

Kithead News

Newsletter of The Kithead Trust



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A Welcome from our Chair of Trustees, Brian King

Welcome to the first edition of the public newsletter of The Kithead Trust; we hope to publish this on a quarterly basis to alert friends, supporters and users about developments in the collection, and to publicise what treasures we hold.

The last few months have seen great change, starting with the retirement of Peter Jaques as Trustee and Secretary last October. Peter had occupied these posts since the creation of the Trust 25 years ago, and the tremendous collection we have today is largely the result of the excellent work that Peter and a small number of colleagues have put in down the years. We are delighted that Peter remains with Kithead as volunteer emeritus. As one supporter said “we simply couldn’t imagine Kithead without Peter.”

We have been fortunate to find a replacement for Peter from amongst our own ranks, with Philip Kirk taking over as Secretary to the Trustees, and in the new post of Archivist. There is more about Philip on

page 3.

Speaking of the future, 25 years seemed to be a good time to review what we do and how we do it, and what we need to do to maintain and develop our collection. At the request of the Trustees, Philip has conducted a thorough review of collections policy, management of the collection, and outreach and publicity to increase knowledge of the Trust and its holdings. See **The Way Ahead** on page 4 for the results of this, the subsequent decisions of the Trustees and the progress we have made.

As you will see and read, there is a lot going on, with more to come. As ever, we are dependent upon and grateful for financial contributions from our supporters, and the help of our band of volunteers. If you would like to join either (or both) category, either Philip or I would be delighted to hear from you.

What is The Kithead Trust?

Founded 25 years ago, we now have the largest collection of UK bus industry records and lots more....

The Kithead Trust was created in 1989. The National Bus Company (NBC) was in the final throes of privatising its operating subsidiaries and when it was time to wind up the group, there remained a vast collection of papers created both by NBC itself and by its subsidiaries, going back to the latter's creation often in the nineteenth century.

These papers were offered to but declined by the Public Records Office (as it then was), and so John Birks, a senior director within NBC, stepped in. John was a lifelong enthusiast of transport history and industrial heritage and he felt that it would be tragic if these papers were discarded or destroyed. He therefore made arrangements with Kithead Limited, based at Hampton Lovett, near Droitwich Spa, to store the material.

Kithead at that time was a printing company specialising in

transport, but, as the archive grew, printing took up less and less of the total activity and eventually this was closed down.

The collection has grown immensely; the archive not only takes up the whole of the original Kithead building, but there have been two extensions. Both were funded by NBC subsidiary directors: Arthur Townsend and David Beaman of City of Oxford Motor Services; and Garry Charles and Andrew Vernon of Southern National.

More bus-related records have been donated by companies themselves, and a very wide-ranging transport library has been established as a result of books and publications donated. In 1994 we were fortunate in being gifted the historic library of the Department of Transport, and this provided us with material on just about every mode of transport. It also gave us a significant holding

of traffic and transport management material, such as a complete run of Transport Programmes & Policies from local government.

We also have the largest collection of vehicle registration registers and vehicle last-user records in the country: if it survives and if we don't have it then we know where it is!

Today, the Trust functions through a board of trustees (see panel) who set direction and policy. Day-to-day operation is in the hands of Philip Kirk, who has the support of a number of volunteers, including Lead Volunteer, Bob Carr. All of those associated with the trust are unpaid volunteers, including the trustees and the archivist.

The Trust has no guaranteed funding and so it relies on donations, mainly from individuals, to cover its annual running cost of around £20,000.

Founding father
and inspiration
behind the Trust

John Birks
(1927-2003)



Kithead Trustees today

Brian King (Chair)
Philip Kirk (Secretary and Archivist)

Paul Addenbrooke
David Beaman
Alan Mills

Tony Newman
Julian Peddle
Derek Potter

Introducing Philip Kirk our new archivist

Philip Kirk has been appointed Archivist to the Trust, a new post created to take charge of all its holdings, to ensure that this is kept in optimum conditions and to increase the number of users of our services.

Philip's interest in transport was inspired by his late father, who worked for one of the numerous independent bus operators in County Durham: Gillett Brothers of Quarrington Hill (one half of the G&B partnership). At the age of five, Philip was put in the cab of an AEC Regal, and as he confesses, in many ways he has been there ever since!



