

Newslink

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION of
**Road Transport
Museums**
N A R T M



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Chairman's Corner

Last time I wrote at some length about the recent death of our friend Gerry Torney and went on to note the risk to our organisations of members passing away suddenly without making arrangements for files they held to be available to their colleagues.

What I didn't know then was that the very day after that edition of Newslink went to print, my wife Christine would have a severe stroke and would very sadly pass away just a week later. Chris often came to the NARTM conferences and so many of our members knew her and I would just like to thank everyone who came to me at the Norwich conference to express your sympathies and condolences; it was much appreciated as were messages and cards sent by other members. Thank you all.

The Norwich conference, hosted by the Eastern Transport Collection at the Wensum Valley Golf Club and Hotel was one of the best, if not the best, we have ever held. We do keep saying that but each one seems to set new standards and it will be hard to improve again, but we shall try. The Eastern Transport Collection took an almost full Bristol MW coach load of NARTM folks to see their new premises, 'somewhere near Norwich', as they understandably don't want the location to become public knowledge. Just like several other NARTM collections they take their vehicles to events to interact with the public - not all museums have to be in buildings open to the public.

The new site is very impressive, housing around sixteen buses and coaches, with a very tidy stores area and plenty of space for the industrious working members to carry on their restoration work which is producing excellent results. It is good to see interworking and support from other NARTM members, notably Roger Burdett in this case.

The conference itself was well attended with almost fifty in the room. We covered a wide range of topics as you will see in the Minutes later in this magazine including two break out discussion sessions. Incidentally the Minutes were taken by Philip Heseltine of the Plymouth City Transport Preservation Group who responded to our appeal for someone to take on the job. Thanks Philip and it is good to see that a few additional people have volunteered to either join or work with your board and we are in a better place than a year ago. We do still need a webmaster to manage our new website which will be ready soon, and also assistance with Newslink would be useful. The last Newslink was produced by our printers, Brightsea, who did an excellent job and very quickly too. They will do the same job on this edition and in future, unless you feel able to step in? Help with editing would also be appreciated - very little content to write, but collating items written by others.

At the board meeting before the conference, we confirmed that Steven Booth of Glasgow Vintage Vehicle Society and Paul Statham of the Oxford Bus Museum would both join the team of directors and also that James Freeman of the Friends of King Alfred Buses would be our

Front cover - *Superbly restored Lowestoft Corporation Leyland Titan PD2, PBJ 2F, stands outside the new ETC premises, 'somewhere near Norwich'.*

Rear cover - *The same bus with many of the NARTM delegates and ETC working members*

President. We welcome them all and others like Philip who have stepped up to support what NARTM is doing. We have some new faces working with the Scoring and Grading Project, which is now really getting into its stride and another enquiry in the pipeline. We still need more people though, so don't be shy!

I am not sure that we formally recorded that Laurie Powell, who represents Aldershot and District, Medstead and several other members in the south, has taken over as NARTM Treasurer. I'd like to thank Mike Sutcliffe for all his hard work as Treasurer over many years and wish him and his wife Pat well as they work together on Pat's health; Mike still retains a keen interest in NARTM and will support the Scoring and Grading Project where possible.

On the Sunday of conference weekend, the ETC took delegates to visit the Roundtree Way depot of First Eastern Counties which is now a completely electric bus site, with 78 buses allocated. We were given a tour by Piers Marlow, Managing Director, First East of England, who explained the process of converting the depot from diesel bus operation and how the daily operation works in practice. All seemed very well organised and successful and it was good to have a look into the future of bus travel as well as looking at the older vehicles as we usually do. A report appears elsewhere in this Newslink. Thanks to Piers and his colleagues for showing us round the site

In recent weeks we have been receiving applications to the new NARTM Small Grants Scheme and the first round closes on 30th April, so this edition may not be with you before that. The next application period will be in October and November this year, so it isn't too late.

Over the winter I wrote to some of our members who open their collections to the public to ask if they were registered for VAT and especially if they charged VAT on admissions because I was not then able to find any clear guidance on the matter. Thanks to everyone who responded. Of the first six to reply, two said that admissions were exempt from VAT, two others said that they charged VAT on admissions and one wasn't sure. The sixth one said that while they were registered for VAT, they didn't charge VAT on admissions, because they had Partial Exemption. So it seems there is a divergence of opinion and certainly some confusion on what has to happen.

The Partial Exemption scenario interested me and while the members' finance team didn't want to give advice, they did give me a contact person at one of the big accountancy practices who very helpfully gave me some good (free!) advice and sent me a link to a useful Gov.uk document I hadn't been able to locate. It is 60 pages long and I am working through it and when I am certain I have something definitive I will share my findings. In essence and as I currently understand it, Partial Exemption means that if a museum is registered for VAT but doesn't charge VAT on admissions, then they are not able to recover all the input VAT on items purchased, particularly those relating to the provision of admission to the museum. But don't take my word for this, as I find out more I will share what I find.

This does also lead to the use of an accounting software package to manage VAT and its returns and that will also become necessary as we move towards the HMRC Making Tax Digital programme as it affects our businesses. Something else to look at which means I don't get to work on my own bus!

The Eastern Counties Bus Preservation Group

We are a small group based in Suffolk and are predominately a husband-and-wife team that formed the group 6 years ago! We have a couple of trustees who also assist us with the running of the group as well and of course some of you may have met our dog Junior who comes with us wherever it is possible. We purchased our first vehicle S574TPW, a Scania L94UB Wright single decker in 2017, and this is the flagship of our group and where it all started! Since then, we have grown, and we now have 9 vehicles, and we are registered as a charity! In 2019 we decided to form a group and become "The Eastern Counties Bus Preservation Group" and in March 2020 we formally registered the group as a charity with the charity commissioners for England & Wales.

Our aim is to 'Preserve our History' and we have vehicles from 1973 to 1999 each one having a unique story and represents a part of Eastern Counties through the years, this includes the deregulation period and Grampian takeover leading to the formation of FirstBus.

