

Kithead News

Newsletter of The Kithead Trust



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This month we hosted a visit of Alex Hornby, Chief Executive of Transdev Blazefield. More about what Alex found in a future edition, but we couldn't resist the opportunity to show something from the predecessor of one of his companies. Here is a photo from the Alan Townsin collection at the Trust – a West Yorkshire Road Car Tilling Stevens at the famous archway at Bolton Abbey.

A Family Affair

Philip Battersby reflects on a singular case of two generations of busmen

When reading Kithead News No. 8 about the directors' visit to City of Oxford Motor Services in April 1969, my eye caught the very unusual name 'Skyrme' among the dignitaries. It is a name that I automatically associate with Norfolk Motor Services Limited of King's Lynn, a company whose directors sold the business to United Automobile Services in April 1926 for the sum of £8,950. The directors were required to take £2,000 of this sum in United shares rather than cash, and one of them was managing director John Berresford Skyrme. He then joined United and subsequently became traffic superintendent for the company's eastern district, based in Norwich.

In February 1929 *Commercial Motor* reported that Mr Skyrme was leaving United to become the assistant general manager of the Belfast Omnibus Company. The family accordingly moved to Belfast but in the following year the son James, perhaps then about 19, came back to England. It was probably no coincidence that it was to United that he went as a 'junior engineer' – really an engineering trainee – at Scarborough in 1930.

Whether or not being his father's son had created the opening, the spectacular progress of Jim Skyrme's career was surely achieved on his own merits. In April 1947 the United board recorded his appointment as Area Engineer at Durham, a post he held until February 1949. By 1961, Jim would be General Manager of Southdown and four years later was appointed to the BET Executive, bringing directorships of many of the group's operating companies, including City of Oxford.

As if this was not success enough, Jim Skyrme became Chief Executive of the National Bus Company from the start of 1972, a position he held until retirement in 1976. In a contemporary interview with *Commercial Motor*, he reflected on his career, and the state of the industry.



Jim Skyrme in his days as Chief Executive of the National Bus Company. (Whitehead Collection at The Kithead Trust)

It is interesting that the discussion centred on funding by local authorities for the industry, although the prospect of a relaxation of licensing restrictions was even then mentioned. "I'm a little uneasy because it's leaning towards the jungle we had before 1930" Skyrme commented.

This brief outline of the careers of the Skyrmes in the bus industry is drawn from the considerable City of Oxford and United Automobile material held at The Kithead Trust, the United archive at the Durham County Record Office and the excellent online archive of *Commercial Motor*:

<http://archive.commercialmotor.com>.

**NATIONAL
BUS COMPANY**



Serendipity Everywhere

Stewart J Brown, Bus industry journalist and editor of Buses Annual, paid us a visit and got more than he bargained for!

There are, by my reckoning, two basic rules for a worthwhile archive. First the material must be well organised and accessible. And second, those looking after it must be helpful and professional. Okay, so maybe that's actually four rules rather than two, but you get my drift.

The Kithead Trust archive scores on all counts.

My visit was primarily to see what progress was being made with the recently acquired Alan Townsin material; Alan was an old friend and mentor. But while I was there I felt I should use my time to see if there was anything of interest to me in relation to a couple of historical Scottish bus projects I'm working on. I didn't really expect to find much relevant material in what I understand is a predominantly English (and Welsh) archive,

Taking the second of my rules first, archivist Philip Kirk and the able and knowledgeable team of volunteers who were on site were both helpful and professional. "Glasgow Corporation Transport?"

one asked, pausing for less time than it takes to read these words before heading into the bowels of the archive and quickly re-appearing with a box containing correspondence between GCT and the Municipal Passenger Transport Association which included coachbuilder's drawings for the proposed postwar trolleybus fleet.

