

# Newslink

Issue 129 February 2026

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION of

Road Transport  
Museums



N A R T M





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## Chairman's Corner

A Happy New Year to all members, although the year may be not quite so new by the time you read this, nevertheless the good wishes are well-intended. NARTM members approach Christmas and New Year in different ways. Some working sites will continue their restoration work with only a few days away with the turkey and mince pies, or there will be those dedicated souls who carry on regardless. Our more public-facing members may close for the winter months or stay open as we do in Manchester. However we do give ourselves a few days off from public opening and that usually means it is a good time of year to rearrange the toys in their box, making buses required for events in the coming year more accessible and rearranging the work area for example. Other members, such as the Friends of King Alfred, embrace the festive season and hold major running days on New Year's Day which are very popular – maybe the novelty of turkey and mince pies has faded by 1st January? Each to their own and whatever suits you and your team.

As part of this December's move around we split a bus in two, lifting the top deck off our 1934 (1938 body) Crossley Mancunian which was an interesting exercise, and I have shared a few pictures in this magazine. Why would you want to do that is a fair question, but the top deck was built on top of the upper deck floor, which had rotted badly all around the perimeter and is made of two cross boarded layers of timber which have to be replaced. When that is done, we can lift the top deck back on – hard to know how you can have so much fun! How many bus bodies were built in this way? I imagine quite a number, unless the body pillars extend up to the upper deck window level?

Moving up to date, while we use AI to produce a creditable first draft summary of our NARTM board meetings held on Teams, I have recently noticed a rise in obviously fake historic AI images on You Tube, Facebook and probably on other social media platforms. Harmless fun you may think and the present images often have strange features – wrong way round Routemasters, illegible text and so on, but they are improving and I have seen images purporting to be of railway locomotives never actually built, but looking quite plausible at first glance. Will future historians be taken in by these images and will we see them included in serious books? I do hope not, but it is a reminder to us all to have a healthy scepticism when looking at anything online. There are a lot of scams out there.

The extract in this magazine from the ever-useful Historic magazine of the Federation of British Historic Vehicle Clubs also contains some useful observations on misleading information and 'clickbait' in particular.

Following on from that, as if we didn't have enough to worry about, it is worth considering if your organisation should have policies around the use of social media by members. If you already have such a policy, do send it to me please so that it can be added to the NARTM library of policies and shared with others.

Many problems can be caused by members inadvertently posting online and even more by occasional less innocent posts and it is good to have a policy in place just in case any issues arise.

More positively, later in this issue we will see the results of more of the first round of NARTM grants. The Autumn round was well supported and ten members received grants of up to £2,000 for their various projects which ranged from new workshop equipment to improved facilities for members and much more. We look forward to seeing the results. In view of the response from members, it was decided that from the Spring 2026 round, up to fifteen grants will be awarded in each round to enable NARTM to help more members. The Spring round will open to entries on 1st March, and the latest forms and guidance will be issued to all during February. The closing date will be 30th April.

Last but by no means least, we have a new member of the Newlink team – Andy Hamer is part of the Hooton Group and from the last issue has added his considerable expertise in making the random files I send him into a finished magazine, filling the role previously covered by our good friend Gerry and by Brightsea in the interim. Thanks to Andy for all the hard work and for interpreting what I have sent to you!



## Member's Profile - Devon General Omnibus Trust

The Devon General Omnibus & Touring Company is still fondly remembered by people all over the country. Why should this be?

During the 1950s, 60s and 70s – before the advent of cheap package holidays abroad – Devon was a popular destination for holidays. Without mass car ownership, many families reached its resort towns by public transport and travelled locally on a Devon General bus or a Grey Cars coach. The youngsters from that era have happy memories of Devon General, as do the Devonians who used its buses to get to school and into town.

Recreating such travel experiences and introducing them to a new audience is an objective for the Devon General Omnibus Trust, which has a collection of eight preserved Devon General vehicles spanning the period 1937 to 1977.

DGOT gives people the opportunity to view and to travel on its buses at events. A regular display venue is the Mid Devon agricultural show in Tiverton each July, where grandparents can be heard telling their grandchildren “I went to school on a bus like that.” Other events attended include the North Devon Festival of Transport at Bideford and the Taunton Vintage Bus Day.