The range of vehicles we have is vast, from a 1973 AEC Swift ECW (WEX685M) which was with Great Yarmouth Transport to an open top Leyland Freight Rover Sherpa (D70 TLV) which was a Banana Buggy and this ran down the seafront in Great Yarmouth. We also have a Bristol VR Series 3 new to Great Yarmouth Transport (CVF 29T), a Leyland National MK1 new to London Transport bus sporting 'Eastern Counties' Tomato Soup Livery (YYE 274T), a Mercedes Benz Frank Guy 609D new to Eastern Counties (N619GAH), Volvo B10M Plaxton Premiere new to Eastern Counties (P330 RVG) and a Dennis Dart Plaxton Pointer 2 new to New World Bus in Hong Kong (S664SNG). Our latest acquisition is a Dennis Javelin Plaxton Derwent (H612RAH), joining our Scania L94UB Wright Axxess Floline, so we hopefully have something to interest everyone with it being so varied and the collection picks up the story of Eastern Counties from our neighbouring friends at the Eastern Transport Collection in Norwich with our focus being directly from the deregulation of the National Bus Company in 1986.

We now also organise "The Big Bus Show" which is now into its 4th year, this is held at Stonham Barns near Stowmarket and it is the East of England's biggest display of vintage to modern buses and coaches and we pride ourselves on how it has developed and grown over the years.



It will be held this year on Sunday 10th August 2025 and entries are being taken now! We hope to see some of you there.

Some of you may already know us but here is an insight into how we came in to preservation as we are some of the younger generation of bus preservationists that are around, we became an established group when we were both in our 20's and although it has its challenges we have continued through the years to where we are today.



Jamie our chairman had an interest in buses, trucks and trains from a young age and this mainly stemmed from his Grandad Roy Stretton who is an avid photographer and enthusiast even today in his 90's! Jamie's grandad often would take him to various rallies including Showbus back in the 1990s

This is where Jamie's interest initially came from. Jamie and his late dad (Alan Vendy) would venture to Great Yarmouth at least four times per year when he was younger to spend his school holidays in Norfolk and remembers various changes around Eastern Counties and this is the era that we now represent today in our heritage vehicles as it comes from many memories spent on the Norfolk Coast throughout the years.

Jamie met myself (Kaylee) when we were just teenagers and throughout spending time together the interest and passion seems to have rubbed off on to me although I still don't have the vast amount of knowledge like others, but I hope I play my part in preservation. Jamie has worked in the bus and coach industry for over 10 years now and has done a vast amount of varied work in that time. This has gained his experience in how the industry works and how it

has changed even over this period, with a glance in to what the future of the industry holds with franchising and ever changing technology which has changed the bus world over the past 20 years and will continue to do so!

Although I don't work in the bus industry myself, I did however do my PSV licence a few years ago to enable me to drive our vehicles and attend shows and what a learning curve that has been and one which I also thoroughly enjoy as well. I am one of the few females that are in preservation and all my passion has been inherited from Jamie and the continued commitment he has in both the bus and coach industry and preservation too! Our lives are very much surrounded by it. We never would have believed that we would be here today with a group that owns 9 buses and trying to do our bit to keep our history alive for others to enjoy for years to come.



There are many continued challenges that young preservationists face and we know how difficult it can really be and why the number of young enthusiasts are dwindling which is a concern for the future of bus preservation. The amount of time and money needed to preserve and maintain buses is a big factor in this and its underestimated how much commitment is really needed when you start to preserve a vehicle and decide to keep it long term. It is not a hobby for the faint hearted; you really do have to put your heart and soul in it to make it a success.

We have each other to rely on which really helps our group and no decision is made in isolation, it also helps with encouraging each other through the challenges, as preservation group certainly has its ups and downs!

By Kaylee Vendy - Group Sectary
<https://easterncountiesbusgroup.co.uk/>

News and information from other organisations

Thanks as ever to Paul and Joyce Jefford for highlighting these items which are of interest to many of us. Two long extracts this time from a bumper crop from the last here months.

From The Museums Association News

£25m Museum Estate and Development Fund to open for applications in May

UK Government confirms fifth round of funding for vital repairs and maintenance work

27 MARCH 2025 Geraldine Kendall Adams@Gkendall

Museums in England will be able to apply in May for a share of £25m funding for vital maintenance and repairs. Now in its fifth round, the Museums Estate and Development Fund (Mend) will open for expressions of interest on 12 May.

The UK Government confirmed this week that it will allocate £25m to Mend this year. The funding decision was first announced in February as part of the government's new £270m Arts Everywhere Fund. Accredited museums will be able to apply for grants of between £50,000 to £5m for essential infrastructure projects and urgent maintenance backlogs. The fund aims to protect collections and buildings while improving the visitor experience and museums' resilience.

"Local museums are the storytellers of our nation's rich history and creative heritage, providing precious civic spaces that attract millions of visitors every year, whilst public libraries play a key role in communities by providing access to spaces where everyone can work and learn," said culture minister Chris Bryant. "Our Plan for Change will support these vital institutions to boost opportunity for all. I'm delighted that this investment into museums and libraries will fund repairs and upgrades to their infrastructure, improving the experience for visitors and ensuring they can be enjoyed for generations to come."

Arts Council England chief executive Darren Henley added: "Museums and libraries are cherished cultural spaces in villages, towns and cities across the country where people come together, share ideas and make discoveries. This new investment in museums and libraries will help secure their future for years to come."

From 'Historic'. The magazine of the Federation of Historic Vehicle Clubs

DVLA - Ian Edmunds

For the sake of completeness, I will start for this edition with an update on the Cabinet Office review of DVLA, although our press schedules unfortunately dictate that this is by now rather old news! In my last statement on this topic I said that we understood the report was completed but that it required the agreement of the then new Secretary of State before it could be published. That agreement was obtained from Louise Haigh shortly before she stepped down and on the eve of the Classic Motor Show last November the report appeared.

Given that matters relating to historic vehicles are a very small part of the activities of DVLA we consider the report fully recognises our concerns and provides as much as we could hope for, summed up in this section:

However, the review went further in assessing the experience of customers with more complex requirements and needs finding far lower levels of satisfaction, including from those with complex or changing medical conditions, from fleet hire companies and special interest groups representing sectors such as historic vehicles. DVLA must ensure:

1. All stakeholders have a genuine opportunity to engage, raise issues and review progress on actions being taken to address them.
2. A more innovative and focussed approach to service improvements.

The full report can be found on the Government website using this link -<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/dvla-review-published-to-strengthen-agency-for-the-future>.

On the subject of independent reviews, we understand, as a matter of interest, that the corresponding report on DVSA has not yet been completed.

