Sources: 1

John F Goodchild

*This article was first published in the Journal in January 1959 under the title
'Some Sources of Canal History: Incidental References'*

Although this article has been prepared mainly with a view to assisting those engaged in writing the histories of individual canals, in most cases it is also applicable to those concerned with the early history of railways. It must be pointed out that it is by no means a list of all sources, which may vary in detail from area to area, but rather a fairly comprehensive list of types of documents which may be found relating to nearly every canal.

County records

1. *Deposited plans for works*

a. Canal and river navigations. These are detailed plans, with books of reference, giving the name of all owners and occupiers of lands through which the canal was to pass. They were deposited with Clerks of the Peace under various Parliamentary Standing Orders from 1792, although a few earlier special deposits do occur. These plans are still deposited where any works requiring Parliamentary authority are contemplated. They were always deposited the year prior to that in which the authorizing Bill came before Parliament. Some plans will be found relating to schemes which never got to the Parliamentary stage.

b. Railways. These are sometimes of use to the canal historian in that they indicate the undisturbed layout of canal works at the points where railways were to cross or join the canal. Some early deposited plans relate to railways constructed as feeders to canals and may also date from 1792.

c. Turnpike Roads and Other Works. These are of interest, if of early date, on account of the plans they may give of adjoining canal works. Sometimes Turnpike Roads indirectly acted as feeders to canals.

2. *Inclosure Awards*

These awards, usually of the 18th and early 19th centuries, often contain plans which indicate in great detail the works of canals passing through their area. It should be remembered in dealing with these Awards that the plans may have been made some

time earlier than the Awards with which they are inrolled; local enquiry will often reveal the date of the plan. The scale is usually quite large.

3. *Tithe Awards*

These Awards and plans, usually of the mid-19th century, have an interest similar to that of Inclosure Awards. They are usually on a large scale, and antedate the 6" Ordnance Survey.

4. *Inrollments*

Certain Canal Acts directed Inrollment of conveyances of land to the canal company with the Clerk of the Peace. They sometimes indicate the state of the works prior to the opening of the canal. In Yorkshire and Middlesex, other canal deeds may be found in the various Registries of Deeds.

5. *Land Tax Returns*

These usually cover the period 1781–1832, inclusive, and detail the owners and occupiers of land in each township or parish. They are useful in showing when the canal company first occupied land in the places through which the canal was to be cut, and in working out how many of the subscribers to the canal were 'local'.

6. *Acts of Parliament*

Many Record Offices have long series of Local and Personal Acts, and sometimes possess papers relating to the County's interests in relation to a canal company, with correspondence.

7. *Plans*

Usually a Record Office will possess a collection of plans, apart from those mentioned above, which may be of use to the historian of canals. They fall under the headings of printed County plans, printed local plans, township or parish plans, private or public estate plans, highway or footpath diversion plans. The printed County plans, if in a series dated at fairly short intervals of years, can be very valuable, but the author has had experience of several of these plans where it has been proved that the map was

actually engraved some time before the date of publication.

8. *Abstracts of Coroners' Inquisitions*

These Abstracts, preserved in some Record Offices, give bare details as to name, place and cause of death. 'Drowned in the Canal' is not unknown, and the details may be followed up in the local newspaper.

9. *Quarter Session Records*

If the Quarter Session records are fairly well indexed, it may be possible to trace some felonies and other offences relating to canal affairs, with their attendant depositions, which may be of considerable human interest.

10. *Other*

The Record Offices of the County Council will often possess the various 1", 6" and 25" Ordnance Survey maps, first edition onwards, which are of great value, and the County Council will possess information as to the abandonment of any canal since 1889, if any major road bridges were affected.

Public Records

There are in the Public Record Office records of the cases tried at Assizes and in the High Courts. Few canal companies escaped without one or two legal cases, and the masses of depositions and the occasional plans are of considerable interest. Abstracts of these cases can usually be found locally in Law Reports.

Local Libraries

The libraries of towns on the course of a canal or at a regional centre possess some material relating to its history. One of the most valuable sources of information are newspapers which contain Parliamentary notices, accounts of openings, notices of calls or shares, share price-lists, and a number of incidental references. Unless unlimited time is available, it is best to consult the newspapers knowing the approximate period of the reference in which you are interested.

Miscellaneous References

Few people seem aware of the references to canal matters in the Journals of the House of Commons (and, to a lesser extent, in those of the Lords), which detail all the opposition to, and Parliamentary history of, a Canal Bill, and in the Catalogue of Plans of Abandoned Mines. The latter details the location of plans of abandoned mineral workings, which in their turn often show railway and canal connexions. Both these are printed and are available in all the larger libraries.

Some reference should also be made here to the National Register of Archives, a public body which possesses and produces lists of documents in private or public collections, and circulates them to other interested bodies, including Record Offices. It is sometimes possible to trace the location of family papers of persons connected with canal schemes through the NRA. This body may be contacted through the Local Record Office.

Local Sources: 2

Harry W Paar

This article was first published in the Journal in April 1965 under the title 'Notes on Sources'. A couple of errors have been corrected by the author and end-notes added.

Directories, guides and transactions

Commercial directories, arranged on a county or other geographical basis, and dating from the early 1800s onwards in most cases, form useful sources for notes on transport facilities, and for background material such as general history and industries; the

maps often included in these directories can also be informative.

An example of their use is in connection with the Monmouth Railway Company, which was empowered to charge tolls for the carriage of passengers. I wished to establish if any such traffic was regularly

carried, but unfortunately the minute books are missing. However, Pigot's *National Commercial Directory* (Gloucestershire), for 1830, mentions no such conveyance, and the only passenger transport mentioned between Coleford and Monmouth is the 'Forester' coach from Gloucester. By 1830 any regular tramroad service would doubtless have been established, and could be expected to be still in operation; hence the evidence, although negative, suggests that no such service was provided. Many of these directories were published in London, and no doubt this is why the Guildhall Library has a particularly good collection of them, readily available.

Guide books, too, can be very useful for transport and industrial references; they range from the 'grand tour' type of journal popular in the late 18th century and onwards, to the more modern and factual type, but the earlier ones are likely to be of more use, as they sometimes give descriptions of ironworks and other enterprises, the contemporary records of which have long since perished or 'gone to earth'. C F Cliffe's *Book of South Wales ... etc* (various editions in the 1840s and 1850s) includes a drawing of a proposed railway bridge, information relating to Old and New Passage ferries, South Wales ironworks and the South Wales Railway, also a woodcut of a tram wagon on a coal tip at Lydney.

The transactions of learned societies and institutions can be useful sources, even if their main object is far removed from ours. As an example, those of the Cotteswold Naturalists Field Club for 1882 give us a short description of a journey by tramroad through Newland tunnel, on the Monmouth tramroad. If the name of an engineer is available, we may expect to find an obituary summarizing his work in the transactions of any institution to which he belonged — mainly the Civil Engineers, Mechanical Engineers, or the similar regional mining and engineering bodies. I have used such sources in the cases of G W Keeling and T Dyne Steel, and was helped in a most courteous and generous fashion by the secretaries concerned.

County magazines can be useful sources¹; today's *Essex Countryside* contains frequent articles and letters on railway subjects, sometimes embodying novel information, while a predecessor, the *Essex Review*, included in 1903 a well-illustrated article on the Great Eastern Railway Ilford–Woodford Loop; I had often been intrigued by the outline of a tiny loading dock north of Grange Hill tunnel, which had served to load fruit from an orchard for use in the Great Eastern hotels; clearly, it was unlikely that

any photograph existed of such a minute detail of the past — yet the article mentioned contains one, wharf, siding and ground-frame completed. (The author, incidentally, was G W J Potter, who in 1906 wrote an account of the Whitby & Pickering Railway which was one of the first branch line histories, setting a high standard not always attained subsequently.)

Newspapers and periodicals

Even the hardest seeker after truth will generally blanch at the thought of setting his hand to this particular plough, unless he happens to live near Colindale and be retired. However, local newspaper files are generally of great value. The historian working on a particular subject will generally have to confine himself to particular events, with already-established dates, but those who are concerned with unearthing references generally can afford the luxury of running through a substantial period. The late Mr Cohen searched the *Hereford Journal* from 1796 to 1860, extracting most railway and canal references; of the many gems thus revealed may be cited an entry in the issue of 30 November 1803, reporting that the Carmarthenshire Rail Road had been opened on the 7th of that month, from Llanelly to the collieries and ironworks near Arondiny and 'Gynhidie' (Cynheidre). Members of the company went up in specially constructed carriages, and ten wagons loaded with 25 tons of iron-stone and coals, with 150 persons, went in the seven mile procession 'to the seaside ... drawn by one horse ... the usual way of carriage here was on horseback, which would have taken over 300 horses for the same quantity'. The 'ironworks' were no doubt merely quarries or mines, as the ore was exported; the gradient was favourable to the load, and the horse presumably put in only a token appearance.

Periodicals lend themselves rather more to bulk treatment, in view of their more limited subject, and I understand that some mining and iron trade journals have been examined²; I scanned *The Engineer* and *Engineering* from their inception (1856 and 1866 respectively) until about 1890, in search of Forest of Dean information, and came across many other items of railway interest, with many finely-executed line drawings of locomotives. To cite one example, in 1879 both periodicals carried illustrations and particulars of small Bagnall tank engines of unusual design, and referred to specimens working on the Wotton Tramway — no mention is made of these in the two accounts of that line known to me.

The British Museum, Colindale, is a considerable repository of newspapers and magazines, and many collections exist in large provincial libraries and elsewhere. Complete files of many technical publications are available at the Patent Office, London.³

Leisure hours

It is surprising how items, sometimes of considerable value, crop up when one's attention is engaged in quite other directions; friends will mention references from newspapers, books and so on; books on subjects far removed sometimes contain railway or kindred references; even fiction can have significance — *The Rape of the Fair Country* contains excellent accounts of journeys by tramroad and canal in South Wales, and at least one most entertaining article has been written on the railway journeys of Sherlock Holmes.

A pleasant, relaxed hour with television can produce film of industrial and other railways (as in the Great War series), of canals, and still views of transport interest; in January 1964 a programme on Pope-Hennessy, a Victorian colonial administrator, yielded photographs of a tramroad (apparently of plateway type) on, of all places, the island of Labuan, and also of its successor, a narrow gauge railway complete with steam locomotive.

A chance visit to a strange house can reveal a painting, print or other picture of great interest; in Dunster Castle is a painting by John O'Connor of the old oak tree which provided Moreton, near Hereford, with its first railway station 'after December 1853' according to the caption, whilst a house visited in quite another connection yielded an old print, apparently dating from the early 1800s, of a string of barges on the river Cam, passing Clare College, the horse wading half submerged along the middle of the stream. It was (I am told) on a gravel bank

provided for the purpose, and oarsmen still have to watch for this obstruction.

Within the past few weeks a visit to a bazaar has produced a fine print from a modern water-colour of Heybridge Basin, the entrance of the Chelmer Navigation, whilst in the Science Museum, South Kensington, is an exhibit (not in the railway section, but in the iron-making exhibit) of a short section of cast-iron channel section tram-plate ascribed to Coalbrookdale, 18th century. A rambling party on the Yorkshire moors came upon a house which was being stripped of its effects, and among the piles of rubbish they noticed a large framed sepia photograph; it proved to be the opening scene at Kirkburton station, 7 October 1867.

In concluding these notes, I should like to encourage all my fellow members to play an active part in the pleasant task of recording railway and canal history, in all its aspects. All can certainly take part in the quest for sources of information, as this can be a sporadic activity, without deadline or time-table, and even a re-examination of the bibliographical sections of already published works on our own shelves can produce intriguing references. The main-stream of information, Acts, plans, minutes and so on, is becoming better known and more accessible, but I hope that you will all keep a sharp eye open for the countless little less obvious tributaries which are so valuable in putting the flesh on to the bones of history; and that you will always bear your fellows in mind — what is of only passing interest to one may be a vital missing link for another, and in regard to 'out-of-context' references, it is often a case of opportunity knocking but once. No other member of our fraternity may pass that way again. Having found a reference, it is important to record it methodically and put it into the record system edited by Mr Skillern.⁴

Notes (2004)

1. This has not been the case for many years; apart from a notable lack of any articles of substance, railway or otherwise, some are little more than advertisers' show-cases.
2. A letter from D E Bick, published in the July 1965 *Journal*, begins: 'Mr Paar's article prompts me to mention a weekly periodical worthy of careful perusal, namely the *Mining Journal, Railway & Commercial Gazette*. First appearing in 1835, the railway content was very much to the fore although as the years passed, the mining interest became uppermost and eventually the publication became the *Mining*

Journal, still in existence today.'