His first job was as a Junior Clerical Assistant at Hartlepool Borough Transport in 1978 and his career progressed with posts in Dundee, High Wycombe, York,

Bishop Auckland and Kent before arriving at Oxford Bus Company (OBC) in 1994 as Operations Manager. OBC had just joined The Go-Ahead Group, and Philip was instrumental in turning it into the modern, award-winning company it is today. His role in this was reflected in further promotion to Commercial Director and, in 2001, to Managing Director.

In parallel with his professional career, he has maintained an interest in history, particularly transport history. At Oxford, a friendship with our founder, John Birks, was forged and so there is a thread of continuity to Philip's new appointment.

Philip has been a Kithead trustee since 2005, and has authored and co-authored a number of publications on those now-vanished north-east independent bus operators. He was President of the Omnibus Society in 2009, and has a Master's Degree in History. He is also a Fellow of the



Philip (left) is welcomed by Peter Jaques and below - the bus that started it all for Philip.

Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport.

Philip took early retirement last year. He said "I thoroughly enjoyed the years at Oxford, at a great time in its history, and there was nothing in the bus industry that could top that. But after 20 years, I decided to stand down and do other things. This coincided with Peter Jaques' resignation at Kithead and everything came together. It is a great honour to take on the responsibility of the Kithead collection, and there are some very exciting times ahead."

Philip has embarked on a Master's Degree in Archives and Records Management, by distance learning from the University of Dundee and he also retains an interest in the bus industry as a business development advisor to FirstGroup.

He paid tribute to the people behind the first 25 years of Kithead: "inspired by John Birks, the volunteers have built up a tremendous collection at Kithead. It is now our responsibility not only to see that it is maintained but that we grow and develop over the next 25 years."

The Way Ahead by archivist Philip Kirk

You will see elsewhere in this newsletter about the tremendous collection of archive material which Kithead has built up over the last 25 years - it truly remarkable and unique: a veritable “goldmine”.

25 years is a good point at which to take a step back and to consider afresh how we do things, to ensure that the service we provide is appropriate for the future. Kithead has grown enormously since the early days, both in terms of the quantity and quality of its holdings; it is rather like being a non-league football team which has risen to the Premier League. We need to make sure we have the right basis to succeed at the new level.

Accreditation Standard

The trustees have considered this very carefully, and have concluded that we should follow the National Archives Accreditation standard. This is the standard for professional archives and there is the opportunity for a private-run archive such as Kithead to attain this standard in due course.

Many readers will have been involved in some sort of accreditation scheme, whether for museums, archives or libraries, and will appreciate what is involved. In basic terms, the scheme lays down a

comprehensive set of standards which are appropriate to the size of the archive. Kithead is a “Type 3 Private Archive Service” which is for archives having 100 m³ of holdings or more - we actually have more than twice that amount so we are comparatively quite large. The standard provides a framework to evaluate the health of the organisation, the collection itself and the experience of stakeholders. Details can be found at:

www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/archives-sector/archive-service-accreditation.htm.

Our aim is to be compliant with the standard by 2020, so that we can apply for formal accreditation directly after that. We will keep you posted on progress.

Immediate Priorities

In parallel with the accreditation work, the trustees have asked that we concentrate on three specific areas.

The first is the development of a collections policy, and this is now in draft stage. This will provide focus to our collection, both existing and in the future, and crucially will recognize the value of working with other archives and libraries. For example, we have identified that the Omnibus Society maintains a comprehensive collection of UK bus timetables and so we are no longer collecting these beyond 1986. This frees up space in our

archive whilst ensuring that a timetable collection is still available.

The second area is the care of the collections. We are in the process of separating out different types of material and ensuring that each has the right level of care. For example, photographs are being stored separately from paper as they need a lower temperature. The paper archive itself will be housed in archive-quality boxes and harmful things such as staples, paperclips and elastic bands will be taken out. The aim is the long-term survival of all the collection and so quite a bit of investment will go into this.

The third area is outreach - to make the collection better known. This newsletter is part of that effort, and we hope that you will send it on to anyone who you think may be interested. I am also conducting a series of presentations to enthusiast groups.

Last, and probably of most importance, we are working on a revamped website which will include a comprehensive online catalogue to assist our users.

For the next five years, therefore, we have a very clear strategy for the Trust - and quite a lot of work ahead. At the end of that period, however, we will have a professional standard archive which will enable us to deliver a great service.