A Historic Vehicle User Group meeting was held in Swansea in December and Federation Chairman David Whale and I attended in person. All the key DVLA Policy people were present, and we were very impressed by the positive approach shown by them all. The sole purpose of the meeting was for DVLA to convey their initial proposals following this long period of work culminating in the Call for Evidence issued last year. It was apparent that our points made over a long period had been heard, even if not acknowledged at the time.

In presenting their proposals DVLA wished to stress that this is all still work in progress and requested that the full details are not shared at this point.

The key objectives are a simplification of the registration procedures and the retention of the original registration wherever possible, or, if it is not known, the issue of an age-related registration. The suggestions are:

- A new category likely to be called 'Repaired' which will cover all normal repair, replacement and restoration activities. The original registration will be retained or an age-related registration issued.
- A second new category likely to be called 'Modified' and defined as a change of shape or dimensions of a vehicle, for example a coupé converted to a convertible. A DVLA VIN will be issued and the original registration retained or an age-related registration issued. Individual Vehicle Approval (IVA) will be required.
- The current 'Reconstructed Classic' category will continue but probably somewhat simplified. Club involvement in validating the vehicle is likely to continue.
- A very satisfactory solution is proposed to the long-standing problem of establishing the final manufacture date for vehicles supplied in CKD [completely knocked down] form.

Despite these intentions DVLA note that it is likely that there will always be a small number of awkward cases where the issue of a Q registration is unavoidable.

The Federation expressed satisfaction with these proposals but raised two concerns, both in the meeting and in a written response later. The first of these was that the wording used by DVLA left some doubt concerning newly constructed bodies on vehicles with a chassis. FBHVC

have requested that any 'period typical' (in terms of style, method of construction and materials used) body should be accepted without prejudice to the identity or registration of the vehicle.

The second concern is more difficult. DVLA consider that any vehicle classified as 'modified' should be required to undergo some form of technical inspection before being allowed back into circulation. The Federation supports that position, but the difficulty arises because DVLA do not have the Regulatory power to mandate a MoT on a 40+ year old vehicle. The only alternative available to them is IVA. FBHVC have stressed that IVA is the wrong tool and as it requires modern vehicle technical standards is unattainable by many historic vehicles.

Despite the two issues noted above it was felt that the proposals put forward were constructive and helpful, supported by the extremely positive approach shown in the meeting. David observed as we left that the meeting 'had exceeded his expectations'.

As always, further details will be shared as soon as we are able.

Seatbelts (Again)

It was in Edition 3 of Historic (Sep 24) that I wrote on the topic of mobile camera units which can detect drivers not wearing a seatbelt or illegally using a mobile phone. Whilst the latter was uncontroversial, I noted that in relation to seatbelts, whilst the overwhelming majority of vehicles on the road are fitted with seatbelts which must therefore be used, there was an issue over HVs (such as my own 1954 car) which are not so equipped (nor are obliged to be so equipped). I further observed that seatbelt equipment is not on the list of vehicle details on the DVLA register and queried at what stage would it be identified that the driver is not in fact committing a moving traffic offence in the event of being photographed by such a mobile camera. I set out some authoritative feedback from the Chief Constable on the National Police Chief's Council (NPCC) responsible for Roads Policing. Whilst he thought the age of the vehicle and lack of seatbelt requirement would not be picked up at force level and therefore a Notice of Intended Prosecution (NIP) would be sent which would need to be challenged, he thought the numbers would be extremely low. He undertook to consider a better way if numbers did escalate.

I received zero feedback to that piece until it was picked up by parts of the motoring media in a quiet spell over Christmas. Though our advice from the NPCC was not quoted, the research done by the media outlets came to the same conclusion. We have since had a number of concerned emails suggesting that those media outlets have a larger readership than my column which will be relief to them and an obvious disappointment to me! We do understand that readers will not want to receive a NIP and the demand for improved algorithms is understandable. However, our impression is that as this is new technology, unlike speeding fines, the Artificial Intelligence (AI) is simply highlighting potential transgressions and then a human looks at it. We do not think at this juncture the police will want to be undermined with 'AI gets it wrong' headlines. Further, the cancellation of a wrongly sent NIP by a Public Body should be more promptly done than the Notices issued wrongly by many private parking companies. We have our undertaking from the NPCC to look at it again if there is a growing problem

To MOT or not MOT, that is the Question.... (Don't believe all you read in the papers...)

And during that same quiet Christmas period, the following startling headlines could be read in the mainstream media (MSM): "Classic cars face MOTs for first time"

The story arose from one question in the DVLA call for evidence (CfE) which was about the Registration of HVs and not MOTs, over which the DVLA have no jurisdiction. Nevertheless, a hare was set running that a return to MOTs for HVs was being considered. The problem seemed to stem from the way the analysis of responses was conveyed.

There was just one question in the CfE relating to testing:

Question 3.4 Should there be a new type of safety check in place which takes into account the age of a historic or classic vehicle?

The FBHVC response was:

"The existing periodic testing regime (MoT), with an exemption from compulsory testing for the majority of historic vehicles over 40 years old, but with the provision for voluntary tests if desired, is broadly satisfactory although there are issues with its application to historic HGVs. However, there may be circumstances, for example following major restoration or repair work, when a one-off safety check would be appropriate. This may need to be a more in-depth inspection than the MoT, possibly including some degree of dismantling to permit full access to all parts of the vehicle but, in common with the MoT, should assess the vehicle with reference to the technical standards applicable when it was new. Individual Vehicle Approval which requires modern technical standards is entirely inappropriate and not suitable in this context."

The DVLA, indeed Government as a whole, is well used to receiving consultation responses from representative organisations, for example SMMT. It was clear from our recent discussions with DVLA (see Ian's column elsewhere in this issue) that due consideration had been given to the fact that some of the CfE responses represented a large number of individuals. Nevertheless, the summary of the CfE results published in December appears to rank each response as 'one vote' and thus the percentages quoted are not necessarily indicative of the true situation. Thus, a quote from one of the newspapers that "[more] than two in five respondents to a Department for Transport (DfT) public consultation exercise agreed with officials that new tests should be introduced for cars more than 40 years old" was not entirely accurate. The ratio quoted did not take account of the numbers which the FBHVC represented, the question was not about an MoT as such and "officials" from the DfT were not proposing the re-introduction of such a test. The summary of the CfE results is just that - a summary of results. It is not a statement of intent.

To conclude - the Federation is not aware of any impending changes to the MoT regime!