Community links have been forged. In 2021 a Trust vehicle featured in the opening of Exeter's new bus station by the then Prince of Wales, and in 2022 the same bus was the backdrop to a street party in Exeter High Street marking Queen Elizabeth II's platinum jubilee. It rekindled memories for many local residents.

The Trust's largest commitment is to provide vehicles for the annual 'Devon General Remembered' running day organised by the Devon General Society – six buses were entered into the 2025 event at Exmouth, with their crews wearing authentic Devon General uniforms wherever possible.

The Trust is separate from, but works closely with, the Devon General Society, which was founded in 1982 and celebrates all aspects of the company with a magazine, a newsletter, and running days. DGS is not directly involved with bus preservation, but encourages it, and today there are over forty BET-era Devon General vehicles in preservation and twenty or so from the NBC and privatised eras.



DGOT was founded as a registered charity in 2013 by two DGS members with bus collections of their own – Philip Platt and Terry Bennett – who wished to ensure a secure future for preserved Devon General vehicles.

The Trust aimed to establish and preserve for posterity a representative collection of vehicles “to advance the education of the public in the history of public road passenger transport, and in particular the history of the Devon General Omnibus & Touring Company and its successors.”

Peter Murnaghan, who had been Chairman of the Friends of King Alfred Buses before retiring to the West Country, agreed to be DGOT’s first Chairman, and helped to guide the charity in its early years. 503 RUO, a 1964 AEC Regent V, was

purchased for restoration, and a website was launched to publicise the Trust’s work.



In 2014 DGOT made a start in raising its profile by organising a bus rally and running day to mark the 50th anniversary of Exeter’s Paris Street bus and coach station. This was followed in 2015 by a running day at Teignmouth and in 2016 by an Exeter – Plymouth cavalcade, held jointly with the Plymouth City Transport group.

Sadly, Phil Platt passed away in 2016 and the Trust dedicated its 2017 event marking the closure of Exeter bus station to him. Phil had gifted his 1957 AEC Reliance VDV 798 to the Trust for restoration and DGOT was able to fundraise to acquire 1952 AEC Regent III NTT 661 and 1957 AEC Regent V VDV 817 from his estate. A little later, Phil’s 1965 AEC Regent V CTT 513C was purchased by Paul Jenkins, who placed it on long term loan to DGOT. By the start of 2018, the Trust’s collection stood at five vehicles.

DGOT still occupies the storage space on a farm in North Devon, where Phil Platt had kept his vehicles. At 800 feet above sea level, the weather conditions at the site can be challenging, but it’s away from prying eyes and the sheds are secure. A small but dedicated team of volunteers, most of whom live some distance away, looks after the collection all year round.

The Trust set about reactivating NTT 661 after its long period in storage and progressing the restoration of VDV 798. In 2019, the Regent III and the two Regent Vs took part in events arranged by DGS to celebrate Devon General’s centenary

– DGS made a donation to support the work of the Trust and has continued to do so since. VDV 798 and 503 RUO both proved to be challenging restoration projects but were seen through, and completed in 2021 and 2023 respectively.

In 2021, after a fundraising appeal, AEC 'Light Six' Rebuild ETT 995 was added to the collection. Fully restored by Steve Cope, it is a unique vehicle, featuring a reconditioned 1937 AEC Regent chassis mated with 1938 AEC Regal running units and a 1953 Saunders Roe body.



Most recently, in 2025, Stagecoach South West donated their 1959 Leyland Atlantean 872 ATA and the Trust acquired 1977 convertible open-top Bristol VRT VDV 137S from the West Country Historic Omnibus & Transport Trust. DGOT's volunteers are working hard to prepare these vehicles for events during 2026.

DGOT's website at [dgot.org.uk](http://dgot.org.uk) features profiles of the vehicles in its collection and has reports about the events attended, along with ways to donate in support of the Trust. DGOT also has a social media presence on Facebook and on X.

The Trust has moved on from vehicle restoration to conservation and operations, and for the future it hopes to continue to acquire further Devon General vehicles,



as resources allow, and take steps to ensure the long term security of tenure of its premises. Its current Trustees are Graham Bailey (Chairman), Paul Jenkins (Treasurer), and Martin White.