Photograph Collection



Strachan & Brown

We have an extensive photograph collection, mainly “official” shots taken by professional photographers for operators and manufacturers. The first set to be scanned and catalogued are those of body manufacturer **Strachan & Brown** of Acton - later Strachans of Hamble.

The scans are now up on photo sharing site Flickr - search for “Kithead Trust” - with a few question marks for information to be filled in: if you can help, just use the “comments” box.



Something of a curiosity - lettered “Irish Sleeper Omnibus Service”

Plaxton

Next for attention is the official **Plaxton** collection, which was deposited with us thanks to Plaxton stalwart Stuart Pringle.



The archivist can't help bringing in some north-east independent operators. To illustrate the body style which established the company as the leading British bodybuilder - a Panorama for Wilkinsons of Sedgfield.



...and not just coaches - the first 36' long Plaxton Highway service bus body for O.K. Motor Services of Bishop Auckland.

The collection consists not just of photographs but also production books and microfilmed specification sheets stretching from the 1940s to the 1990s. It traces the Scarborough-based company's rise from local engineering company to the leading UK coach bodybuilder it is today.

Focus on Potteries Motor Traction



As an illustration of the riches which lie in our collection, we gave well-known bus professional and enthusiast **Thomas Knowles** free reign to take a look at part of our holdings. Thomas is well-known as General Manager and subsequently Managing Director of Lancaster City Transport but his enthusiast heart still belongs in his native Potteries.

I was well aware of Kithead through knowing Brian King and also, through the good offices of Mark Howarth of Western Greyhound, I passed on some archive material from ALBUM (The Association of Local Bus Company Managers) of which I am Secretary. However, when I accepted Philip Kirk's invitation to visit Droitwich, I was quite frankly unprepared for what awaited.

I was immediately drawn to the official PMT photograph albums. There is one to commemorate the opening of Biddulph garage in 1960, which was operated jointly between fellow BET subsidiaries PMT and North Western - I even picked my youthful self out of a line-up of spectators. This brought back a whole raft of memories, particularly of how a shared garage didn't always mean co-operation.

In 1964, the company entered - and actually won - the British Coach Rally at Brighton, with a Duple Commander-bodied AEC Reliance. This was a tremendous feather in the cap for a BET company and again there is a complete album devoted to the entry, with a lot of coverage of the prize being awarded by radio personality Kenneth Horne.

But the photographs are just one aspect of the collection. There is also a lot of material on the buy-out of independent operators in the 1950s, some of which continued to function as subsidiaries.



Probably the only time Kenneth Horne (left) took the wheel of an AEC Reliance. PMT General Manager Walter Womar - quite a character in his own right - looks on.

The files show many small but fascinating facts, such as attempts by the company to buy secondhand vehicles from such sources as Southdown and Halifax and Glasgow Corporations through Frank Cowley, the well-known Salford second-hand bus dealer. There is a board meeting minute saying that the purchase was approved, but a penciled bracket saying “cancelled”. What might have been.

It also reports that the Tilstone and Stoke Motors companies had ordered twelve AEC single deck chassis before they were taken over - but they hadn't told PMT anything about them! The General Manager was given authority to honour the order with AEC as long as double deck chassis could be bought instead. These were duly delivered in 1952/3 as AEC Regent IIIs with highbridge Northern Counties bodies as 521-32 (REH 521-32).

For anyone who wants to study Potteries in any detail there is such a wealth of detail here, including:

- an accounts ledger from the Edwardian period;
- a complete set of four-weekly returns (showing the trading position of the company) from 1916 to 1986;
- a complete set of agreements dated 1896 to 1934;
- a lot of material covering the privatized era in the 1980s and 1990s.