3. The Colindale Newspaper Library is now part of the British Library, although it is still on the Colindale site. Many newspapers in various libraries have been indexed, if not always fully, to a useful degree, and advice regarding specific titles can be obtained from Colindale. A full index to *The Times* can be seen in large libraries. The Patent Office Library has also been incorporated in the British Library and is housed with the main collections at 96 Euston Road, London.
4. William Skillern was then the Research Adviser, a post now held by Geoff Oxley.

Some Pitfalls in Research into Railway History

M D Greville

Originally a paper read to the Society by Mr Greville on 19 March 1956, this article was published in the Journal in July & September 1956. Sub-headings have been added.

Those who have done any considerable amount of research into railway history will probably be fully alive to most of the points which I propose to make in this address. But to those whose experience of this fascinating, if sometimes exasperating, pursuit is not so great, or to those proposing to adventure upon it for the first time, a brief exposition of the dangers and difficulties to be encountered may be useful. I think I may claim that I am particularly qualified to deal with the pitfalls of railway history as, in the course of a good many years research, I have myself fallen into most of them.

The methods of the study of railway history, like those of national and international history, have undergone great changes of recent years. In earlier days, the main idea was to give a general picture, without much attention to detail, or without worrying very much as to the accuracy of such details as did creep in. The real pioneer of the modern factual style of the writing of railway history was Tomlinson, whose history of the North Eastern Railway was published in 1914. It was not, however, until well after the first World War, with the appearance of MacDermot's *History of the Great Western Railway*, and the works of Grote Lewin, together with a general improvement in the quality of the historical articles in the *Railway Magazine*, that the new style began to be established; and it has steadily developed into the commendable thoroughness and accuracy of a great deal of modern work.

We will suppose that it is decided to make a complete study of some early railway — perhaps later absorbed by one of the greater lines. The first thing, of course, is to know its name, but this is less elementary than would at first appear. A railway may have been generally known by, and quoted under, a certain title; yet a reference to its Act may show that it was incorporated under an entirely different name, and the name in the Act of Incorporation can, and must be, the only correct one.

We now come to the plans which had to be deposited with each Bill presented to Parliament. These represent exactly what was proposed, but it

should be remembered that adjustments and alterations were sometimes enforced, or made by agreement, during the passage of the Bill. Parts authorized may never have been carried out, or there may have been deviations or alterations made in a later Act. Frequently there was attached to the plans, especially those of fairly extensive lines, a copy of the 1" Ordnance map of the district, with the proposed line marked on it. Too much attention should not be paid to this, as I think the lines were sometimes rather roughly done, and not taken into great consideration.

Now here is a warning. Never forget to make notes of the sources of information, and keep them where they can easily be found. I have suffered embarrassment in the past from not being able to lay my hands on notes of sources, although I knew they were reliable ones.

Minute books

It can be considered that, making due allowance for human fallibility, entries in minute books are true and reliable statements of the matter recorded. But it should be remembered that, very often, they contain only records of decisions arrived at, and the fact that a decision was made that a particular course of action should be taken — for instance, the opening of a line on a certain date — is not proof that it was always done. Some unforeseen cause may have prevented it, and quite possibly no further reference to it is to be found in the minutes. The practice varied considerably. In some cases it was customary to minute reports from the General Manager, or other Officers, of events which had taken place; others confined themselves strictly to reporting the proceedings and decisions of the Board. The fact that an event is not recorded is not necessarily evidence that it did not happen. Most of the larger Companies had Directors' or Officers' Committees, and the minutes of these are frequently more helpful. When questions arise with regard to dealings with other companies it is essential, if possible, to follow them up in the minutes of those other companies, otherwise a rather one-sided view may be obtained. In the matter of disputes

(in which most early railways seem to have managed to be involved at frequent intervals) an inspection of the minutes of *all* contestants may put a different light on things.

Official records

Many of the great railways had lists, sometimes printed, sometimes in manuscript, giving particulars of the opening and closing of lines and stations, widenings, etc. Although these can be very useful, and should be consulted when available, they require handling with discretion. They were generally started at some later period in the company's life, so that the later entries, say from the eighties or nineties, would be contemporary and presumably reliable. The earlier entries, and those referring to smaller lines absorbed, had been compiled from whatever sources were available, and are quite often wrong, as well as incomplete.

*Bradshaw's Manual*¹

This was at one time considered to provide a reliable framework by most students. It should certainly be consulted at the start to get a basis on which to build. Unfortunately, a large number of inaccuracies crept into it, either from carelessness, from misprints, or from too much compression. It will sometimes be found, on going through successive years, that the information given in one year is different from that in another; and in the table given each year, of lines opened during the previous year, the opening date often disagrees with that in the body of the book. I do not suggest that *Bradshaw's Manual* should be dismissed as of no value; in fact, it may well happen that information can be obtained from it for which no other — or no more reliable — source can be found.

The Press

Now let us consider one of the most important and fruitful sources, the Press, both the ordinary daily (or, in earlier times, more often weekly) papers, and the Railway press, such as the *Railway Times*, *Herapath's Journal* and the *Scottish Railway Gazette*. The value of these is obvious, as providing contemporary evidence of all sorts. One of the points to be borne in mind, however, is the existence of bias and local jealousies. It might be that the chief promoters or directors of a railway were in business rivalry with the proprietors of a local paper, or that the paper was not given advertisements, or that its

reporters were not invited to meetings or functions, the result being that events were not always reported, or else misreported. It is not generally realized that even political bias had quite an important influence at times in early days. It might happen that a railway was promoted, and when opened, controlled by a Whig or Tory interest, and the local press, with opposite views, would oppose it before opening, attack it afterwards, and frequently give a garbled account of its activities — purely for political reasons. If there were two or more local papers, it is always wiser, when investigating, to consult all reports. Even with the railway press, the same state of affairs was liable to obtain; it sometimes happened that anything in favour of a railway was to be found in *Herapath's Journal*, and everything against it in the *Railway Times*, or vice versa.

It must be remembered that journalists are likely to be too intent on getting the news into the papers always to worry about meticulous accuracy and are, moreover, generally working at high pressure, and I should like to mention one aspect in this connection. It happened, all too often, that a report was sent in of the opening of a line on, say, 'Monday last' — for insertion in the Saturday issue of the paper. Then, owing to its arriving too late, or being crowded out, it was held over to the following Saturday — but nobody thought of altering the wording. Therefore, if with such a wording one gets a date exactly a week different from that obtained from other sources, it should be regarded as suspect.

When preparing a list of centenary openings of 1856, for the October [1955] *Journal*, I first collected all the dates concerned from *Bradshaw's Manual* and other sources and then, wherever possible, checked them by contemporary press reports. In the case of the Loughton branch of the Great Eastern, I found that *Bradshaw's Manual* gave the opening date as 29 August, confirmed by the *Railway Times*. Later I found incontrovertible evidence that the actual date was 22 August, from reports in *The Times* of the following day. So I had fallen into the 'last Monday' trap quite innocently, having no reason to suspect anything wrong. Even without evidence to cause doubt it is really wiser, if in a paper published on a Saturday, the expression 'last Friday' is used, to be suspicious. If it *had* been the previous day, it is more likely that they would have said 'yesterday'.

Sometimes it was reported that a line was to be opened on some future date. This should never be accepted as the opening date; more often than not

the Inspecting Officer did not pass it, or the company failed to get an engine at the last moment. One disconcerting fact is that, in the early and middle periods of the 19th century, the local papers took the place now occupied by the national press, and when there was a glut of national news such as the Crimean War or the death of the Prince Consort, local matters were apt to be squeezed out. No doubt it was thought that everyone knew about events which had occurred in the town (especially in a small town). Though there were several papers in Carlisle at the time, in none of them is there any reference to the opening of Citadel station, with the result that no one knows *exactly* when it took place.

Local histories

These works, of towns or districts, can sometimes be very useful. The difficulty is to know how much a work of this kind can be relied upon, unless the author is known as a conscientious historian. It should be read and studied carefully; it may then be possible to judge whether it has been compiled from notes or diaries, or from the study of contemporary documents, etc, or whether it has been patched up from memory or unreliable statements — things which ‘they say’. If it is written in a chatty, popular style, generally speaking it should be distrusted.

Maps

When studying any railway or area, it is essential to consult maps but, at the same time, it is imperative to be careful and distrustful. If 6" or, better still, 25" maps are available for the area and period required, all is well; but it may be that one is interested in an area at a time before the first large scale survey was made for that part — or long before the next — and many years lapsed between one survey and the next. If, therefore, all one has to go upon is the 1" map, it must be pointed out that they were not always accurate as far as railways were concerned. Far too often stations were shown in the wrong place, and in some early editions they were not marked at all. I have also come across instances where single lines were shown as double, and vice versa.

As to other small scale maps, too much reliance upon them can be very misleading. In general, railways were liable to be handled in an offhand manner and even ostensibly railway maps such as Cheffin's or Macaulay's were, more often than not, full of traps — stations misplaced or misnamed, and proposed lines and lines under construction shown

as though in being.

Railway Clearing House (RCH) maps, both the Area maps and Junction Diagrams, are invaluable and trustworthy, although errors are known to have occurred in them. Their predecessors, Airey's, were done in a much more rough and ready fashion and are not by any means free from error.

*Bradshaw*²

This is one source of research which is highly important and essential and, at the same time, exasperating. Generally speaking, it is hardly conceivable to think of undertaking research without consulting *Bradshaw*, but it cannot be too strongly stressed that the greatest care should be taken in doing so, especially in early days, when the main causes of trouble were careless and obscure compilation, misprints, time-lag in the receipt of information (or lack of it altogether) and compression — the last presumably to save space. One of the best examples I know of careless lack of revision concerns Perth. On one occasion, as a result of a dispute between the Scottish Central and the Scottish North-Eastern, the latter put up a temporary station, north of the General station, known as Glasgow Road. The dispute lasted only a few months, but for 17 years — long after both lines had been absorbed by the Caledonian — *Bradshaw* continued to show Glasgow Road for all trains to and from the north.

One curiosity perpetrated by *Bradshaw* was the occasional lifting of tables from their usual place and cramming them into some quite improbable position. As an example, in 1865, at the very end, following the Irish lines, are three pages containing (i) the L&NW Manchester, Wigan & Bolton lines, (ii) the Brecon & Merthyr and Mid-Wales, (iii) the Midland's Birmingham and Leicester line, and (iv) the summary table, Fleetwood, Blackpool & Lytham of the Preston & Wyre! Stations, and even lines, were sometimes omitted for short or long periods, giving the impression that they were closed. For a period of about 18 months about 1850, the Cocker-mouth & Workington Railway completely disappeared, the obvious inference being that passenger services had been suspended. Fortunately, the company's reports are available, and these make it quite clear that passenger traffic had been going on quite normally all the time.

Another difficulty arises when *Bradshaw* did not give services in tabular form: just that trains left A for B, and B for A at certain times, perhaps with a

note that ‘all trains called at’ C. Although this may imply that C was the only intermediate station, there may have been others at which only certain trains called.

The lists which appeared, spasmodically, of openings, closings and changes of name, though useful as pointers, should not be trusted by themselves. During certain periods, actual dates of opening were quoted; as often as not they were wrong. Frequently the date given was the first of the month; all this generally meant was that this was the first month of its appearance in *Bradshaw*. Changes of name were not always what they seemed. In 1886, a change of name (on the Taff Vale) was recorded, from Pandy to Dinas. What really happened was that Pandy was closed and replaced by a new station — Dinas — some distance away.

Dates

There are some people who throw scorn upon dates and consider that those of us who are particular about them regard them as more important than the facts. This, of course, is quite untrue; but they are of considerable importance, and every effort should be made to obtain exact dates. No one would suggest, for instance, that 18 June 1815 had any importance in itself, but one can hardly conceive a serious historian writing of the Battle of Waterloo without mentioning it. How much easier it would be, indeed, if dates could be ignored, for of all the bewildering and exasperating things, the way that a simple thing like a date can so frequently get itself tangled up and misquoted is really remarkable.³

I have sometimes come across almost unbelievable disagreements on dates. The worst I ever struck was the opening of the short L&NW line from Denton to Dukinfield. For the two dates — goods and passenger openings — I got — from *Bradshaw's Manual*, L&NW Official List, GCR Official List and G P Neele — six different dates; and when I finally established it definitely — from the L&NW Officers'

Committee Minutes — I found that all were wrong.