Minutes of the Spring Conference held
on Saturday 29th March 2025
Hosted by The Eastern Transport Collection
at Wensum Valley Hotel, Golf & Country
Club, Beech Road, Taverham, Norwich,
NR8 6HP at 13.00



Present:

DELEGATE

Richard Alger

Tim Barrington

Ray Bignell

Colin Billington

Helen Billington

Alan Bishop

Steven Booth

Roger Burdett

David Chick

Anthony Delaine-Smith

John Dyson

Simon Emerton

James Freeman

Simon Gill

Tony Hazell

Philip Heseltine

Paul Jefford

Tom Lingwood

Katariina Mauranen

Richard Newman

John Peck

Laurie Powell

Ian Souter

Mark Smith

William Staniforth

Paul Statham

Dave Stubbins

ORGANISATION(S) REPRESENTED

East Anglia Transport Museum

Eastern Transport Collection Society

Routemaster Operators & Owners Association

Ribble Vehicle Preservation Trust

Colin Billington Collection

Thames Valley & Great Western Omnibus Trust

Aston Manor Road Transport Museum

Glasgow Vintage Vehicle Trust

Roger Burdett Collection

British Trolleybus Society

Delaine Heritage Trust

Hooton Park Bus Owners

SHMD Joint Board

Bounty Country Buses

Friends of King Alfred Buses

Leicester Transport Heritage Trust

Carmel Coaches

West Country Historic Omnibus & Transport Trust

Plymouth City Transport Preservation Group

Paul and Joyce Jefford Collection

Southampton & District Transport Heritage Trust

London Transport Museum

Isle of Wight Bus & Coach Museum Trust Ltd

Midland Road Transport Group- Butterley

Aldershot & District Bus Interest Group

City of Portsmouth Preserved Transport Depot

Medstead Depot Omnibus Trust

Stedham Garage Working Omnibus Museum Project Limited

Aberdeen & District Transport Preservation Trust

National Tramway Museum

Scottish Vintage Bus Museum Lathalmond

Shetland Vehicle Preservation Society

Ipswich Transport Museum

Bristol Road Transport Collection

Oxford Bus Museum

Barrow Transport Museum Trust Limited

Tim Stubbs
Dennis Talbot
Jamie Vendy

Number of delegates: 30

Dennis Society
Greater Manchester Transport Society
Eastern Counties Bus Preservation Group

Number of organisations represented: 40

DIRECTOR:

Joyce Jefford

In attendance:

Valerie Bishop
Jack Delaine-Mellor
Sydney Eade
Philip Eden
Leona Edge
Phil Gilbert
David Hutchings
Daniel Peart
Nick Pike
Simon Robertson
David Sheppard
Susie Stubbs
Kaylee Vendy

Paul & Joyce Jefford Collection
Aston Manor Transport Museum
Delaine Heritage Trust
Eastern Transport Collection
Eastern Transport Collection
Bounty Country Buses
Friends of King Alfred Buses
Southampton & District Transport Heritage Trust
Eastern Transport Collection
Eastern Transport Collection
Midland Road Transport Group- Butterley
Thames Valley & Great Western Omnibus Trust
Dennis Society
Eastern Counties Bus Preservation Group

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:

Chas Allen
Ashley Blackman
Kirsty Blackman
Chris Butterfield
Robert Crawley
Brian Dicks
David Hudson
Paul Jenkins
David Jones
Philip Kirk
Alex Lawson
Greg Lawson
John Lines
Brian Maguire
Steve Milner
Peter Mitchell

Trolleybus Museum at Sandtoft
The Revivist Collection
The Revivist Collection
Oxford Bus Museum
West Country Historic Omnibus & Transport Trust
Isle of Wight Bus & Coach Museum
Aire Valley Transport Group
Devon General Omnibus Trust
SHMD Transport Board
The Bus Archive
Aire Valley Transport Group
Aire Valley Transport Group
Dover Transport Museum
Cardiff and South Wales Trolleybus Project
Lincolnshire Road Transport Museum
Aycliffe & District Bus Preservation Society
North East Bus Preservation Trust Ltd
Transport Museum Wythall
Mike Sutcliffe Collection
The Leyland Society
Bristol Omnibus Vehicle Collection
James Willmott Collection

Jim Munro
Mike Sutcliffe
Mike Walker
James Willmott

1 Welcome from the Chairman of the meeting

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the Members' Meeting in Norwich and thanked the Eastern Transport Collection for hosting the meeting and for the visit to their vehicle collection earlier in the morning.

2 Presentation by the Eastern Transport Collection Society

Philip Eden, Chair of the Eastern Transport Collection, thanked NARTM for choosing them to host the Spring Conference 2025 and he went on to thank all at the Wensum Valley Hotel Golf and Leisure club staff for their warm hospitality to all the delegates attending. Philip thanked volunteers at the ETC for arranging the travel to and from the venue and making the visit to its storage facility a success. Originally created in the 1960s as a Member's Club, it became a charity in 1984. The collection had been located at a farm at Attleborough for 30 years. Upon news that the site was to be sold and demolished as part of a growth area, the search started to find a new site which took 2 to 3 years. The ETC currently has 9 vehicles and 125 members.

3 NARTM Directors meeting Friday 28th March 2025

The Chairman was pleased to announce the appointment of two new directors to the NARTM Board: Paul Statham (Oxford Bus Museum) and Steven Booth (Glasgow Vintage Vehicle Trust). The Chairman also paid tribute to Gerry Tormey who sadly passed away on 1st December and recognised his contribution to the workings of NARTM: including archives, production of the Newslink magazine, Webmaster and as Director of NARTM for 14 years.

4 Minutes of the Members' Meeting held on the 19th October and Matters Arising

On a proposal by Paul Statham (Oxford Bus Museum), seconded by Alan Bishop Aston Manor Road Transport Museum), the minutes of the previous meeting were approved by the members present. There were no matters arising.

5 An introduction by newly appointed President of NARTM, James Freeman (Friends of King Alfred Buses)

James said he was honoured to be taking on the role as President, following the appointment of Lord Hendy as Minister in the new Labour government. James stressed that his role will be about representing NARTM to outside organisations and relating to Government. James highlighted an unavoidable truth that NARTM members are having to face, namely members are getting older. That is not the only problem we are heading for. We can carry passengers free of charge on the public highway, but that could change in the future. NARTM is therefore a very important body which will be all the stronger if individual members work together.