## Robert (Bob) Crawley (1945-2026) - Obituary

It is with sadness that we report the death of Robert Crawley, Chairman of the West Country Historic Omnibus & Transport Trust (WHOTT).



Many thanks to Tony Hazell, fellow WHOTT Trustee, for preparing the following biographical notes of Bob's life and involvement in the preserved bus and coach movement. This is followed by a personal appreciation from Colin Billington.

Bob was born in Exeter on the 25th of November 1945 and sadly died at the age of 80 on 1st January 2026.

Bob left school at 16 and worked at the print office for the Electricity Board, which was located opposite Paul Street Bus Station, where he could listen to the Exeter Guy Arabs crunching their gears as they climbed North Street.

On passing his driving test at 17 he bought a 1936 Austin 10 which he kept for the rest of his life. After a spell working in police administration, he landed a job at the Head Quarters of the Western & Southern National Omnibus Companies at National House, Queen Street, Exeter where he carried out administration work for the Engineering Department and was also responsible for fleet disposals. He met and married his wife Christine whilst both were working at National House.

After deregulation he transferred to Devon General Limited and, after privatisation, he found himself working for Devon General at Belgrave Road under Harry Blundred. Unfortunately a later reorganisation resulted in redundancy. This was followed by a period of caring for his wife Christine who sadly died of cancer after 25 years of marriage and 2 years after moving to nearby Colaton Raleigh.

A complete change of career led Bob to using his crafting and music skills, travelling around the country restoring church organs. Bob had always loved music and performed in orchestras with the Exeter Music Group until very recently when he found he was too weak to carry his cello. Another job he enjoyed was riding on buses as a "mystery shopper" anywhere in the country for a public transport survey company.

Not always an easy person to get to know, he was greatly respected for his knowledge of transport history which enabled him to produce many books on Western/Southern National and also, the WHOTT magazine.

He was instrumental in establishing WHOTT and was Chairman for 20 years until it closed. In particular he was a keen Archivist and maintained and developed the WHOTT archive, efficiently and professionally.

Colin Billington (Chairman of the Thames Valley & Great Western Omnibus Trust) writes:

I first met Bob at Winkleigh, the original centre for West Country bus and coach preservation and restoration, in 1971, at their annual Autumn Open Day. I was there on a mission to look at a former Royal Blue Bristol LL6B/Duple No. 1250 (LTA729), which was being used to give visitors rides up and down the runway of what had been Winkleigh airfield during WW2. I had been waiting to get on and eventually got a gangway seat about half way down on the offside. On the nearside, two people were talking about their work in the bus industry and vehicle records. As we were alighting I took the opportunity to introduce myself to the person opposite, who turned out to be Bob, and explained that I was riding on the coach with the idea of purchasing it for restoration and wondered if they had any records of 1250? The records never did come to light but we developed a friendship and over the years Bob helped with a great deal of detailed information which was used in all of our subsequent restoration projects.

In the 1990s there were various attempts to develop a West Country charitable organisation to act as a centre for bus preservation. A committee of interested parties was established and a scheme was developed to establish a museum at the Devon County Showground near Exeter which would be set up as a charity. WHOTT was formed to take this forward with Bob becoming a Trustee and Director. Planning permission was obtained but with additional planning requirements, which were not viable. By this time WHOTT had started both vehicle and archive collections and accommodation for the growing vehicle collection was found on a farm just off the A361 near Knowstone which was about 11 miles from Tiverton with good access from the M5. Bob also found archive accommodation first near Plymouth then later at Uffculme just off the M5, less than 20 miles from the bus storage site and very convenient for WHOTT members travelling from Exeter or Taunton directions. Thus, by the turn of the century, WHOTT was established with premises to house its principal collections of vehicles and archives. As Chairman of WHOTT, Bob built a significant body of members whose subscriptions, together with other income, covered the running costs of both sites. He believed passionately in a West Country preservation and visitor facility to educate people of all ages in the rich and influential transport history in the region.