The principal sources for dates on which one has to fall back are: *Bradshaw's Manual*, RCH Records, Companies' Official Lists and previously published data in books and articles.

RCH records are generally fairly reliable, but there were periods when whoever kept them got careless and took to inserting only the date when the information was received. In this case it should have been marked 'Order', but sometimes this got omitted, and it is only after one has worked through them a good deal that one gets an idea where the danger periods occurred. The other sources I have already dealt with generally, but it may be of interest to note that, when I have found a discrepancy between MacDermot and Grote Lewin, I have almost invariably found Lewin to be right.

Great care should be taken to distinguish between formal, goods and passenger openings. In newspaper accounts it was often indicated that the opening was formal, and that regular traffic started on a subsequent date. Unfortunately, it was not always made clear, and as the public opening sometimes took place on the same day as the formal, sometimes later, and even, on occasions, earlier, this sort of thing can present a difficulty. On the occasion of the extension of the Newcastle & Carlisle to the Forth Station at Newcastle in November, 1846, although there was nothing in the published accounts to indicate it, the passenger service was not inaugurated until four months later. This was a fact of which I remained ignorant until I had the fortune to come across — in the York Railway Museum — a handbill announcing it.

One should always try and find out whether the line had been opened earlier for goods traffic, but I must admit that this is often easier said than done. Frequently, all one can discover is that the line — or part of it — had been in use for goods for 'some time previous', and even this meagre information is often only obtainable from the Half-Yearly Reports.

Editor's notes (2004)

1. *Bradshaw's Railway Manual, Shareholders' Guide, and Official Directory*, published annually from 1847 to 1922.
2. *Bradshaw's Monthly Railway Guide*, published from 1842 to 1961.
3. In a letter published in the *Journal* in January 1957,

J F Ling commented, 'In his excellent article, Mr M D Greville seems to me to have missed the real importance of accurate dates. ... Surely the real importance of dates is that they enable us to locate an event exactly in a sequence of events, so that the logical relationship of those events can be discussed?'

Some Doubts on Primary Sources

John Denton

First published in the Journal in March 1981

The importance of using primary sources, especially company minutes, has long been accepted by transport historians. But experience in afield somewhat remote from the transport scene has cast — for me at least — considerable doubts on the reliability of the company minute book.

What does it tell us? It is supposed to be an account of what was discussed and decided at meetings. But is it? For over two years, I was until recently Administrative Officer to a national organization. An important function of this organization was to take evidence from numerous bodies and individuals, to try to assess its worth and then to act as a catalyst between them on the one hand and Government and local authorities, etc on the other. I was required to act as Secretary to the Council at its quarterly Executive meetings and minute the proceedings. It was at these meetings lasting 5 hours or more that the main decisions were taken — decisions that could often have far reaching effects within the Principality of Wales.

Partly in a form of shorthand, I often covered at least a dozen large sheets with notes in less than five hours. Back at the office afterwards, these would be drastically condensed to about two sheets of foolscap for the published minutes — yet even my first draft taken during the meeting would only contain a fraction of what was discussed and aired by the members and delegates. I tried very hard to make my minutes an accurate account of what went on at those meetings, yet it must be admitted that with the best will in the world, they were still my personal condensation of what I *believed* had taken place.

Of course the minutes had to be approved at the next meeting three months later. Invariably they were so without amendment. That is hardly surprising for I had taken more comprehensive notes than anyone else present. I had no axe to grind and had no vested interest in anything — yet I know it would be quite wrong to claim that my minutes were an accurate record of the proceedings. Even resolutions sometimes had to be altered when it was noted that the wording actually agreed by the meeting had either a logical or grammatical flaw which would make them unworkable.

In the light of this it is surely reasonable to assume that the minutes of many a railway or canal company were still more inaccurate as a record of what went on. It is hardly necessary to try to catalogue the reasons for this. Anyone who has studied a railway company minute book — or published minutes (which are not the same thing) — will have noted the odd outburst of dissent from a shareholder in which his ‘demolition’ by the Chairman is given far more prominence. How much else was said that went unrecorded? Are we able to judge the true position? Yes, of course the minute books should be studied, but let us stop treating them as gospels. They are not.

Perhaps worse is the excessive emphasis on contemporary newspapers. Agreed they too should be consulted, but only on the understanding that their accuracy is often grossly at fault. In the days when typesetting was still done by hand, the newspaper was just as anxious as now to rush into print with its stories before a rival got there first — and frequently before the facts could be verified. Read a series of different newspaper accounts of a major railway accident and later compare them with the official report of the subsequent inquiry and note how much they are at variance with each other and with the findings. I know which evidence I would be more ready to accept.

The word ‘contemporary’ is not an automatic label for reliability as some members of the primary source school would have us believe. By that token Victorian engineers should only be read in Smiles and not in Rolt. When the late and much lamented L T C Rolt wrote some of his biographies, he surely did not need further contemporary evidence to see that Smiles had certain typical Victorian hobby-horses which biased his accounts. Using his intelligence and viewing the scene from afar, he was able to see the wood for the trees. Interesting though it is to read Smiles, who wrote a contemporary account, I prefer to rely on Rolt’s interpretations, written a hundred years afterwards.

But if this makes us wary of what we are trained to regard as the only reliable sources, we can take heart

in new avenues of acceptability: 'Never take notice of the ramblings of the oldest inhabitant' was good advice and should still be heeded if there is no way of measuring them. In the past decade, however, oral history has taken on a new meaning with the excellent work done by an increasing number of individuals and bodies concerned with obtaining accurate and reliable information by this means — and much of it is information that is not available in primary source material. A study of the books of George Ewart Evans or Paul Thompson's *The Voice of the Past* (OUP 1978) will reveal that a great deal

of research has been done recently on the reliability one can place on various types of oral evidence and methods of obtaining it. It is achieving the status of a new science and properly applied will open up new fields to the historian.

By all means let us continue to place high emphasis on primary source material, but let us be aware of its pitfalls. At the same time let us accept that there are other sources of reliable information — and to get the story right we need all the information we can obtain.

Making Use of Secondary Sources

Frank A Sharman

These comments are reprinted from a letter published in the Journal in July 1981

The primary sources of transport history have been subject to many man hours of attack and the result has been the production of many individual studies. I would hold that none of them is, or ever can be, definitive in the sense of exhaustive. Indeed what most of them do is organise the primary sources into a manageable form for providing a general, and usually chronological, narration of the origin and development of one line of transport. Most of them are strikingly similar in what they emphasise and what they neglect. What these studies most certainly do not do is interpret the primary sources they present in the only way possible — both in so far as they do or do not accept the primary sources as gospel and in so far as they do not apply to those sources all the questions which may arise about transport history.

I think it is time we started to make more use of the secondary sources. My own interest is in legal aspects of transport history — aspects which are widely disregarded in the published works. One could tackle the legal implications of transport history

by diving into the primary sources — and resurfacing in about the year 2000. One can also make a reasonable job of the matter, in far shorter order, by squeezing out of the secondary sources such references to the matter as they do make and then interpreting them.

In other words, we need to take some stock of what has been dug up from the primary sources so far and to make only selected excavations where it becomes imperative. In most disciplines there has always been a distinction between the field worker and the armchair worker. The latter has, in historical studies, fallen somewhat into disrepute of late, being, unreasonably, equated with 'popularising' an activity which is, equally unreasonably, seen as inherently inferior if not downright bad.

There is still great scope for the armchair historian so long as he remembers that in dealing with secondary sources he has to keep his critical wits about him just as much as field workers must on their dusty or muddy forays.

A time will come when you reckon you had better publish. I will not say when you reckon the job is done, for that time never comes.

Charles Hadfield

The kind of history I want is accurate, comprehensive, and readable. That's all.

Michael Robbins

Bewdley's Suicide: A Reassessment

J D Porteous

First published in the Journal in July 1967

History abounds in unsubstantial legends which remain current until confronted by contrary evidence. One of these concerns the supposed rejection by the citizens of Bewdley, Worcestershire, of Brindley's proposal to fix the Severn terminus of the Staffordshire & Worcestershire Canal at that town. This falls into the well-known category of towns which failed to welcome a canal or rail line and paid for their shortsightedness by loss of trade to an upstart rival, transport-created or -enlivened. No canal historian can fail to have encountered the story of Bewdley's suicide, for the creation of the town of Stourport as the Severn terminus soon put an end to Bewdley's river trade, leaving the town in the charming state of fossilization we see today. It seems strange that Hadfield, in his definitive *Canals of the West Midlands*, omits this interesting story altogether, while Rolt also fails to give it even a passing reference.¹

The story is worth examining from the two points of view of engineering decision-making and available documentary evidence. The Staffordshire & Worcestershire Canal was conceived early in 1766 as a trunk line between the well-used Severn and the Trent & Mersey (Grand Trunk) Canal then being agitated. From both engineering and economic points of view, the optimal route for this canal was not the Tern Bridge (near Shrewsbury) – Trent route suggested by Whitworth, whose estate lay along that line, but the route via the Penk, Smestow and Stour valleys, a line projected by Congreve forty years earlier.² At the Severn end, the last major town to be linked by the canal was to be Kidderminster, a fact noted not only in the Act (Royal Assent 14 May 1766) but also at 'a very numerous meeting of Gentlemen, Landowners, Traders, and Manufacturers, held at Wolverhampton' on 24 March 1766 at which it was agreed that the canal should enter the Severn 'at or near a place called Stour's Mouth'.³ The Act, however, specified the Severn outfall vaguely 'between Bewdley and Titton Brook' (below Stourmouth) a distance of about six miles.⁴ The reason for this vagueness is not clear, but it is likely that adequate surveys had not been finalized, or that the participants were giving themselves room to manoeuvre.

Assuming, however, that the engineers and projectors debated the possibilities of Bewdley versus Stourmouth as the terminus, we can assess the advantages of each, bearing in mind the local geography of the time and the adequacy of contemporary maps. Bewdley's main claim lay in its status as a thriving river-port fed by pack-horse routes from the north and midlands, with a well developed shipping and forwarding infrastructure. But Stourmouth had every other advantage. A canal leaving Kidderminster for Bewdley would have to lock up from about 100ft OD to 250ft, and then down again to the Severn at Wribbenhall, over the block of hills separating Stour and Severn. In comparison, to continue down the Stour valley was both easy and cheap, for a sandstone shelf following the 100ft contour on the right wall of the valley was an ideal track for a Brindleyan contour-hugging canal, and avoided the swampy valley floor. Moreover, whereas the Bewdley line would have disturbed an established park, no doubt at some cost, the Stour line not only avoided the parks set on high ground above the valley, but also linked up a number of the active forges for which the pre-Industrial Revolution Stour was noted.⁵ If Brindley did choose Bewdley first, as is alleged, it is clear that unless his engineering concepts had radically altered in this southern milieu, this choice was not rationally based on a close examination of the terrain, and was likely to be substantially altered on closer inspection. Bewdley, therefore, was unlikely to get the canal in the first place let alone be given the chance to reject it.

The documentary evidence for the rejection must now be examined. One of the story's earliest appearances, little more than 30 years after the event is in Nash (1799): 'Brindley proposed making the bason at Wribbenhall and consequently requested the assistance of the inhabitants of Bewdley for its completion. Unfortunately the scheme was rejected, and, I am credibly informed, with less politeness than the offer merited.'⁶ It would seem that the conservative Severn monopolists of Bewdley were extremely sure of themselves, although they cannot have been unaware of the value of canals in this hey-day of the

Duke of Bridgewater.

The tale of rejection is taken up by a number of later writers. Harral (1824) is not quite sure, 'It is said,' he notes, 'that the people of Bewdley opposed the intention of making the Staffordshire canal communicate with the Severn at this place.'⁷ Laird, a contemporary, echoes this uncertainty, for 'We have been told' begins his story of how 'some of the leading men' of Bewdley opposed the canals. No mention is however, found in several contemporary sources⁹, but the story reappears in Billing's Directory for 1855.¹⁰ By 1883 the tale had been coloured a little more; J R Burton, the antiquarian of Bewdley, insists that the inhabitants of Bewdley actually 'petitioned against the canal'.¹¹ The simple rejection is obviously not sufficient to keep the story going, and the tale of doom following the rejection of progress was evidently much to the liking of a generation brought up on Samuel Smiles. Today the legend is perpetuated in popular canal literature and by British Waterways.¹² Unfortunately not one of the above-mentioned writers has seen fit to give his source of information.