At the request of members, James also gave an update on the King Alfred Leyland Olympic. It will be renovated and this is going to take place from April at Lathalmond in Scotland. The estimate for the renovation is £500,000 of which half has already been secured. James used the renovation of the Olympic to demonstrate the importance of the Bus Archive and its collection. Contained within its collection are 150 scanned images of MCW's original Leyland Olympic drawings which will be used in its renovation.

6 NARTM Grants Scheme (Dennis Talbot)

The Chairman presented the NARTM Grant Scheme, explaining that there is a single application form and members have until 30th April to submit their application with assessments taking place in May. The Chairman confirmed that feedback on both successful and unsuccessful submissions would be provided following a question from Dave Hutchings (Southampton and District Transport Heritage Trust). It was also confirmed that case studies of successful bids will be made available following a question from David Chick (British Trolleybus Society).

7 The benefits of a registered charity becoming a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (Eastern Transport Collection)

Nick Pike, Treasurer of the ETC presented how the Eastern Transport Collection Society transitioned to a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) and now known as the Eastern Transport Collection. Explored options for limiting personal exposure such as a registered company limited by guarantee. CIOs originally created 10 years ago. ETC's constitution is a Charity Commission standard with bespoke by-laws concerning the operation of the collection. Going down the route of a CIO avoids Companies House and the relationship is between just the ETC and the Charity Commission. ETC assets transferred to the CIO from the previous charity organisation. Kept the existing charity for the purpose of donations and sales.

Dennis Chick (British Trolleybus Society) asked whether there were any downsides, to which the reply was none really. The Chairman confirmed that there was still a need to continue with an independent audit of accounts.

Advantages are that charities and companies are limited by guarantee. However, it is less straight forward to move from a registered charity to a CIO. There are definite benefits for unincorporated organisations to move to a CIO. Helen (TV&GWOT) confirmed that the TV&GWOT is a company limited by guarantee and a registered charity and company limited by guarantee. Producing an annual activity report is useful as a document that can also be deposited with Companies House.

A show of hands amongst organisations present showed 3 to be CIOs, 2 unincorporated and the rest had charity status.

8 The Bus Inspectors and the Vehicle Database and the development of scoring and grading (David Sheppard and Ray Bignell)

This is an audit of all preserved buses in the UK in terms of location, condition and status. David Shepherd provided a recap of the scheme so far. Working with NARTM members to grade the national collection of buses in the UK, enriching national records and providing a framework for future prioritisation. David went on to provide an update one year into the process. 12 collections have been scored so far (10% of NARTM membership) by the team of 6 scorers. In 2025, there will be 17 scorers working in groups of 2 or 3. Through experience, site scoring efficiency is improving.

For 2025, scoring regions are being reorganised with experienced scorers being redeployed to help out in other regions. Post-data collection processes are also being streamlined. New volunteers to score are welcome. The fourth podcast "Meet the Bus Inspectors" designed to generate interest in the scheme, has been completed. 50,000 people aware of the scheme, 4 podcasts produced totalling 2 hours 20 minutes of content featuring 19 NARTM members, 81 posts across social media, 11 YouTube videos. 3000

people have checked out the Bus Inspectors website and David has given presentations to 7 NARTM member organisations. Five articles have been published in the national press, spreading the work of the Bus Inspectors to a wider audience who might be interested in the scheme.

The fourth podcast was played, which focused on the difficulties of preserving modern buses in order to represent vehicles of a modern age of interest to younger people. Maintenance of modern vehicles involves complex electronics and plastics prone to deterioration replacing more traditional wood and metal. From the 1990s there is a different preservation story. Diagnostics using a laptop, having correct operating systems and being able to interpret the data outputs are becoming part of the modern bus preservation scene. If modern buses become more difficult to keep on the road, there is a danger that they are more likely to end up in inaccessible places away from public view taking up a lot of storage space.

David trailed the fifth podcast coming out soon, which will focus on the ones that got away, those buses we wished had been preserved but have all been scrapped, the rebuilding of the King Alfred Leyland Olympic and presenting bus preservation to a wider audience.

As was explained earlier, new volunteer scorers are always welcome. Ray Bignell explained that volunteers are given a grounding on how to score and that all aspects of scoring are funded by NARTM, including travel and subsistence. Following the presentation, the floor was opened up for questions.

Paul Statham (Oxford Bus Museum) said how important having 2 or 3 people scoring at each location can complement each other, with one person focussed on writing but having 2 or 3 people does stimulate a discussion about scores for individual vehicles. As David reiterated, every vehicle deserves an argument. Ray also explained some nuances around scoring, explaining livery is not crucial, but the livery needs to be appropriate to reflect any internal/external modifications a vehicle may have received during its service life.

Tim Stubbs (Dennis Society) told us that the society holds a record of all Dennis vehicles in existence including over 40 Dennis Darts, demonstrating that there is already younger people prepared to take forward the preservation of more modern vehicles.

Kaylee Vendy (Eastern Counties Preservation Group) talked about preservation groups not having the skills to repair modern vehicle electronics such as ECUs and more often than not, have to be sent away for repair. This prompted David to trail the sixth podcast which will focus on how current operators can support the preservation of more modern vehicles that have or about to come out of service, particularly in respect of access to software and maintenance manuals. Even manuals to programme Hanover dot matrix destination displays. David also took the opportunity recently to present the work of NARTM to bus operators attending the Confederation of Passenger Transport conference.

Those present thanked David and Ray for their presentation on the work of the Bus Inspectors.

9 Other Topics for discussion

In the run up to the tea-break, a number of other topics were discussed:

Ray Bignell reminded members to complete the NARTM annual survey summarising individual organisation activities in 2024.

The Chairman provided a resume of the discussion that happened at the 2 break-out sessions at the previous meeting at Wythall in October covering (a) Sustainability and skills retention and (b) Audiences - attracting a wider range of interest.

With passing of Gerry, the Chairman also put a call out to anyone who could help pull together Newslink content ready for sending to the printers.

David Shepherd explained that the NARTM website is being updated for 2025 and that NARTM needs someone who can receive website content and has experience of website on-line web interface.

Kateriina Mauranen, London Transport Museum (LTM) wanted to let everyone present to know about the Heritage Skills Project mapping out where and what skills are out there and providing a database which can be shared on-line. Kateriina has created a survey for NARTM members to complete. A link will be provided to the survey.

