

# Kithead News



Newsletter of The Kithead Trust



In this issue:

- Celebrating 25 Years
- Gas Buses
- Registration Records
- New Additions

## Celebrating the first 25 years



# Celebrating the First 25 Years

*In September, we took some time out to celebrate our own history. We were able to gather together many of the people who have supported the Trust over its first 25 years, either financially or with the gift of significant material.*

This gave the Trust the opportunity to thank all of its supporters and particularly to honour our founder, John Birks, who sadly passed away in 2003.

In the keynote speech, chairman Brian King gave a run-down of John's highly successful career in the bus industry, which covered roles at National Express, Northern General and United Counties, but is probably best remembered as General Manager at Midland Red and Southdown, before ending his career as Regional Enterprise Director. With a career which began as a BET management trainee and ended with the establishment of the National Express brand as we know it today, this was truly a man who spanned the ages.

A plaque to John's memory was unveiled by his widow, Margaret and younger son Austin (himself a stalwart of

the bus industry), and we were delighted to welcome John and Margaret's two daughters, Cathy and Liz.

Proceedings were rounded off by a trip by vintage bus (Crosville Bristol L from the Birmingham and Midland Motor Omnibus Trust) to the Kithead premises for a small exhibition of some of the treasures which lie in the collection, and to

see how things are being taken forward for its second 25 years.

The final words must go to Margaret Birks, who presided graciously over the event: "John would have loved this, and would have been delighted to know that the Kithead Trust is in good hands."



Margaret and Austin Birks unveil the plaque to John's memory, which will take pride of place in the Kithead foyer.

First Midland Red Managing Director Nigel Eggleton (right) inspects some BMMO photographs with former manager Paul Addenbrooke.



## Registration Records with Peter Jaques

# KHT 1

*In the last issue, we gave a glimpse at our tremendous library of railway books. Here, we continue the theme that “we’re not just about buses” by describing our holdings of registration records.*

We have one of the largest collections of registration records in the UK. When the Local Taxation Offices closed in 1977/8, their vehicle records were offered to the appropriate local authority record offices or police forces.

In many cases, this offer was declined and it is many of these records which make up our collection: in excess of **TWO MILLION** records!

For a small number of issuing authorities, we have the original issuing registers. There is a tremendous variation of information between these - some record first owner, allocated registration, date and vehicle type. Others will record only the date and allocated registration.

Before 1921, the various local authorities retained receipts from vehicle taxation, as they did with various other licences (dogs, servants or coats of arms, for example) and there were many individual systems

in use. From 1921 the local authorities became agents for the Ministry of Transport and a standardized system was introduced for motor taxation. Under this system there was only ever one file per vehicle, which was held by the area where the owner lived. If a vehicle was re-registered for some reason, the existing file was simply renumbered. When an owner taxed a vehicle in a different area, following change of address or sale of vehicle, the log book would show where the file was held and a system of card requests was used to obtain the file from the previous authority and to update the original “home” authority as to a vehicle’s whereabouts.

When a newer card was received by the home authority, the previous one was usually destroyed but once a vehicle had been scrapped, exported, or simply not licensed for a number of years the vehicle file would have been disposed of. Actual procedures varied over the years but particularly after about 1960, the final details were often added to one of these cards and a good proportion of our records are these “last owner” cards.

These cards often contained

rather more information than the original registers and crucially some cards also include the vehicle chassis number. And therein lies much of their value....

If a vehicle was not licensed when the DVLA computer system was set up, then it is not on the system and a record of its registration does not exist at Swansea. For example, if a vehicle has been “laid up” for many years, or is a “barn find” then it does not have a valid registration in the eyes of DVLA.

If the vehicle is returned to roadworthy condition, then DVLA will issue a new age-related registration, the actual format varying according to the age of the vehicle. If a restorer would prefer to retain the original registration, these last-owner cards can often provide the detail for us to issue a certificate acceptable to DVLA for the original number to be retained.

Our website includes details of the areas from which we hold records and also includes details of all other known repositories who hold such material and this is frequently updated. Sadly, such changes nowadays tend to be updated contact details rather than the discovery of new material!

## Captain's Log with archivist Philip Kirk

Well, it's been quite a year at The Kithead Trust. We began with a new set of priorities from the Trustees:

- To ensure the collection is kept in the appropriate conditions;
- To bring more focus to the collection;
- To make the collection better known.

In each case, I think we can report significant progress.

We identified that the records which make up the core of the collection needed more protection and after lots of trials and advice we standardized on low-acid boxes. I am pleased to say that the original batch of 700 is now filled and a further batch of 700 has arrived, thanks to a specific donation by a new friend of the Trust.

At the same time as boxing-up the papers, a lot of hard work has gone into listing the collection and we now have an electronic catalogue of some 8,000 items. We expect this number to rise to 20,000 eventually.

This will be available to researchers via our new website and will be a very significant step forward in publicising the collection.