Confusion seems to have arisen over (a) a petition made by the Bewdleyans, and (b) their rejection of a canal. The citizens of Bewdley made at least three petitions in this critical period. The last of these, in 1774, was an attempt to limit the growth of an already-established Stourport by preventing the construction of a bridge across the Severn there, for which a Bill was under consideration. 47 signatories, including one Samuel Haddock, vainly beseeched D Zachary Esq, the owner of the land on which the bridge was to be built, to oppose the measure.¹³ Their grounds for opposition were numerous, including the adequacy of Bewdley Bridge, an obstruction to river traffic and an increase in the number of poor should the Stourport bridge be built, besides the expected desertion of new turnpikes. The main object, however, was to prevent at all costs the growth of Stourport, not only as a port, but as a local market, which would effectually remove Bewdley's last *raison d'être*. If the Bewdleyans had indeed rejected the canal in 1766, by 1774 they were regretting the move, especially as Stourport's urban sphere of influence became established mainly on Bewdley's side of the Severn.

The facts of early 1766, however, are these: on 15 February of that year, the inhabitants of Bewdley presented two petitions to the House of Commons, in conjunction with the similar petitions of nearby

towns. The second petition, with Wolverhampton, Walsall and Willenhall, was to oppose Whitworth's intended Severn-Trent-Weaver canal, a danger to the Trent-Mersey and Trent-Severn proposals.¹⁴ The texts make much of the obstructions in the Severn above Bewdley and state: 'The Petitioners conceive, that the Merchants, Manufacturers and Trading Towns of Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Walsall, Stourbridge, Kidderminster, Bewdley and Dudley, and Places adjacent ... cannot receive the least Benefit from the said intended Navigation.' From this we see that the people of Bewdley cannot have been oblivious to the benefits of canals, but, contrariwise, were only too aware of them.

The astuteness of the Bewdleyans is further seen in the petition presented immediately before the one outlined above, at a time when the Trent-Severn line was much in the news, but the route probably not decided. A preliminary petition from the 'Gentlemen, Clergy, Merchants, Freeholders, Manufacturers and Tradesmen' of Wolverhampton stated that in view of the intended Trent-Mersey Canal, 'in order to extend the Navigation aforesaid, for the Benefit of the Land and Trading Interest, the Petitioners apprehend, is it practicable to make a Navigable Canal from or near Bewdley, on the River Severn, through Kidderminster', and thence, via the Peak, to the Trent. This proposition was backed up by petitions from the towns of Walsall, Stourbridge, Kidderminster, Dudley and Bewdley, all favouring a 'Bewdley Canal', and 'setting forth, that the Petitioners apprehend the making and maintaining such a Navigable Canal, will be of great Public Utility; And therefore pray, that the said Bill, if brought into the House, may pass into a Law'.¹⁵

The Bewdley petitioners in each case consisted of 'The Bailiff, Justices, Aldermen, Capital Burgesses, Merchants, Gentlemen, Clergy and Tradesmen of the Borough'. It is almost inconceivable that there could have been other 'leading men' (Laird c1818) capable of 'petitioning against the canal' (Burton 1883). Bewdley was founded on trade, and its merchants and shippers would hardly have been likely to let such a golden opportunity slip their grasp. The facts of the case are probably that the Staffordshire & Worcestershire Canal was at first planned extremely haphazardly, with either no explicit Severn terminus, or with Bewdley as a tentative suggestion based on small scale maps uncorrected by local survey. But within one month of these petitions, the Wolverhampton proposers, on second thoughts, had set their sights towards Stourmouth.¹⁶ In the vague

situation before this date, however, it would seem that Bewdley did its best to capture the Severn terminus of the canal.

Unless further evidence comes to light¹⁷, we can feel sure that the citizens of Bewdley, far from rejecting the ‘stinking ditch’ out of hand, as is generally alleged, strenuously attempted to guide the

canal towards their town, being sufficiently farseeing to realize that its non-appearance might herald their doom as a trading community. Thus the garbled story which at present passes for truth may be regarded as no more than a two-hundred year libel on the economic foresight of the citizens of 18th century Bewdley.

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6. T R Nash, *Collections for the History of Worcestershire*, 1782, Supplement 1799, 47
7. T Harrall *Picturesque Views of the Severn*, vol 1, 1824, 288
8. Mr Laird, *A Topographical and Historical Description of the County of Worcestershire*, c1818, 248.
9. W Pitt, *A General View of the Agriculture of Worcestershire*, 1810
10. M Billings, *Directory and Gazetteer of Worcestershire*, 1855, 185
11. I R Burton, *A History of Bewdley*, 1883, 15
12. *Cruising on the Staffordshire & Worcestershire Canal*, British Waterways Inland Cruising Booklet No 4, 4, 21
13. Petition of the Borough and Inhabitants of Bewdley to D Zachary, 1774, Worcester CRO, (3198) 705: 135/22
14. R Whitworth, *The Advantages of Inland Navigation*, 1766
15. *Journal of the House of Commons* XXX (1765–66), 15 February 1766, 574
16. At the meeting of 24 March 1766, noted above. Indeed the *VCH* (Worcestershire) states Stourmouth to be Brindley's choice, *VCH* (1906) vol 2, 168.
17. Brindley's diary 1755–58 (Birmingham Central Library) obviously reveals nothing, while the original petitions, although ‘laid on the table’ are not to be found in the House of Lords Records Office. The town of Bewdley itself possesses no reliable material bearing on the subject.

What Happened in the Tunnel?

A Study in Railway Mythology

Philip A Stevens

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Many years ago, an eminent railway historian remarked to me that there was an excellent book to be written about railway openings, since something usually went wrong, producing always interesting and often hilarious results. One opening which is often

quoted in this context is that of the first section of the Leicester & Swannington Railway on 17 July 1832. This line, designed mainly to bring the mineral products of west Leicestershire into the county town, was engineered by Robert Stephenson, and its

opening had been delayed by unexpected engineering difficulties, notably at the 1796 yd tunnel at Glenfield. It is this latter which is the centrepiece of the well-known incident which it is the purpose of this paper to examine.

According to the accepted version of the story, the first train, a special, bearing the directors, shareholders and friends to the number of between three and four hundred people, and consisting of a covered carriage and 'ten other temporary carriages' (ie coal wagons fitted up for the occasion), left the West Bridge station, Leicester, at about 10am, bound for the foot of the Bagworth incline, at the beginning of the coalfield area, that being the limit of construction at the time. At the head of the train was the Company's only locomotive, *Comet*, a product of Robert Stephenson & Co. The train, in fact, departed twice, since its first setting out was so impressive that it was stopped after travelling a few yards, reversed into the station, and made to do it over again. All went well until the train was inside Glenfield tunnel, when, in the words of C E Stretton in his *History of the Midland Railway*, 'a sudden shock was felt. The train almost came to a stop, and the band (occupying one of the waggons) ceased to play.' Stretton goes on to say that, owing to platelayers packing the track too high, the locomotive's chimney had come into contact with the roof of the tunnel and been knocked off, 'and the occupants of the open vehicles were for what seemed to them a considerable time kept in the dark in a moist, smoky atmosphere'. During this time, he says, they were 'thickly covered' with black spots by the smoke (described as dense) from the locomotive, and a stop was made so that they could remove the grime by means of handkerchiefs and the waters of the Glenfield Brook.

Such is the story, and it has been widely accepted. It will be noted that the name of C E Stretton has been cited. Unfortunately, Stretton, indefatigable writer though he was, is not ranked among the most reliable of historians, and is the source of some quite inexplicable errors which have bedevilled railway history in the Midlands to our own time. However, he was a local man, and it has been generally held that he was in a position to gain information from men who were present on the occasion, and so could be trusted in this instance. Reference to Stretton's pamphlet on the Leicester & Swannington of 1891 seems to support this. It was produced originally as a lantern lecture given at Leicester Museum in that year, and for once Stretton cites his evidence. His informant was William Kelly, a well known local

historian whose reputation for accuracy is still high. The Kelly family lived near the West Bridge station, and according to William, he and his sister were invited to travel on the train by Gillespie, the resident engineer, who chanced to notice them watching the train filling with passengers on the opening day. He records the breakdown in the tunnel, and says that, although at the time it was said to be due to the workmen forgetting to take out the cross-timbers used in building the tunnel, 'a few years ago' E S Ellis, the Midland Railway chairman, who had also been aboard the train as a youngster, told him that it was due to a mistake in the gradient of the line.

On the fact of it, this is conclusive. But, on reflection, doubt creeps in. From the content, it is clear that Stretton got this information from a letter by Kelly — written in 1891; that is, nearly 60 years after the event, and the human memory is notoriously unreliable at such a distance of time. Doubt was considerably increased in my mind when I came across a similar tale of Trevithick's Penydarren locomotive having its chimney knocked off by a bridge on its historic run in 1804; and I also recalled that Stretton describes the first train on the North Midland from Masborough to Derby as breaking down in Clay Cross tunnel in 1840. Had tunnels a sort of hoodoo effect on early railways? Or did nobody think about them when fixing the height of locomotive chimneys? My doubts grew still more when I encountered in the records at Porchester Road a letter written by a Leicester man very much nearer the time than Kelly's description. This was written on 11 April 1833 by a young man named James Gibson, who was not himself on the train — but 'Father, Edward, and William all went, and had a very fine holiday'. He was thus in a very good position to get first-hand knowledge of what happened and he records — nothing; merely that 'they went up to Bagworth in about an hour'. There then follows a description of the mishaps to a number of people foolish enough to try to ride their horses through the tunnel after the train. There is quite an amount of information about the line in the letter — including a note of a derailment which sent one of the L&SR's later locomotives into a gravel pit — and the fact that an alert, intelligent and interested observer does not mention any incident in the tunnel is significant.

The next source to investigate was obviously the minutes of the Directors' meetings of the company. Surely, if the Swannington had made a fool of itself in such a conspicuous way when half Leicestershire was watching, the Directors would have had

somebody's blood? But there is no mention whatever of the supposed mishap in the minutes. Unfortunately, it has to be added that neither is there any mention of the opening of the line!

Official sources having failed me, I went to the files of local newspapers in the Leicester Reference Library. As might have been expected both the local papers covered the opening. To take the *Leicester Journal* first. This has the important statement that the passengers took their seats according to the numbers on their tickets, which would imply that there was little chance of a latecomer like Kelly with no ticket getting aboard. After describing the two departures, the *Journal* comes to the passage of the tunnel. Its exact words are: 'It is impossible to conceive the feeling that instantaneously struck the company in the carriages on exchanging the glaring light of a July sun for the almost impenetrable darkness of the subterranean passage, and the heat of a summer's day for the chill of night. On emerging from the darkness of the tunnel into the clear light of day, the cheering effect was evinced in a simultaneous shout of pleasure and delight from the whole party; and the spirits which had been depressed by the passage through the gloomy cavern were soon elated to the highest pitch.' There is no mention of the depression of spirits having been amply justified by an accident in the tunnel, and in case it should be thought that the *Journal* correspondent was so unobservant that he may have failed to notice a happening which according to Stretton's account made itself heard even above the band — no mean feat if Leicestershire bands of those days resembled their descendants — it should be said that he records a fact not otherwise noted, that the train had some difficulty in managing the last mile to Bagworth, owing to what Gillespie called 'a bit of a garg', which the *Journal* man interpreted as the locomotive being short of steam.

The *Journal* account is a full one; but it is exceeded by its rival, the *Leicester Chronicle*, which carried two independent eye-witness accounts. One of them is by a staff reporter, and confirms the details of that in the *Journal*. The passage relating to the tunnel, however, contains extra items of great interest. In the first place, it records that the train stopped before entering the tunnel, to pick up water from the 'reservoir' or water tank a short distance from the eastern end of the tunnel. It then goes on to say that the train then 'bounded' through the tunnel in 6 minutes. As the tunnel is 1 mile 36 yards long, and the tank some 170 yards away from it, this hardly

seems to leave time for any check to the acceleration of the small locomotive, hauling its sixty-yard long train of 11 (one report says 12) vehicles and up to 400 passengers, let alone a stop in the tunnel.

The other account in the *Chronicle* is from the pen of William Gardiner, a Leicester hosiery manufacturer well known as a man of letters and musician. It is especially significant because he was obviously scared stiff, and would hardly have overlooked any untoward event. He does not, however, record any mishap to the engine in the tunnel, though he does say that some passengers 'before we were half through' felt 'a great depression of the breath' which he put down to fumes from the engine (which should have burnt coke, and, on this occasion at least, probably did).

