



# NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 11

JULY 2020

## **Chairman's Update ...**

I hope everyone is still well and keeping safe. It seems an awful long time now since we closed The Bus Collection to keep us all at home and safe from Covid19. In accordance with Government guidance, we all agreed to stay away from Alford, and we are extremely grateful for the regular checks on the premises by the Museum's staff. We also felt comforted by the knowledge that our building is well-protected against intruders and fire by a modern alarm system.

I had one worry about our buses during this period of inactivity, that the batteries on our buses have not been charged for nearly three months, and we know this could lead to battery failure. This is one of the routine jobs we have to do to keep buses ready for action, not only giving them a charge but, I believe even a short spin around the grounds can help to stop the batteries from sulphating and "dead" cells developing. Thankfully, due to the relaxation of restrictions, we are now back working on our vehicles, with the Museum opening to the public from 23rd July 2020. Please check our website for further updates: <http://thebuscollectionatalford.co.uk/>

Unfortunately, due to the lock down regulations, our Open Day this year was cancelled, and given the uncertainty around holding events in the months ahead, we have decided that our next open day will be arranged for 2021. This will give us extra time to make it bigger and better ... further information to follow in due course.

***Stay Safe ... Stay Well, Gordon Mills, Trust Chairman***

## **Please Be Seated! ...**

Prior to the mid-1920s it was usual for tramcars to have wooden seats on both decks, formed either of slats of different designs (there were various patents on the subject), perforated plywood or even cane rattan. Aberdeen Corporation Tramways, and the Suburban Tramways too, were unusual in providing lower saloon passengers with buttoned leather longitudinal benches from the earliest days of their electric tramways. It was not until the mid-1920s that new cars taken into the Corporation fleet treated top deck passengers to transverse leather upholstered seats.



The Trust's tramcar 15 has lost all its seats but it too had longitudinal buttoned leather seats downstairs and slatted seats upstairs. Slats were of course the norm for seats on the top deck of open top cars, but when top covers were applied retrospectively the original top deck seats were retained.



Aberdeen Corporation at its peak had about 100 cars with slatted seats upstairs, and when these cars were withdrawn from service there was quite a demand for these seats from the public for use as garden furniture, etc. Grampian Transport Museum was kindly donated one such seat some years ago – see illustration - but whether this design was common to the different batches of cars in the tramcar fleet is now lost.

**A question then for readers: do you know of any other such seats in the Aberdeen area? If you do, please contact the Trust, sending a photo if possible.**

**The Bus Collection at Alford is presently closed to visitors and will reopen once the Scottish Government has indicated it is safe to do so. You can view our vehicles and information on our website: <http://thebuscollectionatalford.co.uk/>**

## **“BEARING UP” ...**

All the Trust’s vehicles have a history supporting their presence in the collection and the two 1940s ex Corporation Daimler saloons, numbers 11 and 14, are no exception.

In mid-1945 Daimler had started to supply its own design of diesel engine, the CD6; previously, engines had been bought in from other engine suppliers. The later 1940s was a time of much difficulty in matching demand for new buses with UK industry’s ability to supply and accepting Daimlers with CD6 engines accelerated delivery of new chassis. All 36 Aberdeen Corporation Daimlers bought from summer 1945 to 1948 had CD6 engines, the last of which came out of ordinary service in 1972.



The engine part of the restoration of the two single decker’s has brought problems for both vehicles. ACT 11 still had its original engine and this, unsurprisingly, has been found to have wear in its crankshaft bearing shells. ACT 14’s engine had been stripped completely before the vehicle came to the Trust, its individual components now arranged as if by an explosion. Another CD6 engine from an ex Venture Transport of Consett Daimler was obtained and, although it had been neglected somewhat in its later years, it seemed to be a good candidate for the job. Wrong! Suffice to say that this engine is now with a specialist engine overhauler who at least was able to confirm that its crankshaft main bearings were good, but with two exceptions.

In contrast to Gardner engines which continued with traditional white metal bearings into the 1980s, CD6 engines had steel backed copper-lead bearings from new. The two exceptions mentioned above have suffered from corrosion, leaving the moth-eaten surface to be seen in the illustration.

**Question: does any reader know of a source of replacement bearings for a Daimler CD6 engine, or a proven method of making good a bearing of this design with a damaged surface?**

## **There’s no Place Like Home ...**

None of the forty or so electric tramcars at the end of Aberdeen’s tramways in 1958 avoided the “Viking Funeral” on the Links. The horse tramcar did survive but it was a close-run thing – it too had to go. An offer for it was made by one of the few local preservationists at the time, the initial plan being to remove it to open air storage in Kincardineshire. In the event Edinburgh Corporation became custodian of the car which was to feature in a new road transport museum in Edinburgh. Note that in 1958 there were extremely few museums in the whole of the UK catering for historic tramcars and buses; this Edinburgh museum was the only one in Scotland and was closed in the early 1980s. Glasgow’s Transport Museum was five years into the future.

In the 1950s it was usually private individuals and groups who took the initiative to secure vehicles for future generations. Tramcars were then disappearing fast, hence it was tramcars that were the focus of attention. There were then two serious attempts to preserve Aberdeen tramcars but none to secure a Corporation bus. In 1953 a relatively recently formed Glasgow based group bought car 73, a 1913 vintage open balcony car built in Aberdeen by JT Clark of Rose Street. The complete car was moved to the Glasgow area but the group’s funds having become much depleted the car lay sheeted over in open storage until it had to be disposed of some four years later. The next attempt was in 1956 when a Manchester area group moved to return car 49 to its home city. The car was bought for £25.0.0 but the costs of transport and future storage proved too much. It had been intended that the car go to a new Museum of Science and Industry, the group remaining responsible for storage in the interim. Many years passed before that institution opened.

The common factor in these, and other, failed tramcar preservation attempts was the lack of secure storage and somewhere for the public to ‘experience’ historic vehicles. This was recognised and the result was the establishment of the tramway museum in Derbyshire. However, this did not happen until the year after tramway closure in Aberdeen. Ten years later a group of local students became the first to preserve an Aberdeen Corporation bus - 155, a wartime utility Daimler - and especially in their earlier years they too suffered storage difficulties.

Now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the North East has, at last, its own dedicated centre for local historic public transport vehicles—the Trust’s Collection Centre at Alford. The Trust’s Aberdeen tramcar 15 now has somewhere to call home.



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