Speaking of the new website, we had hoped to have this up and running before year end, but unfortunately with the focus on other matters, we simply ran out of time. I can report that work is now well underway on both the design and technical aspects so hopefully we can be up-and-running shortly.

Finally, thanks to everyone who has supported us in 2015 - here's to a Happy New Year!

## Classic Bus

### A New Partnership

We are pleased to announce a new partnership with Classic Bus magazine, the leading historic bus enthusiast publication, edited by Ray Stenning.

Ray paid his first visit to Kithead in the Autumn and was "blown away" by the collection and the detail. "To borrow a phrase from the newspaper ads, 'I never knew there was so much in it!'" he quipped. "Seriously, this is a very important collection - it is no exaggeration to say that it holds the story of the UK bus industry and we are delighted to team up and tell some of that story."

Watch out for us in Classic Bus during 2016 - starting with the story behind some Routemasters which operated a long way north of Watford...

## Thank You

The biggest "thank you" of the year must go to our team of volunteers - to Peter, Derek, Bob, Bernard, Tony, Ron, Dave, Martin, Mike and newest recruit John - for doing so much this year. At times during the year, Kithead has looked like a "cataloguing factory" with teams diligently going through files and tapping away on laptops!

# Is Nothing New?



The BCT photo archive which we hold has a series of photographs of number 60 including an annotated exterior shot (left) and a series of chassis shots such as that below which shows the three gas canisters.

There seems to have been a refueling point at the nearside rear.

We also have the individual vehicle record cards for the Birmingham fleet which reveals all of this juicy information.

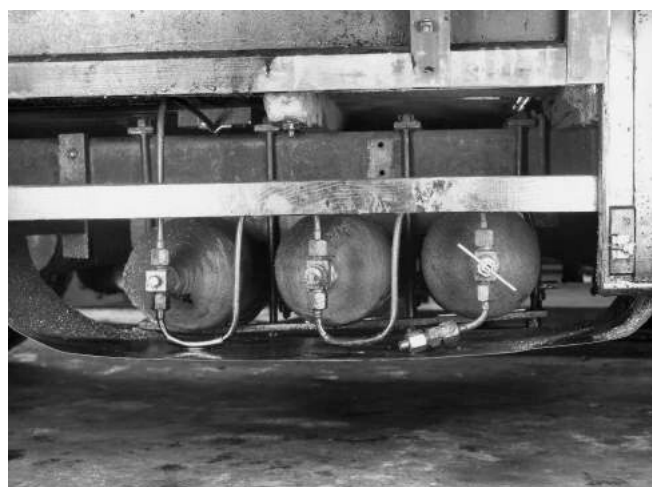
The main focus for the conversion seems to have been the British Industries Fair, which was held at Castle Bromwich each year from 1922. Special trains ran from Euston with connecting buses.

## It's a Gas!

There has probably never been a time when there is more choice of motive power for buses. Gas seems to have been around for quite a while but these photos demonstrate just how long.

They depict a Guy Conquest of Birmingham City Transport equipped to run on "Town Gas". It was part of a batch of 10 buses new in 1929 as normal control 25 seaters - see photo below - built for one-man (in those days) operation.

In 1931 they were lengthened and converted to forward control. At that time, fleet number 60 was also converted to run on "Town Gas".



60 ran in this form for four years (the photos are dated February 1932) before withdrawal and disposal in 1935 to Grice, a dealer in West Bromwich, minus the gas equipment.

Its demise may have been hastened by union representation that drivers were feeling sick due to the fumes coming into the cab!



## The Things You Can Do Nowadays...

Technology has revolutionized many things in recent years - Trust supporter Garry Luck has become quite a celebrity on the Flickr photo website for his recreation in colour of long-gone transport liveries and also “what if” scenarios.

We were recently able to share some images from the Plaxton collection with Garry - including a fire engine from North Yorkshire which he was able to colourise as quickly as if his computer was on fire!

Check out Garry’s images in Flickr as [nothernblue109](#).



## Additions to the Collection

### Railway Material

We recently received an important donation from Rowland Pittard of Bridgend.

This consists of Working Timetables and other operating documents of the Eastern, North-Eastern and Scottish Regions of British Railways from the early 1960s up to the late 1980s, which are a substantial addition to our railway records. This is a substantial addition to our railway records.

### Haulage

From Warwick University archive has come an almost-complete set of Applications & Decisions - the regular publication by the Traffic Commissioner for the haulage industry. The corresponding publication to road passenger’s Notices & Proceedings.

### Volvo Bus

From Adrian Wickens, who recently retired from Volvo Bus is a large quantity of official photographs from the last 20 years which fits perfectly within our collection.

**A Merry Christmas and  
Happy New Year  
From The Kithead Team  
- thanks for all your support in 2015!**

## Want to Find Out What We Have?

Our new website will be online in 2016. This will include a searchable database of the parts of the collection we have catalogued.

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](mailto:hello@kitheadtrust.org.uk)

## 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](mailto: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](mailto: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](http://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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