The LTM has also adopted a new approach to volunteering, opening up Saturday sessions focused on mechanical skills and aimed at younger people who would otherwise be working during the week. There are great young volunteers in the under 60 age bracket. The LTM has a seminar at the Acton Depot on 29th May addressing the problem of scarce skills.

The LTM now has an outreach programme using a mobile exhibition to attend events.

Finally, Kateriina mentioned upcoming restoration projects and what skills will be needed to complete these. One vehicle will be restored by volunteers, while the other will be sent out to a contractor.

Ian Souter (Scottish Vintage Bus Museum) asked whether the LTM's volunteering programme was providing potential career opportunities and helping to secure employment as a result of their volunteering activities. Kateriina was able to confirm that it was proving to be of some help, but also, amongst older volunteers, the programme helps combat loneliness and helps establish new friendships.

10 Major topics for discussion discussed in two break out groups

The Chairman introduced the major topics for discussion, which following the format of the meeting at Wythall, would be discussed in two break out groups. These topics were (a) Sources of Funding and (b) Sources of Spares. Members were split into two groups and members had the opportunity to participate in both discussions. Feedback to follow.

11 Other topics for discussion

a Ongoing use of legacy funds (Dennis Talbot)

The Chairman introduced Anthony Delaine-Smith (Delaine Heritage Trust), who posed the question on whether NARTM could buy a building using some of the legacy funds. He went on to say that people in the heritage movement generally do not own land or have access to secure long leases. How do we fix this? The Glasgow Vintage Vehicle Trust own their building and rent out space. NARTM has the combined clout to be able to secure a long lease on a building. Simon Emerton (Bounty Country Buses) thought this was a brilliant idea and that large premises should be sought. Alan Bishop (Aston Manor Road Transport Museum) said that there are premises around.

David Hutchings (Southampton & District Transport Heritage Trust) wanted to mention that building management or estate management is time consuming for any organisation

and requires a lot of co-operation. Kaylee Vendy (Eastern Counties Preservation Group) continued by saying that covered accommodation was in short supply and getting more expensive, preventing the younger generation from joining the bus preservation movement. Daniel Peart (ETC) highlighted the disparity across the country with some parts of the country deprived of decent storage facilities.

James Freeman suggested that someone needs to champion this in order to take the idea of a NARTM site forward.

ACTION: Anthony Delaine-Smith to prepare an article for Newslink explaining what has been said at this meeting

b Insurance (Dennis Talbot)

The Chairman introduced the topic of insurance and invited Roger Burdett (Roger Burdett Collection) to take the floor. Roger reminded everyone that PIB had passed the bus insurance business to NCI. The bus business is underwritten by Equity Red Star (ERS) who have issued 300 bus policies over the last 6 months. Roger gave a shout out to small insurance broker, Routen Chaplin, based in Long Eaton in Nottinghamshire who have been providing insurance solutions for over 50 years. Opinions amongst those with experience of using Routen Chaplin have not got any negative comments.

ACTION: Roger Burdett to write a short piece on insurance in the next issue of Newslink

12 Date, Venue and format of future meetings

It was agreed that the Autumn Conference would be held on Saturday 27th September 2025 and would be hosted by the Scottish Vintage Bus Museum at Lathalmond.

13 Arrangements of the Sunday event on the 30th March 2025

It was announced that the coach to visit the **Norwich** Electrics fleet would leave at 1000 and members were reminded that British Summer Time starts tonight and to put their clocks forward by an hour.

14 Any Other Business

The Chairman reminded members to submit stories featuring their activities to go into future issues of Newslink.

Simon Emerton (Bounty Country Buses) wanted to make members aware of the 'Little Bus Big Ride' starting on Good Friday travelling the 1000 miles from Land's End to John O'Groats in a 1948 miniature bus raising money for: The Children's Society, Hope House children's hospices and the MPS Society. Donate via www.littlebusbigride.co.uk

Paul Statham (Oxford Bus Museum) announced that the museum is now hosting their 3rd youngster participating in the Duke of Edinburgh Awards scheme.

Meeting closed at 1705.

The Bus Inspectors vs Artificial Intelligence

By David Sheppard

As Radio 4 listeners will know, Artificial Intelligence is soon to take over the world from us mere humans. Over coffee at the recent NARTM spring conference in Norwich, the great Richard Newman (a naturally intelligent human being and Trustee of the Isle of Wight Bus Museum) lamented the BBC's obsession with AI, what it can do and who it will replace next.

As a former Corporation man going straight, it's not for me to comment. But Richard's animated tirade did make me wonder if AI might be able to complete The Bus Inspectors' scoring and grading project without moving an artificial muscle. I asked ChatGPT, a leading AI 'chatbot': 'Which is the most historically significant preserved bus in the UK?'. Its answer, revealed after less than a second of contemplation, was frighteningly plausible. Not only was it a real vehicle, but one that had already crossed my mind as a strong contender and possibly the bus that just flashed across your mind, too. Nervously, I asked ChatGPT to name the second most historic bus - also a surprisingly likely candidate. Likewise, the third...



*ChatGPT's attempt at "David Sheppard standing proudly in front of his bus at Penzance Vintage Bus Day".
Who should be more offended, David or the bus?*

But, we should be careful before we consider standing-down The Bus Inspectors with their collective centuries of accumulated human knowledge. There's a slight bias in ChatGPT's artificial bus interest that, no doubt, the Today programme would be quick to call out. All three buses suggested as the 'most historically significant' are from London. You could argue that may be fair, given the important role the capital's buses have played in our national story; but it also happens that the suggested top three vehicles are relatively well documented online and particularly well celebrated by approachable websites for the non-enthusiast. Put another way, they're all popular, well-known, celebrity vehicles. Accordingly, there's no surprise that ChatGPT's top-three suggestions for most historically significant UK steam locomotives are Rocket, Mallard and Flying Scotsman, followed only a few places down the list by the entirely fictional 'Hogwart's Express'. Is it possible that AI has confused 'historically significant' with, simply, 'famous'?



ChatGPT was able to identify these wheels as belonging to Manchester 1250 (JVU 755), a 1951 Crossley Dominion Trolley Bus at the Museum of Transport, Greater Manchester. Were you?!