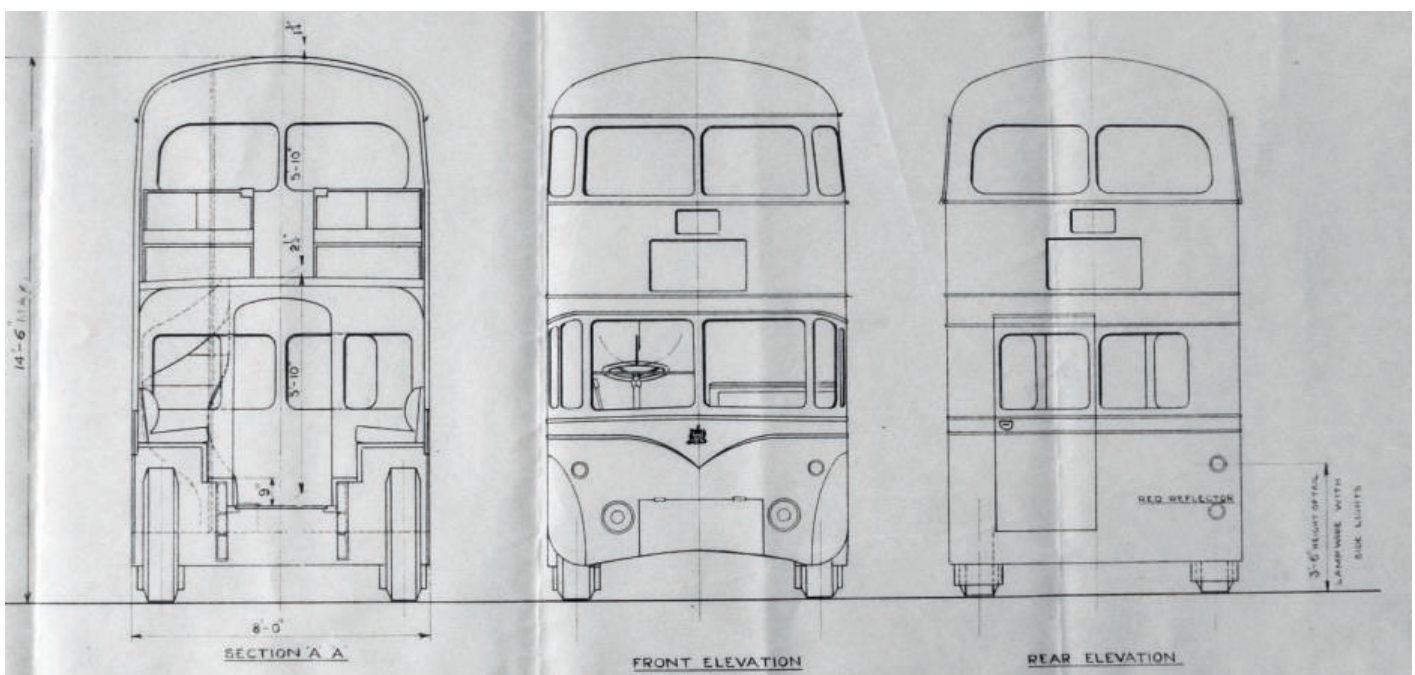
That was a real surprise. I've seen drawings which represented how the two-door double-deckers would have looked, but never before an actual general arrangement drawing. (In the end the buses were never built; to speed delivery the Corporation instead took London-style bodies from Metro-Cammell.)

That the material could be located so easily addresses my first rule: organised and accessible. To achieve that requires not just a knowledge of the subject, but a lot of hard work and enthusiasm.

Kithead houses a marvellous archive. I suspect that writing in these pages I'm preaching to the converted, but there's a wealth of historical information carefully filed on its shelves and for any researcher it's well worth a visit.

And that's because the real key to the success of an archive is surely not how much material it has, but how well that material is used. The set-up at Kithead is designed to encourage people to make use of it.

My only complaint? I live 330 miles from Droitwich. Maybe I should move house....



More Serendipity

In advance of the creation of The Bus Archive, both the Kithead Trust and the Omnibus Society are carrying out a series of 'exchange visits' to meet with volunteers at other locations and to get a flavour of what other depositories are up to.



For Stephen Oliver, a volunteer at the OS base in Telford, a request to look at some of the vehicle taxation records held at Droitwich revealed an unexpected twist.

Stephen knew that we have an extensive holding of registration records – mainly last user cards – but we also have a small number of registers of initial allocations. Growing up in the Thames Valley, Stephen was delighted to hear that we have the registers for Berkshire and asked to see if we have anything on his father's Morris car, TMO 662.

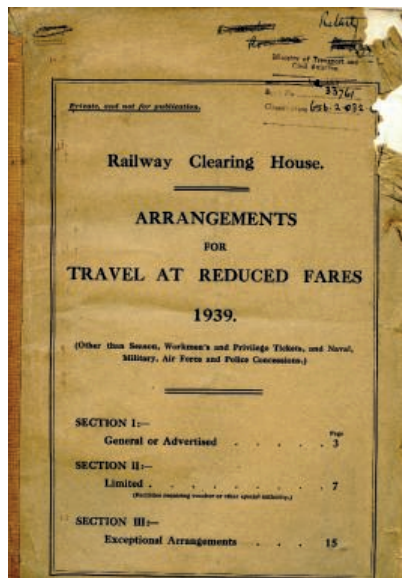
Not only did we have the register, we were able to open the page to that very registration and to Stephen's delight this included his father's handwriting. Clearly, the issuing authority had asked Mr Oliver to put his own details in the register.