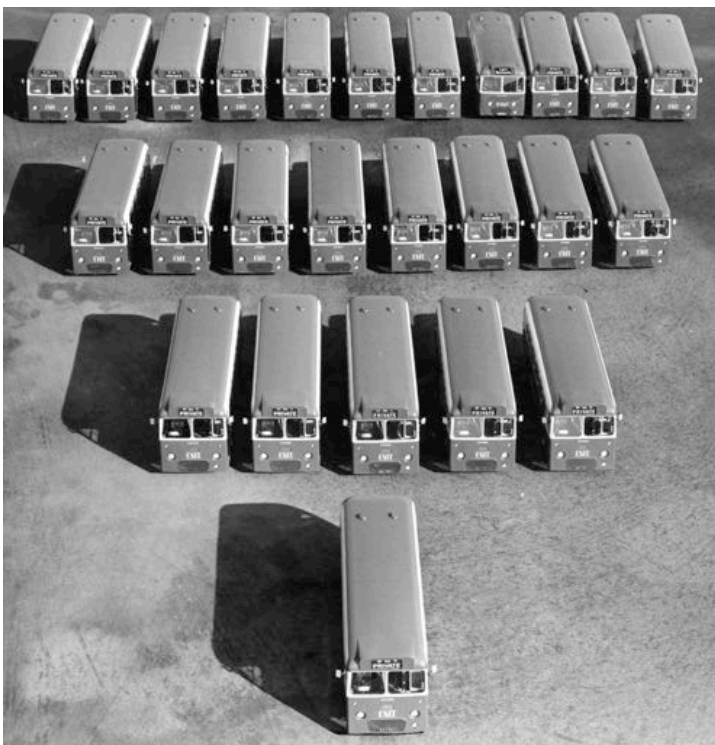
Stoke-on-Trent City Council made a number of attempts to wrest control of bus services away from the company (a precursor of the Quality Contract proposals of today in other areas) and there is a good deal of material about this, from both sides of the “debate”.

There are also three binders on “rolling stock”, company route histories and even files on meetings with the Transport & General Workers Union. There are also schedules bus working charts.

All in all, there was far too much to take in on a single visit and I look forward to returning to take in more - both of my memories and the period stretching back to the creation of the company in the nineteenth century.

To end, I thought I would return to the PMT photo collection, and the stories which can lie behind ostensibly straightforward company records.

I immediately recognised the shot of 25 new AEC Reliances which were delivered in 1961. Except, that's what the photo is supposed to show but one of the buses was delivered late from the factory at Alexanders. Therefore, one of the 1955 batch, bodied by Weymann, was placed in the line-up and the photo was subsequently altered - “photoshopping” is nothing new!



The famous line-up with the “rogue” Weymann bodied Reliance, fourth from right in the back row. The photograph was taken at the home of another of Thomas's loves - Stoke City Football Club!



Want to Find Out What We Have?

We aim to have a comprehensive catalogue available online later in 2015.

In the meantime, if you would like to have a copy of our listing for your particular area or operator of interest, please email us on hello@kitheadtrust.org.uk and we will send you details.

Volunteers Needed

We have an interesting range of tasks ahead of us, which require an equally diverse range of skills and abilities. If you would like to get involved, please get in touch with us on hello@kitheadtrust.org.uk.

Even if you can just do a half-day every month, this could be very valuable to us. Full training will be given.

We also have tasks which can be done away from our premises.

Donations Welcome

We are always interested in acquiring new archive material on transport subjects. If you or your organisation have material which you are thinking of disposing, please speak to us first.

Are You Signed Up?

This newsletter is being sent out to our supporters, and anyone who we think might be interested in hearing about us. To satisfy Data Protection requirements, if you would like to receive future editions please register with us, simply by emailing us at hello@kitheadtrust.org.uk with "Newsletter Subscribe" in the subject line.

We guarantee that we will only use your email address to promote The Kithead Trust and we won't disclose it to anyone else.

How to Visit us

The Kithead Trust Archive and Library is usually open on Wednesday and Thursday each week, from 10.00am to 4.00pm.

There are a limited number of spaces available in our searchroom, and so it is essential that you check with us to book a place.

There is no membership or payment required to use the Archive and Library, although the majority of users feel that it is appropriate to make a donation towards the upkeep of the collection.

The nearest railway station is Droitwich Spa, some 1.7 miles away. Bus services which pass close by are 20 (Monday to Saturday) and 133 (Monday, Wednesday, Friday); full details are available from www.traveline.info.

Our premises are wheelchair accessible via a separate entrance. If you do have special access requirements please let us know when booking.

We are able to provide hot beverages and have a refreshment area. We do not sell food, nor is there a shop nearby. We advise you to plan ahead and bring something with you - we can store it in the fridge!

Please note that we don't allow refreshments to be taken in the searchroom - for obvious reasons.

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