What, then, *did* happen in the tunnel? On the evidence of the contemporary witnesses, one is inclined to say 'Nothing'. It is, however, possible that the story preserved by Stretton is a garbled memory of minor incidents not understood in those early days of railway travel. The 'depression of breath' may have been caused by changes in the pressure of the air in the tunnel, which was a notoriously narrow-bore one (the Midland Railway coaches for the line had barred windows to stop passengers from having their brains knocked out by imprudently putting their heads out of the window in the tunnel). But Gardiner may have been right to attribute it to fumes from the engine; anybody who travelled through the tunnel on the footplate or in a brake van will know how foul the tunnel could get, and coke fumes in such a confined space would be highly unpleasant, especially to people in open wagons. This may have given rise to the belief that the fumes were there because the chimney was knocked down. The reputed stop to wash in the Glenfield Brook (which would not have been necessary, since coke fumes would not have covered the passengers with smuts) may be a misinterpretation of a stop which was certainly made at the junction with the Groby granite quarry branch, near Glenfield, where Lord Stamford's agent was waiting to congratulate the Directors. The *Chronicle* records that the train on its return journey passed through the tunnel more slowly than on the outward trip, and this sounds as though the enginemmen were looking out for trouble; but this is as likely to be because of the attempts to pass through the tunnel by onlookers as because of any fear of collision with the roof — as has been said, the tunnel is very narrow, and there would have been no chance for anybody unlucky

enough to be in it at the same time as the train

It is extraordinarily difficult to prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that a reputed event did not happen, for naturally nobody bothers to report a non-event; and it is always possible that, tucked away in a corner of a provincial newspaper, or in an unpublished letter or diary, there may be an eye-

witness account of the defunnelling of *Comet*. But, in view of the silence of available evidence, which in fact points to the mishap as not having happened, it is surely wiser to regard the story as part of the mythology of early railways until the contrary is proved.

Acknowledgments

I am indebted to the BR Archivist for allowing facilities to work on the Leicester & Swannington Railway records, and to the Chief Librarian, Leicester

City Libraries, for permission to use the files of local newspapers in his care.

A Railway ‘Gallery’ at Harlesden

D Garnett

Published in October 1970, this was the first illustration to appear in the Journal

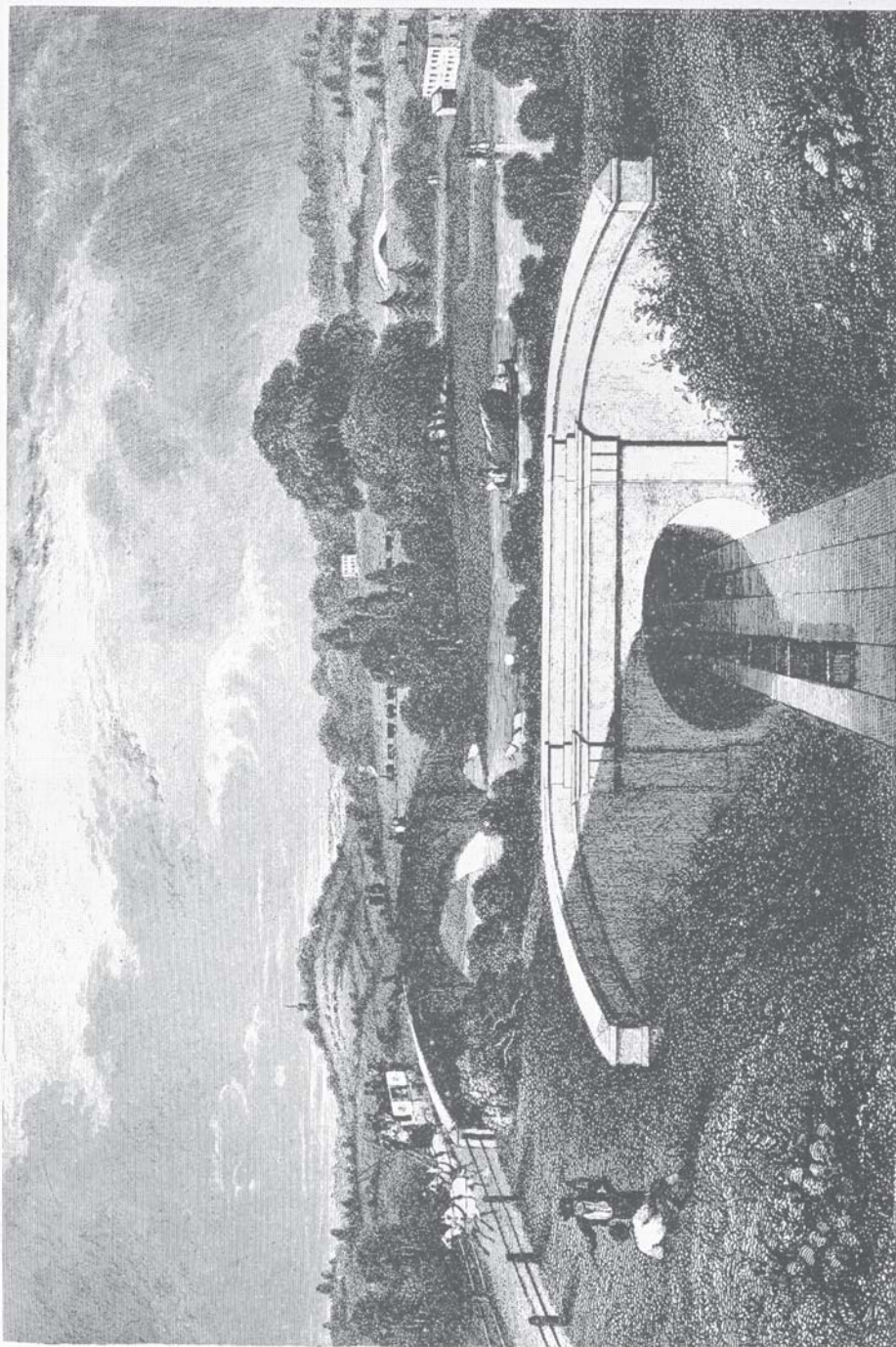
A remarkable picture is reproduced opposite by kind permission of our Member, Mr C V Martin. It purports to show the North face of the short tunnel carrying the Birmingham, Bristol & Thames Junction Railway (later West London Railway) under the Paddington branch of the Grand Junction Canal at Harlesden. The line had obtained its Act on 21 June 1837 thereby acquiring precedence at the level crossing immediately south of this tunnel which the Great Western Railway’s Paddington extension Act of 3 July 1837 authorized. The Great Western had to buy out this right.

An excellent reproduction of an official plan of this level crossing as it existed in 1844 is shown on page 275 of Volume 93 of *The Railway Magazine* (1947). This shows only the northbound track in situ, though the tunnel is clearly wide enough for two tracks. The south face of the tunnel, with an entirely different architectural motif, is shown on page 273 but the level crossing has been replaced by a bridge.

The plan mentioned shows that the road (Scrub’s

Lane) crossed the canal immediately over the point at which this crossed the railway. The *Railway Magazine* reproduced a rather poor picture of the south face of the tunnel on page 443 of Volume VII (1902). This also shows only the northbound track in situ but it also shows a bowstring girder bridge carrying the road over the canal and the tunnel. The tunnel face is the same as that shown in the later picture but the latter does not show the bowstring girder bridge.

Thomas Kelly’s picture appears to be the ultimate in artist’s licence and must really be a complete figment of his imagination. The Great Western was opened between Paddington (old station) and a temporary terminus near Maidenhead on 4 June 1838, barely a year after the Birmingham, Bristol & Thames Junction obtained their Act. So there wasn’t much time for the latter to complete their line and for herbage to grow on the slopes of the cutting and for the artist to obtain his impression *before* the Great Western earthworks upset the scene. But is that the Great Western in the middle distance? In 1837?



RAILWAY GALLERY UNDER THE CANAL NEAR HOLSDEN GREEN, MIDDLESEX, BIRMINGHAM, BRISTOL & THAMES JUNCTION RAILWAY

London, Published by Thomas Kelly, 1837.

The Beginnings of Electric Traction

G O Holt

First published in the Journal in July 1960

Electric traction on the railways of Great Britain is generally believed to be of comparatively recent origin, and those who trace its development usually take the year 1883 as their starting point. In that year Volks Electric Railway at Brighton (later enlarged and improved) was opened on 3 August and a few weeks later, the Giant's Causeway, Portrush and Bush Valley line began to operate a public service, the Bessbrook and Newry coming next in 1885. Still earlier, in 1879, a Siemens electric locomotive ran on a miniature railway at the Berlin Exhibition.

A few years ago, the weekly magazine of the SNCF, *La Vie du Rail* published a curious little drawing in an article dealing with the electrification of railways. This represented an electrically propelled vehicle said to have been tried on the Edinburgh & Glasgow Railway about 1840, and more than one eminent railway historian declined to believe in it. But there are grounds for supposing that electric trains go back to even earlier days for, in July 1837, *Herapaths Railway Magazine* published a short paragraph to the effect that scientists had 'long looked to electro-magnetism for important consequences in the application of its power', and, according to a paper called the *New Era* published in New York, Thomas Davenport, a Vermont blacksmith, had built a small electric car which ran on a circular railroad 'with immense velocity, and rapidly ascended an inclined plane of far greater elevation than any hitherto ascended by steam power'. A more detailed description was quoted in the *Railway Magazine* for the following month.

According to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and other sources, Robert Davidson of Aberdeen constructed an electric locomotive in 1839. It weighed about 5 tons, current was supplied by a battery of forty cells carried on the vehicle, and it is said to have attained a speed of 4 mph on the Edinburgh & Glasgow Railway.

On 11 September, 1841, Heraopath reported that a clerk in the Bank of England claimed to have invented an electro-magnetic locomotive. The Chief Accountant, who was interested in scientific experiments, invited him to dinner and evidently proved his invention to be a hoax, whereupon the unfortunate clerk was 'reduced to the back offices'.

In 1847-1848 the vagaries of the South Devon Railway's atmospheric system were being reported in some detail by *Woolmers Exeter Gazette*, and the Editor evidently thought a news item from America would arouse the interest of readers who were following the progress of the line. Heraopath on 18 December 1847 quoted this paragraph which stated that a Mr Lilly of Pittsburg had a small electric locomotive running on a circular railroad, which differed from Davenport's in that power was supplied 'not to the locomotive but to the track ... Two currents of electricity, negative and positive are supplied to the rails and from thence communicate to the engine. The latter is provided with two magnets, which, by a process of alternate attraction and repulsion, drive the car over the track.' Hence, 'an engineer might remain in one town and, with his battery, send a locomotive and train to any distance required'. But Heraopath, suspicious of any invention which must have seemed as impracticable as Brunel's 'Atmospheric' tersely commented, 'We doubt this.'

Knowing, as we now do, that these principles were developed some thirty years later, it seems remarkable that a successful locomotive did not see the light of day before 1879. The American inventions were evidently little more than toys, but these contemporary accounts of them at least give weight to the story that Robert Davidson's locomotive actually ran upon the Edinburgh & Glasgow Railway during the lifetimes of George Stephenson and Michael Faraday. It would be interesting to know whether any trustworthy accounts of the inventions have survived.

Excursions Extraordinary

C R Clinker

This 'filler' was published in the Journal in March 1958

At least two instances are on record of excursions run for the purpose of witnessing public hangings. On Monday, 13 April 1840, the Bodmin & Wadebridge Railway ran three special trains to Bodmin so that Wadebridge people might see the hanging of William and James Lightfoot, convicted of the murder of Mr Norway, one of their townsmen. No fewer than 1,100 people travelled on this occasion, almost half the population of the town! As the gaol adjoined the railway depot at Bodmin, passengers were able to see the spectacle in comfort from their carriages. (*Bodmin Guardian*, 17 April 1840) The company also ran special trains for those wishing to attend the assizes four times a year. On Saturday, 15

September 1849, Gleeson Wilson was hanged outside Kirkdale gaol, Liverpool. The Lancashire & Yorkshire Railway ran what a local newspaper described as 'cheap trains, all of which were densely packed'. (*Nottingham Review*, 21 September 1849)

A more pleasant note is struck by an advertisement of one of Thomas Cook's excursions in the Gloucester Chronicle for 23 July 1853 — 'This being the first time he has had the honour of conducting a party of excursionists via Gretna Green, if any demand is made by ladies and gentlemen of the party for the services of Mr Linton or Mr Murray [the 'Gretna Parsons'] the special shall be detained to enable them to terminate "single blessedness".'