More recently, however, the standing costs could no longer be covered so the members decided WHOTT should close with its vehicle and archive collections transferring to other West Country based preservation organisations where possible. The Thames Valley & Great Western Omnibus Trust, at its base near Kingsbridge, was able to take five vehicles (three of which were already in its care) and a substantial part of the WHOTT archive, consisting of some 1000 archive boxes and a large library. The Devon General Omnibus Trust, still based at Knowstone, has accommodated Devon General archive material, together with one vehicle. Despite failing health, Bob oversaw the safe transfer of WHOTT's heritage assets, ensuring that his years of work leave a lasting legacy for future generations.

Bob will be remembered for his gentle friendship and missed for his encyclopaedic knowledge of the 'National' and his knowledge of the records of the companies and their vehicles and bus and coach operations.

# Extracts from the Federation of British Historic Vehicle Clubs

## HISTORIC

The Magazine of the Federation of British Historic Vehicle Clubs  
Issue 8 – December 2025

### Legislation - Lindsay Irvine

#### AUTOMATED VEHICLES CALL FOR EVIDENCE

In summary, the Government wants to press ahead with the implementation of the provisions of the Automated Vehicles Act 2024 (AV Act) which will permit the operation of fully driverless vehicles. Initially, that is intended to be vehicles operated as taxis (or Automated Passenger Services (APS) in legal speak) by licensed operators with "personal" driverless vehicles a stage further on, presumably when lessons have been learned from the APS experience.

As I previously described, the practical and legal steps required by the provisions of the AV Act before driverless vehicles are deployed, are fairly significant. They include immense technical and software challenges but also philosophically-interesting legal questions in relation to legal liabilities and responsibilities concerning driverless cars and what standard of driving an automated system should achieve (by reference to the standard that a human driver needs to achieve to be in accord with the law).

In a call for evidence (rather than a formal consultation), the Government is asking contributors to provide information and evidence to assist its understanding of how the safety principles might be used, the safety standard might be described, and the safety performance can be measured.

The FBHVC responded to this call for evidence. Hopefully, you have already perused our response at <https://bit.ly/4hLdPPy>. Our main aim, as with many similar consultations, is for the Government to at least acknowledge our unique position and recognise that it should take into account any special circumstances which attach to Historic Vehicles (HVs). As stated in our press release of the time, in responding to the specific questions in the Call for Evidence, we wished to ensure that the systems and processes mandated for the licensed operators, secured the following:

- (a) the safe interaction of driverless vehicles and historic vehicles (all shapes and sizes); and
- (b) the continued freedom of HVs to operate without restriction.

In relation to (a), we appreciated that the AVs will be required to deal with bicycles, pedestrians and animals but we asked for HVs to be treated as an individual category. We gave examples of some of the challenges in relation to some particularly older HVs; in contrast to their more modern brethren, some may be very small, very slow and perhaps partially constructed of non-metal materials and indeed fabric covered. Signalling devices may be different from today and indeed might not exist at all.

In relation to (b), we wish to discourage any consideration of any form of segregation of HV and other human controlled vehicles from AVs as the means of securing safety. Down such a route lies restriction or limitation on HV use.

## CLICKBAIT (YET AGAIN)

Oxford Dictionary definition: "Noun; content (on the internet) whose main purpose is to attract attention and encourage visitors to click on a link to a particular webpage."

As if life for club officials isn't challenging enough with all the legislation and regulation obstacles which I entertain them with in this column we can now add to their woes the exaggerated, distorted and misleading information available online. Recent HV relevant clickbait videos have included "the need to renew your driving licence at aged 62 as from 12 October this year" (it is still 70); "the need to pass medical and eyesight tests on renewal" (no); "the ending of zero rate VED for HVs" (no). There are more, including a very odd take on the recent generally well received changes to DVLA vehicle registration policies.

We confirmed directly with the DVLA that there were no licensing changes (other than to some EVs in the November 2025 budget).

I have written before about clickbait in Issue 1, March 2024 under the banner of *Purpureus Pannus* (Purple Prose). In retrospect I was too kind about this rhetorical flourish, interpreting its use rather benignly as the maker hyping up interest in a dull subject by the use of a lurid headline, as my favourite Latin author, Horace, had done.