All this frivolity does bring us to a serious point. The work of The Bus Inspectors to score and grade the national collection is about unmasking and evaluating the less-obvious, as well as recording what we already know. Sure, the more famous and celebrated vehicles are likely to be so for good reason, and this is why so-called 'Star Quality' is rightly considered as part of The Bus Inspectors' scoring and grading process. But, as you'll know if your collection is among the NARTM member organisations we have already started to score, there are many more detailed considerations in play which I'm sure AI in its current form wouldn't stand a hope of busking. To understand, for example, the historical significance of a particular aspect of bus design, one needs to appreciate context - what came before and what followed; likewise, the social changes enabled by particular bus designs are something even The Bus Inspectors have to work hard to understand, their research being greatly enhanced by the stories they hear from owners and curators during their scoring visits.

So, it looks like The Bus Inspectors are safe from replacement by AI, which means I'd better update you on our progress since the last edition of Newslink. Those at the Norwich conference in March heard that scoring is now underway or complete at 12 collections, namely: the British Commercial Vehicle Trust, Leyland; Barrow Transport Museum Trust Depot; City of Portsmouth Preserved Transport Depot; Glasgow Vintage Vehicle Trust, Bridgeton; Hooton Vehicle Owners Group; Leicester Transport Heritage Trust; the London Transport Museum Depot, Acton; Medstead Depot Omnibus Group; North West Museum of Road Transport, St Helens; the North West Vehicle Restoration Trust, Kirkby; the Roger Burdett Collection; and the Southdown Omnibus Trust at Amberley Museum. Since the conference, a thirteenth collection has been scored, appropriately enough the Eastern Transport Collection, and three more collections are about to receive their first visits as this edition of Newslink goes to press. This represents around 15% of NARTM collections which have had at least one visit from The Bus Inspectors, some two or three, so far.

This progress is good, but it doesn't represent the team at anything like full tilt. Scoring visits so far have been made predominantly by six key members of the team, whereas we now have an expanded scoring team of 17 volunteers who are ready to start work in the various regions around the UK. If you haven't heard from us yet, we'll soon be in touch.

Crucially, the project continues to deliver considerable public benefit on behalf of NARTM. The long-term legacy of a fully graded 'national collection' is the ultimate goal and the associated future benefits are obvious; but our work to promote the heritage bus movement along the way is also seeing some more immediate wins. Cumulatively, our project attracted and sustained the interest of more than fifty thousand people last year, through its media mix of websites, podcasts, social media channels, press articles and in-person talks - very encouraging in its first year of being. We are particularly proud of The Bus Inspectors podcast, which is unique in the bus heritage world. The podcast has lifted the lid on many of the challenges facing our movement, now and in the future, and has also been a catalyst for productive discussions about how to tackle them. We've considered the changing interests and priorities in society which mean our movement must continue to evolve; difficulties in succession planning for our organisations; issues around heritage bus storage; the benefits and challenges of keeping buses and coaches on the road as 'living' history rather than static exhibits; the challenges of preserving more modern and more complex vehicles; and, among many other topics, the need for a scoring and grading system in our sector and others. Although the podcast is designed to be approachable for everybody with an interest in heritage, people, places and stories well-told, I was hugely encouraged to see that the NARTM community is itself finding great value in the series, with a show of hands at the recent Norwich conference confirming that almost all the attendees listen regularly.



Roger Burdett and other delegates climb aboard the Eastern Transport Collection's AI-generated Bristol MW, so good they almost believed it was a real one...

Given that, you probably won't need me to tell you that a fifth episode of the podcast is now overdue and eagerly anticipated by our followers (there has been a brief pause in our established rhythm while efforts are made to create a new NARTM website, to be launched soon). Fear not, the next episode of The Bus Inspectors podcast is now in production and its own launch is not too far away. It will discuss vehicles which have fallen out of preservation, the reasons for this and what has happened to them since. We'll also discuss the 'gaps' in our national collection, those much lamented vehicles which never made it to preservation. Plus, NARTM's President, James Freeman, tells the incredible story of the King Alfred Leyland Olympic which has recently moved north to begin a major restoration following the devastating fire of 2023 at a storage facility in Penton Mewsey, of which the Olympic was the only vehicle to survive in partly recognisable form; a vehicle which remains in preservation against all odds.

It's going to be a busy year, and it is a pity we can't generate AI volunteers to swell our numbers - but we're more than happy to accept human ones. Please get in touch if you'd like to help us.

By the way, you might be wondering why I haven't revealed the identities of the vehicles suggested by ChatGPT during my research? You might think it's my trademark diplomacy in action, but no; it's because there's another slight problem with ChatGPT as it stands. When I asked the same question about the UK's most historic preserved buses just a few minutes later, the answers it gave were completely different. Turns out AI is just as capricious as human bus fanatics.



Passengers at the recent Penzance Vintage Bus Day were just as likely to catch a glimpse of the Easter Bunny than this Orion bodied Bristol Lodekka/Daimler hybrid, fancied by ChatGPT as the bus we should all look out for...

Charging Into The Future

By David Sheppard



I'm sure a few Newslink readers will know how it feels to be chased out of a bus depot? Thought so. Especially as plucky youths, the temptation of that over-the-pit photograph, or a poke around the withdrawn buses at the back of the yard, may have been too much for some to resist...

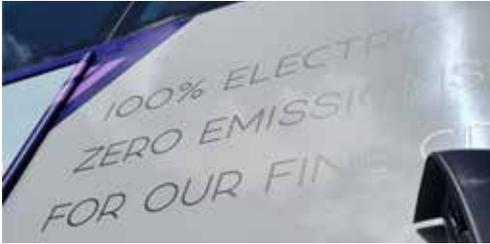
It's a rare privilege to be invited into a working bus depot and a very special treat when it happens – as it did on the final day of the recent NARTM Spring conference in Norwich. Courtesy of the excellent relations between our hosts, the Eastern Transport Collection, and the local bus operator, First East of England, delegates were able to enjoy a guided tour of the newly electrified depot at Roundtree Way, hub of the Network Norwich Electric fleet.



It was fitting that we were transported into the future by something rather wonderful from Anglia's past and, as we drew up outside the state-of-the-art depot on board the Eastern Transport Collection's very fine former Eastern Counties Bristol MW coach, there was a definite sense of time travel.

We were met by none other than Piers Marlow, a well-known and respected senior figure in the bus industry and currently the Managing Director of First East of England. In his welcome, Piers gave a delightfully candid account of how the electrification project had grown to the impressive scale we saw before us.