Some Railway Might-Have-Beens Wales, Border Counties, and Scotland

Charles Klapper

The September–November 1964 edition of the Journal included Klapper's paper 'Some Railway Might-Have-Beens', which had been presented to a meeting of the Society on 18 January 1964. Unfortunately, it is too long to reproduce here in full, but these extracts give the flavour. Sub-headings have been added.

Of all the aspects of the might-have-been, the unfulfilled scheme for a railway is the one which can lead us to the most entertaining reflections; my own interest in them was stirred as long ago as 1928 when I was looking at the late Holman Fred Stephens's collection of pre-grouping first-class passes in his office at Tonbridge and he said, on bringing out the Great Northern one: 'You know, if the Great Northern Railway had carried out its intention of taking over the Potteries, Shrewsbury & North Wales and completing it to Porthdinllaen, there would have been

no need for my Shropshire & Montgomeryshire Light Railway.'

There are many similar projects, some wrapped in more mystery than others, which have come to nought. Many remained paper schemes; some secured authorization but did not proceed to construction; others began construction and through the great financial crisis of 1866 or for other reasons had to abandon their chosen task before it was complete. More rarely a railway has been completed but not brought into use.

Manchester & Milford

Manchester, from early in the 19th century, had the urge for communication with the sea developed to a high degree. The Liverpool & Manchester Railway was a happy result and later, the Ship Canal became a hallmark of Victorian achievement. Some other ventures ended queerly, however. The Railway Mania produced schemes for connecting Manchester with Poole Harbour, Southampton Water, Milford Haven and with the Tyne, none of which came off and none of which had any great intention of starting on their own tracks in Manchester.

The Manchester & Milford idea turned up at one period as a Manchester & Aberystwyth project, but during the next 15 years, the original conception was gradually completed by local undertakings. One could reach Llanidloes from Manchester via Crewe, Welshpool and Newtown and one could get from Milford Haven to Carmarthen and up the Carmarthen & Cardigan Railway, which eventually was to turn west from Pencader to reach Newcastle Emlyn. In 1860 the Manchester & Milford Railway was sanctioned, but the imposing title covered a mere 51¼ miles of route from Llanidloes to Pencader Junction across the outlayers of the Plynlimon range.

The Manchester & Milford speedily got itself involved in difficulties, some through no fault of its own. The first section of 1¾ miles out of Llanidloes southward, for example, was authorised by Parliament in the 1860 Act over the same ground as a line already authorised to the Mid Wales company. This was resolved by the Llanidloes & Newtown company obtaining an Act, 17 July 1862, to build the line from Llanidloes to Penpontbrin for the use of the rival claimants. The three companies shared the cost of a joint station at Llanidloes; considering the population the structure there is an imposing memorial to their earnestness.

In the meantime, a fatal new idea had struck the Manchester & Milford directors; to get some of the Aberystwyth traffic, they obtained powers in 1861 for a branch there from Devils Bridge. In 1865 the scheme was modified and, as built, the Aberystwyth branch ran from Strata Florida. In this year, the Mid Wales obtained power to build extensions to the Manchester & Milford. The 1866 financial storms left the M&M, as so many Welsh companies, rudderless in a sea of debt. The main line of the M&M had been completed from Pencader through Lampeter towards Strata Florida and the opportunity was taken of diverting it the quick and easy way to Aberystwyth,

whence connexions northward to Newtown were available by the Aberystwyth & Welsh Coast from 1 August 1864 onwards. This section of the M&M was completed in 1867. There was never any more cash for capital works.

From the junction with the lines of the Llanidloes & Newtown and the Mid Wales at Cwmbelan, the Manchester & Milford had been completed to Llangurig, where a station was laid out with track and signals in 1863. Beyond the village the railway ran on the hillside north of the Wye for some distance before funds ran out and work stopped, never to be resumed, about 14 miles from the intended goal at Strata Florida across the high moors.

In 1936, accompanied by my wife, I walked from Llangurig to Cwmbelan, taking photographs of the ravages of 60 years on the earthworks. In one place a cart track cut down the embankment; in others, streams had hacked a way through. Sometimes bad drainage had produced a bog. In other parts one could see sleeper marks as if the track had been lifted only yesterday. We were able to photograph the signal Fox Davies photographed for T R Perkins over thirty years previously. A heavy hailstorm hastened our footsteps back and we spent the evening enjoying Welsh hospitality in borrowed clothes. The next day we walked to the western end of the line, where one could still, with a little imagination, see the last marks of pick and shovel before orders came to pack up work for the last time. Track had never apparently been laid on this western section, which incidentally, it would appear from T R Perkins' *Railway Magazine* article of 1906, he and his friend did not explore. In the course of walking up the Wye to the summit of Plynlimon my wife and I cast about for any signs of contractor's work further west but weather continued mostly inclement and we had no success, although from time to time correspondents have provided one with stories of abandoned work on a tunnel in these mountains.

It is sad that the Manchester & Milford finished up with the singular mortification of being responsible for a third share in the costs of a joint station 18 miles as the crow flies from its nearest trains. Of all the extraordinary positions that British railways got themselves into, the M&M's was probably the most peculiar.

Sennybridge to Llangammarch Wells

The Neath & Brecon Sennybridge–Llangammarch Wells line was authorized in July 1864, and the

contractor started in at several separate places — the high bridge over the Usk, a level crossing and earthworks over several miles of the route across the Mynydd Eppynt. This line can be recommended to the explorers of abandoned enterprises — in the Act of 1869 when the Swansea Vale and Neath & Brecon Junction was vested in the N & B it was stated that the ‘Langammarch branch had been commenced, but the contractor was unable to complete so much of the contracts entered into by him with the company as remain unperformed’. Very polite. An attempt at a Llangammarch and Neath & Brecon Junction Railway was made under an Act of 1882 to use up the earthworks. R P Lawrie was a director common to the two companies but the Stock Exchange thought then as one must think now that both the M&M and the N&B connexion with the Central Wales would have made some impact on their owning systems had they been completed, but that it is difficult to see any earth-shaking results occurring from the projection of second class railways across two peculiarly barren countrysides.

To Ireland — via Shropshire

During Railway Mania negotiations the Great Western offered to subscribe £1,000,000 to a broad gauge line to the proposed Caernarvonshire port of Porth Dynllaen out of a required capital of £2,700,000 for the Worcester and Porth Dynllaen Railway, surveyed by Brunel. But the gauge report of 1846 would have prevented the adoption of the 7 ft gauge and the GWR withdrew its support, causing the collapse of the company if not the idea. Because of the attractions of a shorter sea passage to Ireland it was revived in 1861, when Parliament rejected the West Midland, Shrewsbury & Coast of Wales Railway Bill; the separate Portmadoc & Porthdynllaen Bill was then withdrawn. In 1862, however, the West Shropshire Mineral Railway obtained powers for a line from Llanymynech to Westbury (on the newly authorized Shrewsbury & Welshpool Railway) and these were the subject of an amending Act the following year. This sanctioned a diversion to Redhill, nearer Shrewsbury; a westward extension from Llanymynech to Llanyblodwel and quarries at Nantmawr was also authorized. It was in this year that the Stafford & Uttoxeter Railway, over which the Great Northern Railway later obtained running powers, obtained its powers.

On the same day, 30 June 1864, two West Shropshire Acts were passed, one authorizing 20 miles of

new route and the other changing the name to Shrewsbury & North Wales and authorizing construction of another 18¾ miles of line. The next step was the incorporation on 5 July 1865, of the Shrewsbury & Potteries Junction to make 23½ miles of line from Redhill via Shrewsbury to Market Drayton, etc. In the following year the two lines were amalgamated as the Potteries, Shrewsbury & North Wales as from 16 July 1866. The combined line from Shrewsbury via Redhill to Llanymynech was opened on 13 August 1866, a case of the 13th being a thoroughly unlucky day. At June 30 previously the Potteries company had managed to spend £380,751 (Colonel Stephens in 1920 propounded a scheme to make use of the derelict earthworks involved) and the North Wales no less a sum than £734,796. The financial crisis of 1866 was upon the country and all the grand combined company had to show was 21 miles of route across thinly populated agricultural country that can hardly support a Bedford bus or two even today. And what a main line! Starting from the Shrewsbury Station in Abbey Foregate, connecting with the Welshpool line and throwing off a spur over a high embankment and through a costly cutting to the Wellington line, it was laid out with easy curves and for double track, the Irish packet port bee buzzing hard in the heads of the directors. A great iron bridge spanned the Severn at Shrawardine and there were double track junctions to the Cambrian at Llanymynech and off again towards Llanyblodwel. The westward extension never got under way, but would have followed the Tanat, pierced the Berwyns by a two-mile tunnel from the Llangynog neighbourhood to near Bala and thence gone to Portmadoc and across the base of the Lleyn peninsular to the shores of the Irish Sea. Some £1,388,000 had been spent on the bits and pieces.

Traffic on the truncated line peaked in 1872, then declined steadily until the receipts caused alarm in 1877. It seems likely that no maintenance at all could be afforded, as in 1880 the Board of Trade stepped in and issued a Closing Order as from 22 June on the ground that track renewals ordered at the beginning of the year had not been carried out.

An attempt at revival between 1888 and 1891 was ineffective with the money available. The Shropshire Railways, then formed, arranged for the Cambrian to work Llanymynech–Nantmawr and later the Cambrian routed Llanfyllin trains over this piece by a new connexion to their own branch at Wern, the section north of that point to the main line being abandoned.

The Great Northern finally bought the Stafford & Uttoxeter in 1881 but apparently took a last despairing look at the PS&NW, whose metals it would have gained via the Wellington curve at Shrewsbury, and decided that with an LNWR–GWR joint line in between and the prospect of heavy expenditure to complete the North Wales route, it must remain only a pipe dream. The prospect of a cross-channel ship owned by the GNR and the GNR(I) — a sort of (GN)² joint ship — would have been one amusing outcome of completing a line between two companies which had some other links in rolling stock design and livery.

When the Tanat Valley line was built up to Llan-gynog from Llyncllys Junction, it used part of the Nantmawr extension and at Llanyblodwel there was a significant embankment to complete the triangle by which a train from Shrewsbury could have run in the Llangynog direction. The Llanymynech–Nantmawr section continued to be operated on behalf of the Shropshire Railways by the Cambrian and the Great Western, and for a time there were Llany-mynech–Blodwell Junction (that was the PS&NW Llanyblodwel renamed) passenger trains twice daily. The eastern part of the route was revived in 1911 by Colonel Stephens as the Shropshire & Montgomeryshire Railway; passenger trains were withdrawn in 1933 owing to the competition of Vagg’s buses and the BTC gave the nominal sum of £1 for the entire undertaking under the 1947 Act. The Llanymynech–Blodwell Junction line has been lifted from the junction at Wern to the Llanfyllin branch and more recently the Tanat Valley line has been replaced by buses.

I travelled in 1927 from Llanymynech to Shrewsbury by Ford back-to-back double railcar — in itself an awesome experience — and subsequently have had several opportunities of seeing the area west of Llanymynech. Motoring across it to Bala and going, whether by rail or road, across to Portmadoc and thence to the far side of the Llyn peninsula, one is again astonished at the courage of 19th century engineers in promoting schemes across such country.

North Wales

The 1ft 11½in gauge North Wales Narrow Gauge Railway was authorized by Act of 1872 to join the Portmadoc & Croesor Railway via Beddgelert to Bettws-y-Coed, a distance of 23 miles. This was the company’s ‘General Undertaking’. Also authorized was its ‘Moel Tryfan Undertaking’, which eventually

emerged as the line from Dinas Junction to Rhydou and the branch from Tryfan Junction to Bryngwyn, opened between 1877 and 1881. It was not long after incorporation that the directors realized they had produced a flop. There were endeavours to lease the Moel Tryfan Undertaking to Mr Hugh Beaver Roberts of Bangor, who signed in 1873 and repudiated in 1874. And the company was on such shaky ground it came to the conclusion that litigation would be injudicious. Two years later it secured power to abandon the general undertaking and to raise more cash to complete the Moel Tryfan.

The struggle to carry out some semblance of the original idea and to get a railway through the Pass of Aberglaslyn lasted from 1879 to 1923 — 44 years of litigation, receiverships, panics, construction started and abandoned and finally brought to fruition under a Light Railway Order.