"This is a fantastic find" said Stephen, "not only have I actually seen the register for the car but to find my father's writing and the date is an obvious bonus".

<p>15 10 59.</p>	<p>Halfpenny's Garage Sunningdale</p>	<p>Hartwell. Chobham do. S. D. Cole.</p>	<p>MAKE Morris. DATE 6/11/59. CHASSIS No. M/AW-4/304111.</p>	<p>TMO 661</p>
<p>11</p>	<p>"</p>	<p>J. A. Oliver: Beetle Wanderer Sunninghill</p>	<p>MAKE Morris. DATE 11.11.59. CHASSIS No. 20373.</p>	<p>TMO 662</p>
<p>1</p>	<p>"</p>	<p>Rev J. J. Vickery The Vicarage Sunninghill Berks.</p>	<p>MAKE Morris DATE 14.11.59. CHASSIS No. M/AS3/446190</p>	<p>TMO 663</p>

On the Right Lines

As a change from showing more locomotive photographs, for this edition we delve into the railway archives papers and come up with a couple of interesting items.



Above is an image of the cover of the booklet whilst to the right at an enhanced size, for the sake of clarity, is the comprehensive index page.

The first item is from 1939, from the Railway Clearing House and lists in quite some detail the arrangements for Travel at Reduced Fares. What is perhaps surprising is the sheer number of categories to which different conditions apply: everything from Entertainers to Hop Pickers!

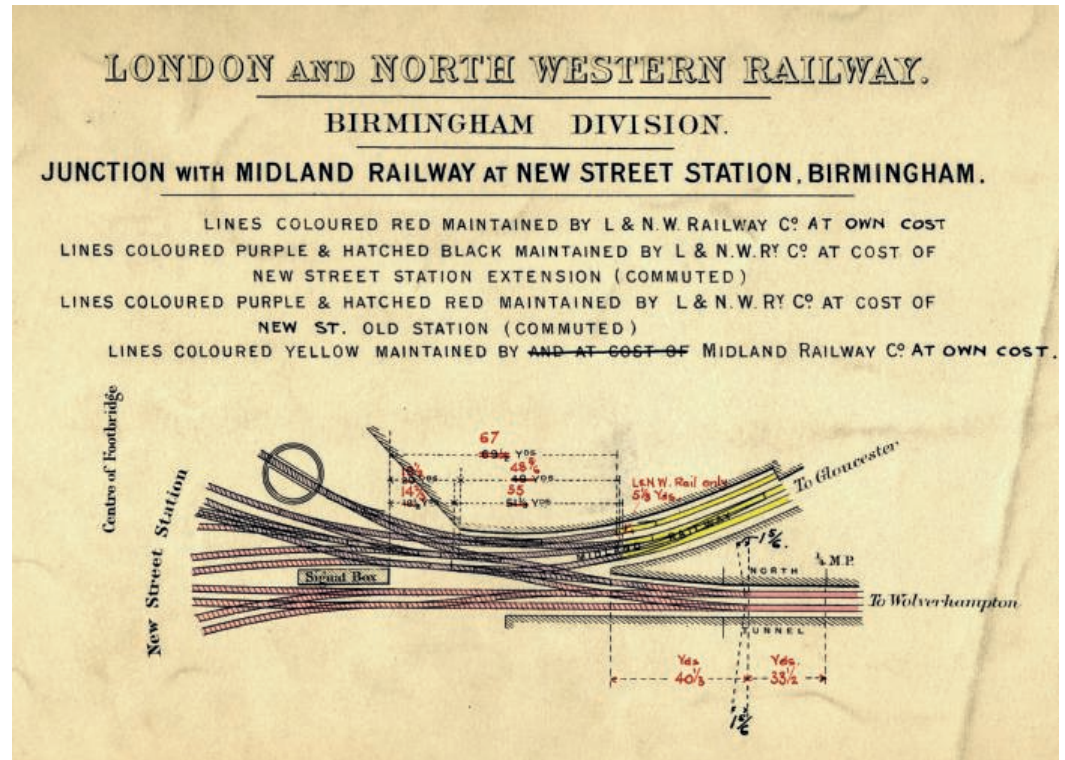
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Note.—When reference is made to pages 3 to 15 respecting the Items shown above, regard should also be had to the Notes set out on pages 2 and 3.