"We applied for (funding for) 15 electric buses to start with. The Department for Transport said to us that not everybody had taken up their option, so there was potentially money available



if we did want some more”explained Piers. “We then decided to pitch for 70, not expecting to get 70 - but 70 we got!”

The funding came from the Government’s ZEBRA (Zero Emission Bus Regional Area) scheme, which has so far delivered £413m to support the deployment of zero-emission vehicles across 41 transport authorities in England. For Piers, the Norwich electrification scheme puts Norfolk in line with FirstGroup’s commitment to zero emissions by 2035.



“This is all part of that programme. We have to be moving in large steps like here and Basildon (currently undergoing electrification), and at this sort of pace, if we’re going to deliver that.”

Our visit fell on a Sunday when many of the vehicles were at home, an impressive sight in the latest purple and grey incarnation of First’s corporate identity, though noticeably unaccompanied by sound. The vehicles live beneath a network of over-head gantries, carrying charging cables safely clear of the ground, and offering capacity to charge 76 vehicles. Once plugged in, the charging starts and stops automatically as required, with an average charge time of 4 to 6 hours.



A fully charged battery will usually last the day.



Says Piers: "If everything goes to plan and even if it's cold, all the buses will complete their scheduled running lines. Some will come in with as low as 10%. Generally, at that point, drivers will begin to panic. If you can imagine a combination of a driver who realizes that he's only got to go to Wymondham once more and then he can go home, but actually it's showing 8%. You tend to hear about it fairly quickly!".

Otherwise, the reception from drivers has been notably positive. "No drivers have moaned about them. We had a few at the beginning when they started to arrive going, "I'm not driving one of those. I like diesels". But since they've tried them nobody has complained and I've never known that in my entire life in the industry. So, it's been brilliant".

Alongside the new buses delivered to First for the electrification project - all Wrightbus vehicles in the case of Norwich - several existing vehicles are in the process of being re-powered from diesel to electric. NARTM delegates enjoyed a chance to inspect a newly arrived specimen, re-fitted internally as well as mechanically to create the illusion of a brand new bus, but at roughly half the price.

Piers regards the electrification project as a success in every way. The only teething troubles have been minor and of the kind that could easily afflict a traditional diesel bus, such as freezing air valves. "A Leyland National problem!" laughed Piers. Despite popular concerns about electric vehicles, there have been no incidents of fire and no pedestrian issues caused by the silence of the electric buses. In fact, quite the opposite.

"Norfolk County Council have just released some figures about the reduced environmental impact of our buses - reduced decibels, reduced everything really, and it's had a huge effect." says Piers, with pride. "It's just so nice to see. When you go into Norwich City and you see what's running now and the impact it's had on a network that, let's face it, looked quite tired before - and is now really, really buzzing and really growing".

NARTM delegates are hugely grateful to Piers and his team for allowing us to visit, for being so generous with their time and extending such a warm welcome. We are also grateful to the Eastern Transport Collection for enabling the visit as part of their magnificent hosting of the conference as a whole.

You can see a short film of the visit on [The Bus Inspectors YouTube channel](#), linked from [TheBusInspectors.com](#).

SCORING SURPRISE

A report from Paul Statham.

As many of you know, I have the collections of the south-east of England to score and grade, which includes LT Museum and London Bus Museum amongst others.

I attended the recent NARTM conference at Norwich, representing Oxford Bus Museum, and as the Eastern Transport Collection who hosted the conference is on my list of collections, I had arranged to score the collection during the weekend. After the Sunday visit to First's depot in Norwich, I went to inspect the collection and was met by several of their members including their Chairman Philip Eden and their Deputy Chairman, Daniel Peart.

As all scorers must, I try to keep an open mind about what I am going to discover. Given the collection is at the heart of former Eastern Counties territory, it was no real surprise to find several Bristol/ECW vehicles, some very noteworthy examples of typical Tilling-group vehicles among them. There were a couple of exceptions too, for example a municipal VRT3 from Great Yarmouth and two Leyland PD2s from Lowestoft.

Using NARTM's database there are some scoring categories which can be answered prior to the visit, such as the age of the vehicles. We have a table of 'decades' with fixed scores awarded per decade, with older vehicles attracting the highest scores in this category. On the day of inspection I look at things like the Originality/Authenticity category. One aspect of this



which is often tricky to evaluate is the livery of the vehicle, which may not be original or as worn in-service, and this proved to be the case for ETC's open-top VR. Whilst the overall effect is of an Eastern Counties open-topper, the livery is in fact the one it carried during service with Carters from Colchester - so, whilst not original, this livery does represent part of the service life of the bus! In the grand scheme



of things, livery accounts for only a small portion of the scores available in the authenticity category (it could be changed with relative ease) but nonetheless the note-taking on livery is important.

Another of the difficulties we face is that NARTM's database of vehicles cannot possibly track the moves of vehicles each time they move from one storage site to another - so there are often some surprises! This was the case here with two unexpected vehicles on site. One is an ex-North Western Tiger Cub bus and the other is an ex-Southern National RELH coach, now in later 'white' Royal Blue livery. I did not discover until I got home and started transferring the scores on to the NARTM's files that I know the previous owner of the RE and in fact photographed it a few years ago when it was still in Southern National (Royal Blue) livery.

For those of you who do not know, Southern and Western National normally kept some coaches in Royal Blue livery but with Southern or Western National fleetnames, these normally being used on private hire or day excursions, usually working Royal Blue services, and normally as Relief cars on Royal Blue services at weekends.



But the big surprise was still to come. Relatively recently, the Eastern Transport Collection has acquired a Bristol LH bus with a Perkins engine, itself less common than the usual Leyland O400. As our scoring discussions with Daniel revealed, the bus was exhibited at the 1972 Commercial Motor Show and, as such, the seats are trimmed in a unique moquette. The moquette was the 'prototype' or 'proposed' design which was going to be used in NBC standard buses. The design was not adopted so this one remains unique. (ETC understand it is also possible that this was the first single deck vehicle to be delivered new in corporate poppy red. Can any NARTM members confirm or suggest otherwise? - Ed)

All this goes to prove why in-person inspections of the collections and individual vehicles are so important to the scoring and grading project and the huge value in the conversations we have with owners and curators during our visits.

Thank you to all at ETC for hosting us so well.