The original NWNG scheme, it is worth noting, was in two parts, separated by the Snowdon (Rhyddu) to Beddgelert gap. The NWNG secured a Light Railway Order to cover this section on 3 November 1900. The other part was covered by an Act of 1879 which changed the Croesor & Portmadoc Railway (formerly incorporated in 1865) into the Portmadoc, Croesor & Beddgelert Tram Railway Company and authorized a branch through the Pass of Aberglaslyn to Beddgelert. Nothing was done, for the usual financial reasons, and in 1901, the undertaking was taken over by the Portmadoc, Beddgelert & South Snowdon Railway, which obtained an Act re-authorizing the Beddgelert branch, and curiously talks about the ‘outlet of the River Glaslyn into Llyn Gwynant’. Most people are under the impression that water flows downhill, but not so the framers of Section II of the PB&SS Act of 1901.

In 1904 another Act authorized a line from Caernarvon to Dinas and agreements with the NWNG. Later the latter’s light railway powers were transferred to the PB&SS so that the company had power to make a through route from Caernarvon to Portmadoc and to operate electrically into the bargain. Work was done in 1904 to 1906 in the Pass of Aberglaslyn on the tunnels and later on the 1 in 28 descent to Beddgelert and a bridge over the road south thereof. The NWNG closed in 1916.

When the Welsh Highland scheme was mooted after the War of 1914–18 a new route was adopted to reduce the gradients to 1 in 40 and to improve the layout south of Beddgelert. The 1 in 28 gradient and the road bridge south of Beddgelert were thus left derelict. The Welsh Highland, without the

Caernarvon–Dinas link, but suffering from bus competition, was an abject failure and was open only from 1923 to 1937.

* * * * *

Paisley & Barrhead District Railway

Among the more freakish might-have-beens was the Paisley & Barrhead District Railway, incorporated by Act of 6 August 1897, vested in the Caledonian in 1902 and opened for freight traffic on 1 June 1905. In its 11¼ miles of length from the Caledonian Greenock line near St James to Lyoncross Junction on the Ardrossan line provision was made for a passenger station at Lyoncross, but passenger stations were built complete and elaborate at Ferguslie, Stanely, Glenfield and Barrhead New, none of which, so far as I am aware, received a single traveller. There was a shorter chord from Arkleston Junction via Paisley East and Dykebar to Barrhead which also failed in its purpose. One can only conclude that electric tramway competition on the grand scale in the beginning of this century chilled the Caledonian ardour for a loop suburban service from Glasgow Central via Paisley and the Paisley & Barrhead District to Barrhead and back to Glasgow. Similar considerations, at a guess, caused stations on the Newhaven and South Leith section of the Caledonian to be abandoned before more than work on platforms had been carried out.

Scottish schemes: 1919

I conclude these brief outlines of selected might-have-beens with a reference to the Scottish light railway schemes concocted during the war of 1914–18. They were remarkable for having taken little account of the part motor transport might play in our economics, a fault that was also apparent in the charges provisions of the 1921 Railways Act.

In February 1918 the Secretary of State for Scotland appointed a committee to investigate rural transport facilities in Scotland. In the end of 1919 it reported, suggesting the construction of 382 miles of new railway, 85 miles of new road, 225 miles of

road improvements, road motor services over 224 route-miles and something like 1,000 route-miles of new steamer and motor boat services. Standard gauge railway proposals totalled 226 miles, the largest two items being strongly reminiscent of the schemes north of Dingwall which were a bone of contention between the Highland and the Great North of Scotland Railways; they were Culrain to Lochinver, 40 miles, and Garve to Ullapool, 33 miles. Parton, New Galloway and Dalmellington was the third in length, 28 miles. Some of the routes, such as Ballater and Braemar, had already been worked up by buses, but many are covered by daily or less frequent journeys of small Bedfords and in the latitude of Ullapool is Mellon Charles, distinguished by a fortnightly bus service. Even less realistic in the light of road transport development were the schemes for 156 miles of narrow gauge railway, 75 on Skye, 40 on Lewis, 20 on Arran and 21 isolated in Argyllshire between Dunoon on the Firth of Clyde and Strachur, nearly opposite Inveraray on Loch Fyne. The whole system was to have been administered by a Scottish division of the Ministry of Ways and Communications which became the Ministry of Transport. Nationalisation of transport was, of course, so much a live subject then — a promising young MP named Winston Churchill had just been advocating the taking over of the railways in a famous speech in Dundee.

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In this paper, I have made no attempt other than to give some entertaining thoughts on possibilities now irretrievably lost which may give some of you pleasure either in the field, searching for those elusive relics of embankments and cuttings that have given me much interest and exercise at various times, or in the armchair, where you can speculate on the composition of a through express from Manchester to Milford by way of Llangurig, whether the Great Northern would have built a 4–6–0 if it had had to work boat expresses across the Berwyns and the Arenigs, or to what sort of status as fishing port and holiday resort Ullapool might have attained had it had through coaches on the night sleepers from London.

1986 AGM
weekend
at March
[A C Mott]



The Railway & Canal Historical Society: A Review of the Second Fifty Years, 2004–2054

Martin Barnes

Dr Martin Barnes, now in his 115th year and the longest-serving member of Council, looks back over the last half century.

This article is reproduced from the Journal celebrating the 100th Anniversary of the Railway & Canal Historical Society

Introduction

This paper is intended to be a factual, retrospective account of the fifty-year period 2004–2054 covering three topics:

1. What has happened to the railways and canals of the UK;
2. How the Railway & Canal Historical Society and the study of transport history have developed; and
3. The influence of the RCHS on world history.

In the UK in 2004, the railways were in decline as to traffic and public confidence in their reliability and safety, the canals were blooming as to leisure traffic and expansion of the system, and the RCHS was stable. The UK was grappling with uncertainty about its future in the ‘European Union’ but was still an independent nation. A minority of adults used computers although all children did. Much communication was still in the form of writing on pieces of paper — laboriously moved around the country from writer to reader by the labour intensive and 200 year old system of the ‘post’.¹

Apart from the Channel Tunnel Rail Link, the railway network included no new routes. Freight traffic was minimal, passenger traffic was dominated by medium distance business and carless passengers and by what was called ‘commuter’ traffic around London and a small number of other cities. Trains were still either diesel powered or used electricity distributed by overhead wires or through third and sometimes fourth rails.

The canal system had recently begun to expand rapidly with the reopening of the Huddersfield Narrow and Rochdale Canals and parts of others. Freight traffic had almost completely ended except on a few estuarine waterways. The very first stirrings of new canal construction proposals were detectable. The new boats coming onto the canals in large

numbers were still diesel powered.

The RCHS had fewer than a thousand members, nearly all male and, given the low life expectancy of those years, rightly regarded as elderly. Its principal activities of publishing, organising visits and holding meetings followed more or less the same pattern as it had for the whole of the first fifty years of its existence. The Society was very much alive and well but there was some concern that it would experience gradual decline if its activities remained unchanged.

This is a very brief summary of the *status quo* in 2004. There is nothing in contemporary writing which suggests that either the members of the RCHS or the public had any vision of the changes which the next fifty years would see. The special publications celebrating the golden jubilee of the RCHS in 2004, for example, were almost entirely retrospective in their choice and treatment of topics.

The last fifty years — the railways

Commuter traffic on the railways steadily declined in the early years of the 21st century. Fewer and fewer people travelled to a central ‘office’ each day as the use of computers and the internet became better established. Commuter trains dragged on until the last such service, between Bishop Auckland and Newcastle, ceased in 2034.² Long distance business travel had effectively ceased a few years earlier for the same reason.

Had it not been for the growth of the ‘social journey’ sector, rail passenger transport would have been eliminated in the UK over the last fifty years. The use of electronic media for all types of communication has meant that the earlier national patterns of ‘week-ends’, ‘holidays’ and the like have given way to leisure travel at the same high level all days of the year. Fortunately for the railway companies, people

still want to be with other people for social reasons and are no longer prepared to drive themselves any distance on our roads. With 'congestion charge' averaging £4 per mile and cars costing £120,000, modern rail transport is not just viable but preferred. These prices must be multiplied by ten to equate with prices in 2004 to allow for the higher value of the new pound introduced after the abandonment of the Euro in 2030.

The e-power revolution has, of course, been complete over the last fifty years. In 2004, electricity was generated in power stations mainly comprising steamdriven generators fuelled by oil or coal and was transmitted along many thousands of miles of cables around the country. The development of cryo-fusion power produced a clean source of fuel at negligible generation cost and the invention of e-transmission meant that there was no longer any need for cables. It was not conceived in 2004 that, by 2054, not only would all trains use e-power but all our homes and cars would as well. The last overhead wires were taken down in 2032 and the last diesel-powered train ran in the UK in 2034.

The heritage railway movement was largely established during the first fifty years of the RCHS. It has continued to thrive in the second. In 2004, all the locomotives hauling trains on heritage railways were real old engines — albeit heavily renewed and rebuilt.³ Since then, many new locomotives to old designs have been built. The first was an LNER A1 class 4-6-2 which was finished, later than originally planned, in 2009. Now there are over 200 'new' heritage locomotives in service, most of which were not even contemplated in 2004. The LSWR Drummond 'Paddlebox' 4-6-0 was one of the first, soon followed by the LNWR Webb 'Greater Britain' compound, the NBR Reid Atlantic and the Caledonian Conner 8 foot single. The new 0-10-0 Lickey Banker was brought into use exactly 100 years after its predecessor on New Year's Day 2020. For the last thirty four years, the spectacle of it pounding aggressively up the bank pushing a train of 40 four-wheeled goods wagons with mighty noise and towering exhaust has been a major tourist attraction despite its predictability.

Most of the existing heritage railways were already up and running in 2004 although, in many cases, not at their full route mileage. The boldest move was, of course, the conversion of the whole of the Paddington to Bristol main line to a heritage railway requiring, as it did, conversion to the broad gauge

and the construction at Swindon of a large number of new locomotives and carriages to the original Gooch designs.⁴ As most of the 'real' traffic on the line is, in any case, now 'social', it has not decreased. In the last five years it has actually increased and a survey in 2053 showed that passengers tolerated the longer journey times because the arrival times had become more reliable using replica 19th century steam traction.

The last fifty years — the canals

In 2004, there were many thousands of pleasure boats on the canals, most of which moved seldom and then not far. The e-power revolution affected canal traffic as it did everything else. It is almost forgotten that, fifty years ago, the water supply to canals came from rainwater collected in reservoirs. Most of these were very old and so deeply silted that traffic had to be limited almost every Summer due to shortage of water at the summits. Now all flights of locks are continuously back pumped using e-power, there is never a water shortage and the reservoirs have all become nature conservation sites.

Except for carefully designed and built replica traditional boats, most new boats were driven by e-power from the early 2020s. In 2054 there are many replica traditional boats. Indeed, there are now many more Bolinder semi-diesel engines fitted in canal boats than there ever were in the early 20th century and far more steam driven boats. Few will now remember that, in the first flush of e-power enthusiasm, some boats were fitted with the 'E-bolinder Simulator' which made the boat vibrate realistically and emit a noise which passed for the genuine thump as it moved along. The device was not popular and was extinct after a few years. However, there is believed to be an example in a derelict boat sunk in a backwater of Presteigne marina on the Leominster Extension Canal.

In 2004 there were few horse-drawn boats on the canals. The real resurgence of the use of horse power started in 2015 and soon led to refitting of the locks with the necessary ironmongery and the overhaul of towpaths. The southern Oxford Canal was the first to be comprehensively restored to its 19th century condition and limited to horse-drawn traffic. Some enthusiasts thought that the restitution of Fenny Compton tunnel, completed in 2029, was taking things too far but it did permit legging to be introduced into the programme of the by then well-established Napton three day event. Arguably the

worst joke in the last fifty years on the canals was the opinion in an article on the 'Canal Horse World' website that some horses might have thought that putting back the tunnel was a bit 'over the top'.

Fifty years ago, nobody expected horse-drawn lock working to become a major spectator sport. At that time, events like the open golf tournament attracted big crowds in temporary stands, big screen replays and all the paraphernalia, but not on the scale seen in recent years for the Napton. Edited highlights showing, for example, how triple crown winner *Jack*, with the legendary S W Bucknell at the tiller, came in to Napton number 4 to lock down — without touching the side and strapping the top gate shut without a ripple — are a sight that the RCHS members of 2004 never saw on their primitive 'television' sets.