On the Right Lines

continued

The second item is a plan from 1899 which is part of an agreement between the London and North Western Railway and the Midland Railway. This shows part of the track formation at Birmingham New Street Station, and specifically allocates the responsibility and cost of maintaining the sections of the track.



Update on Developments with Chairman Brian King

In the last issue, we announced the proposal to merge The Kithead Trust and the Library & Archive of the Omnibus Society into a new entity – The Bus Archive. The new entity would also continue to collect non-bus material and keep this under the ‘Kithead Transport Archive’ name.

Work has progressed in both organisations over the last few months, including approval in principle by both the AGM of the Omnibus Society and the trustees of The Kithead Trust, both dependent on approval of the final agreement.

Philip Kirk has also been appointed as OS Director with responsibility for the Library & Archive – in effect he is now performing the same role in both organisations. The OS appointment is part of a long-standing succession plan and Alan Mills had planned to stand down in mid-2017. Sadly, Alan's final illness overtook him in January and so he was not able to hand over this important post.

Both organisations have made their trustee nominations for the new entity:

From Kithead: Brian King (who will be chairman)
Philip Kirk (director and archivist)
David Beaman

From The OS: Pat Russell (treasurer)
Tony Francis (secretary)
Julian Peddle

A seventh, independent, trustee will be nominated jointly in due course. I am very pleased about the composition of the new trustee body; it is well-balanced between the two organisations and draws on the talents of both.

The target date of April 2018 remains achievable and work is being undertaken on the legal issues of transferring assets and collections to The Bus Archive. Ray Stenning is working on the branding and identity of the new venture, whilst work is underway to liaise directly with the transport industries.

As ever, we will keep you informed of developments, and if you have any queries or comments, please get in touch.

Roe Images

Last time we announced the availability of prints created from the glass negatives from the Charles H Roe collection.



One request was from long-term supporter Roger Warwick, whose eye was immediately drawn to an image of a Roe bodied Bristol K of United Counties, a subject on which Roger has of course written extensively.

Unfortunately, the original glass negative was broken into pieces but our scanning expert Dave Stevenson accepted the challenge and worked his magic on the image with a little help from Photoshop. The result is absolutely extraordinary. There is a lot of debate in archives circles about the use of images enhancing software to alter images but in this case there is an entirely legitimate case for restoring the image to the state which the original photographer intended – and what a picture it is.



Odds and Sods

Empress Coaches

Our feature about Empress Coaches prompted David Domin to get in touch with more information about the history of one of the coaches:

The June Newsletter contained a blast from the past. PVV 888J was new to Palmerston Garage, Northampton (t/a Country Lion). I worked at Country Lion from 1984 to September 1986, and from time to time drove 888. It had only 3 gears, a 3 litre engine, and a supposed top speed of about 45, but I remember one occasion, while driving staff home, reaching 60 on a downhill stretch! The end of 888 in that life came around April 1986, when a road spring fractured, and it occupied a corner of the yard, as no replacement spring could be found. I am surprised that it has survived to this day, and wonder where it has been in the interim.



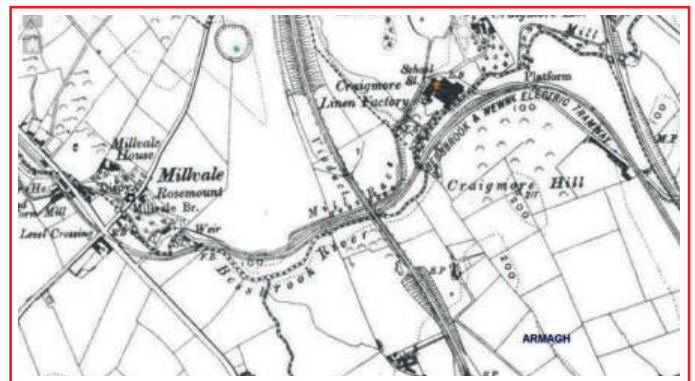
Remember that David is carrying on excellent work with his 'Major Operator Garages' series of publications – they are well worth supporting. More details at:

<https://www.omnibus-society.org/publications>.



Bessbrook and Newry Tramway

David Jenkins was the first of many readers to identify the location of the photograph in the last edition. It is on the section of line that has just passed under the GNRI viaduct, as shown on this map:



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If you didn't receive this direct from us and you would like to receive the newsletter on a regular basis, simply e-mail 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 Trust and we won't disclose it to anyone else.

Why not pay us a visit?

We are open Wednesdays and Thursdays each week from 10 am to 4 pm (and some other times by arrangement). Please book your place in the Search Room by emailing hello@kitheadtrust.org.uk.

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