The canal restoration movement is as old as the RCHS itself but has seen great strides in the last fifty years. Indeed, the restoration of the North Walsham & Dilham, completed in 2044, left no former UK canal unrestored. In the early years of the 21st century, this achievement would have seemed impossible, not least because some of the canals had been obliterated many years before to construct railways which were still in use in 2004. Even such obvious projects as rebuilding the Wilts & Berks and the Bude took some time to get funded and under way. Characteristically, many projects featured controversy between groups of enthusiasts each of which believed that they were the guardians of true historical accuracy. The protracted disagreement about the exact positions for the portals of Pensax tunnel on the Leominster Canal was a case in point as was the schism in the Somersetshire Coal Canal Society as to whether, at Combe Hay, the locks or the submerging caisson lift should be restored.⁵ Eventually, of course, both were reconstructed and boaters can now choose their preferred means of ascending or descending. The forecasts of the lock faction seem to have been right in that most boaters, having used the caisson once for the experience and found it claustrophobic, use the locks on subsequent cruises.

In 2004 there was one scheme for a new canal — the connection between the Grand Union at Milton Keynes and the Great Ouse at Bedford. New canals built in the last 50 years are of course well known. The North Riding (opened 2023), the High Peak (opened 2031) and the Dumfries & Motherwell (opened 2033) were the more substantial. At the time of writing, it seems likely that the construction

of the South Marches Canal will go ahead.

The Society and the study of transport history

A breakthrough for the Society, not recognised at the time, came in 2005 when, with the help of a national lottery grant, the Society developed and mounted a website for children. It was aimed at schoolteachers of whom many, short of material for local history and other projects for their pupils to undertake, fell upon it and used it extensively. Improved and expanded over the years, it was the seed of a lifetime interest in transport history for many young people of both genders. Throughout our first fifty years, the seed of interest had been planted most commonly either by 'engine spotting' in childhood or by watching a pair of narrow boats, carrying a real cargo, work through a flight of locks. Before 2004, the Society did not advertise itself at all and many railway and canal enthusiasts were not aware of it.

From about 2020, the seed of interest for most members had become the RCHS Schools Website. In a straw poll taken at the annual conference of the Society in 2052 (held in the Boyes Suite in the Transport History and Leisure Centre at the Crystal Palace⁶), all but one of those present cited the website as the seed of their interest in UK transport history.

RCHS members have always been avid readers of books about their subject. A small number of the specialist publishers are older than the Society itself. There is now virtually no aspect of the operation of railways and canals and no length of route, however short, which has not been covered by a well-researched history. Members of 2004 would be surprised by the amount of original material which has been discovered and written up in the 21st century. This includes material not only from the 20th century but also from the preceding 250 years.

Books continued to be printed on paper until the late 2020s, after which e-publishing was universal. RCHS members particularly welcomed the invention of the now ubiquitous e-reader. It seemed astounding in those early years of the technology that a reader could lie in bed with the text and pictures of any book appearing in large format on the ceiling, invisible to anyone else in the bed, with 'page forward' activated simply by an eyelid movement.

A boost in the canal history sector was the discovery in 2015 by the veteran historian Hugh Compton

of what became known as the 'Egerton Archive'. The early history of canals had become a little sterile before this event as new material was almost entirely drawn from minute books, accounts, contracts, leases and other formal documents. The archive told us for the first time about the people of the first hundred years of the canals and about their interactions. It told us what the great men such as Brindley, Telford and Rennie had actually said and done, and brought the history to life. Reputations changed after Compton published his two-volume analysis of the archive in 2017 and 2019.⁷ The caricature of Brindley as the unscientific poor communicator was dispelled as was that of Telford as the brilliant stonemason making progress just by his talent and warm personality.

A characteristic of the whole of the last hundred years has been that it remains rewarding for a member of the RCHS to research an aspect of the history of transport, to assemble data about it which has not been assembled before and to publish it for the benefit and pleasure of others. The stalwarts of the Society have always done this and continue to do so. In the pattern set by such legendary figures as P A L Vine with his lifetime's work on the waterways between the Thames and the South Coast, we have seen more recently the work over many years of G J Eaton on Virgin Trains, of W A Plowden on the early pleasure boat hire companies and of S W Horderley on the social effects of the railway and canal heritage revolution in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. The great tradition of the pursuit of technical detail has been maintained by, amongst others, H N Strefford-Bridge in his monumental work of identifying every type of security camera ever fitted on a UK railway station with precise dates for bringing them into service and taking them out of service at each location.⁸

The frame of history moves forward and it is salutary to contemplate that future RCHS members will research and write up the events of the mid 21st century as history. Their tasks will have been made easier for them than for their forbears by the instant electronic availability of all extant documents and images, both still and moving, which we now take for granted.

The influence of the RCHS on world history

The sequence of events which had the most effect on the status and influence of the RCHS in the last

fifty years was, of course, its part in bringing about the demise of the United States of Europe (the USE). So much has been written about this, mostly from one political standpoint or another, that it may be helpful to set out a brief, factual account in this paper.

The RCHS has had a railway chronology group for a very long time. Its members have done valuable work in establishing the precise dates of all the events, major and minor, which are the stitches in the great tapestry of railway history. The group had achieved much over the years, since well before the UK became a member of the USE.

In 2022, the USE Congress passed the Transport Chronology Harmonisation Directive which became the law of Europe on 1 January 2023.⁹ It was not lost on railway chronologists that this was 100 years to the day since a UK government had effected the grouping of the railways. The RCHS group had, at the time that the directive became law, the 17th edition of their chronology of passenger railway stations in the UK ready for publication. The group knew that its new edition fell foul of the directive but decided to 'published and be damned'. Chairman of the group was Eric Clinker. Although subsequently famous in his own right, he was known in 2023 as a great-nephew of Charles R Clinker, a founder of the RCHS and a pioneer railway chronologist.

Eric Clinker and his colleagues were prosecuted. The case against them, heard in the European Supreme Court in 2024, was that they had wilfully included Banbury Street Ticket Platform (on the approach to Birmingham New Street Station from Proof House Junction) in their chronology. Clinker and the others counter-claimed that the directive breached the Convention on Human Rights and also asked for 21 similar instances to be taken into account.

Put more simply than the lawyers on either side managed, the issue was that the directive limited chronologies to stations at which passengers had both boarded and alighted from trains — a test which no ticket platform would meet. The hearing was lengthy and the issue hard-fought but was eventually decided in favour of Clinker *et al.* Clinker himself was feted throughout Europe for having taken on the government of the USE and exposed its futility. Soon after returning to the UK, he was asked to become leader of the 'UK Reborn' movement. He and the RCHS were seen as the 'little men' who had taken on the USE, beaten it and made it look ridiculous. Historians now agree that the Banbury Street hearing was

the turning point which led, in 2027, to the independence of the UK and the subsequent rapid collapse of the USE.¹⁰

Clinker became the first Prime Minister of the restoration parliament as Lord Clinker of Banbury Street and governed with huge public support. The RCHS had, by this time, become widely known and well reputed and its membership expanded considerably. But Clinker was accused by some of acting dictatorially. For example, he decreed that the new parliament should be unicameral with the chamber comprising 'Lords' chosen by him. His excuse that an earlier Prime Minister had filled the House of Lords with his own nominees when the hereditary peers were abolished did not convince everybody that there was a sufficient precedent. His similar argument that making the current members of the Council of the RCHS members of the House of Lords *ex officio* was no different from the former and similar right of bishops of the Church of England was also regarded by some as unconvincing.

Few would have predicted on 2004 that the RCHS would ever have a profound influence on world history or one which would prove a lasting benefit.

Conclusion

This paper has been written in adherence to the practice of limiting its contents to properly-sourced fact about the past — as has been the proud practice of the RCHS throughout the last one hundred years.

In conclusion, I depart from this practice to make a forecast. It is that the RCHS will develop over its second one hundred years as it has over its first. Recorded history demonstrates that it has steadily become stronger and more influential over time despite the huge changes in technology and social habits which have occurred — particularly the major changes which have taken place in the fifty years since 2004. There is every reason to expect that it will meet the many further challenges which it will confront in the next fifty years and beyond.

Notes and references

1. The last Travelling Post Office train ran on Saturday 10 January 2004, leaving Bristol for Penzance at 6.30am.
2. It would have been surprising to members in 2004 that a train service in the north-east should have been the last commuter service to run. The former Durham coal mining area had become a choice residential area for people working on Tyneside. For no known reason, they enjoyed the camaraderie of congregating in order to work for some years after other communities had given it up.
3. A few replicas of very early locomotives such as *Locomotion No 1* and the locomotives of the Rainhill Trials of 1829 were used for demonstrations but not for hauling serious trains.
4. R M Broome, *The Restoration of the GWR*, University of Walsall Integrated Data Resource, 2041
5. For details of how the schism developed and was eventually healed, see G J Marshbrook, *Combe Hay — an Early Transport Heritage Crisis*, www.uktransporthistory/swengland/canals/2024/rchs
6. The Boyes Suite is named after Grahame Boyes, a famous transport historian and a principal figure in the RCHS in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. The suite is within the reconstructed Crystal Palace High Level station (LCDR) adjacent to the reconstructed Crystal Palace itself. The whole complex was opened by HM The King on 1 May 2051, the 200th anniversary of the opening of the original Crystal Palace.
7. Hugh J Compton, *Analysis of the Egerton Archive, Volume One*, Fugit Communications, 2017. Ditto *Volume Two*, 2019.
8. The publications by Eaton, Plowden, Horderley and Strefford-Bridge are on www.uktransporthistory/monobiblio/2000-2050/rchs
9. *Transport Chronology Harmonisation*, USE Directive 2022/socuni/tch/6102 code Black Watch
10. The Banbury Street matter may not have been as clear-cut as Eric Clinker claimed. In his great-uncle's seminal work (C R Clinker, *Railways of the West Midlands – A Chronology*, Stephenson Locomotive Society, 1954), the opening date of Banbury Street Ticket Platform is not given but the date of its last use is. If the lawyers prosecuting Clinker the younger in 2024 had known about this early lapse from principle, the course of British, European and, indeed, World history might have been very different.

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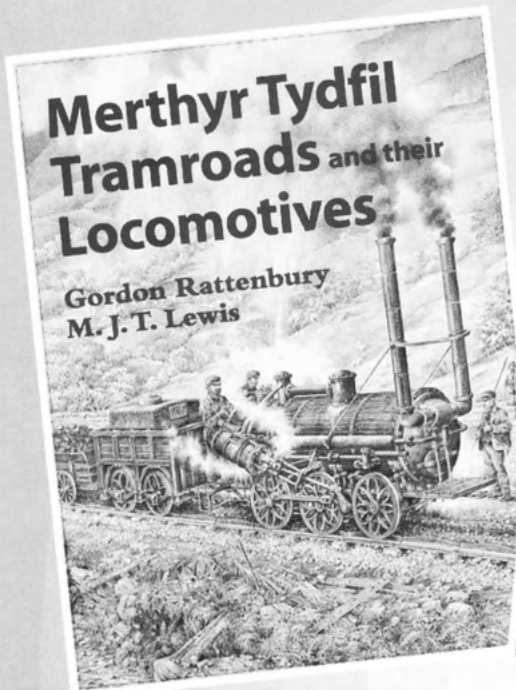
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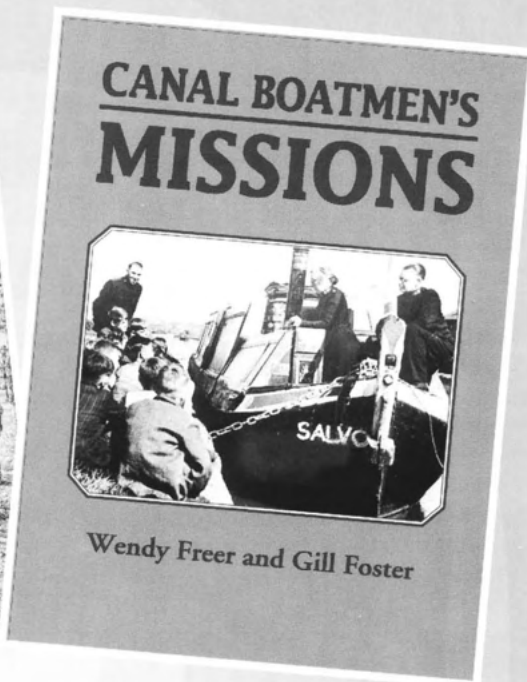
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