The reason of course for attracting "clicks" is entirely mercenary. Advertisers pay the video maker on the basis of how many visitors are attracted to the site measured in "clicks". Annoying but forgivable.

However, Artificial Intelligence (AI), very much in the news at present, has moved clickbait firmly into the malign category. AI's genius is being able to reproduce the appearance, structure and content of a genuinely authoritative article, masking the often inaccurate information at its core as in some of the examples quoted above. In a different context, I was encouraged to try out an AI graphics tool which, at my prompting, produced a picture of a vintage car in visually stunning scenery. Unfortunately, the car that emerged had 3 headlights, no steering wheel, oddly located wing mirrors and a driver whose head seemed unconnected to his body. Needs more work, as a former senior colleague of mine would have said!

So, be alert out there and please do let us know of any odd HV stories so we can check them out.

## AUTOMATIC DRIVING LICENCES

Not currently an “imminent” problem for the movement but nevertheless thought provoking, is a statistic revealed on our website recently. 1 in 4 driving tests are now taken in vehicles with automatic transmission. The significance as many of you will know, is that by virtue of Regulation 6 of The Motor Vehicles (Driving Licences) Regulations, if you pass your test on a car with automatic transmission, you are “authorised to drive ...only motor vehicles having an automatic transmission”. Manual authorisation requires another test (though fortunately not needing to retake the theory test). If you subsequently upgrade your licence to manual bus or lorry, this upgrades your car “B” licence as well (yay!). A major impetus behind this increase in “automatic tests” is obviously the increase in EV (Electric Vehicle) purchases.

However, even in the ICE domain, manufacturers are gradually phasing out manual transmission as the norm. What used to be an expensive option becomes cost effective for the manufacturer to fit as standard when they no longer have to make manual gearboxes. Given that the majority of HVs are manual, there is a growing issue if an increasing number of new and future drivers are unable to drive them. I doubt that a request to amend the above regulations to remove the distinction is likely to have much traction. Although generally overcome through practice, there is an additional skill or technique to be mastered and as with all such skills, easier to be acquired when young. In that vein, our current mitigation must be to encourage all the young people we know venturing into driving to take the manual option even if slightly more challenging. Not only would they be “future proofing” themselves, but they will find that a much wider and less expensive range of used vehicles will be available to them as their first cars.

## National Historic Vehicle Survey

### BRITAIN'S LOVE OF HISTORIC VEHICLES POWERS £7.3bn BOOST TO THE UK ECONOMY

The results of the latest National Historic Vehicle Survey (NHVS) were presented by Mark Harvey, joint managing director of research agency, Turquoise Thinking Ltd, at the Federation's AGM event in October.

The survey summarises the views of 19,943 owners, enthusiasts, trade members, clubs and representatives of the wider UK public. In his presentation, Mark pointed out that exit polls for UK parliamentary elections rely on a sample of just 2,000 demographically representative UK adults. That fact alone underlines the efficacy of our study, that's relied upon to influence opinions and policies that affect our passion and, for many, their livelihood.

This page in **Historic** shows only a small sample of the key findings of this most far reaching and influential survey, conducted about the industry and passion surrounding the historic vehicle movement.

To access more information and to download the report, go to: <https://bit.ly/49uoX15>

### **1,934,178 - The number of historic vehicles registered in the UK\***

The figure for historic vehicles now stands at just under two million. The predicted growth by 2025 was expected to exceed two million vehicles by 2025 so 1,934,178 is just short of what was anticipated.

\*Source: DVLA, August 2025

### **£7.3 Billion - Total Annual Spending**

Estimated total value of spending on historic vehicles and activities in the UK economy.

### **£890 Million - Inward spending**

Estimated foreign spending with UK firms from foreign historic vehicle owners.

### **£4,567 per annum**

The average amount an historic vehicle owner spends on their historic vehicles.

### **2.8 - The average number of historic vehicles owned per person**

The number of current historic vehicle owners who also own a 'Youngtimer' vehicle (registered between 1994 and 2003) remains around 1 in 4. Those historic vehicle owners who also own a Youngtimer, typically own 1.5 future historic vehicles.

### **690,777 - The estimated number of historic vehicle owners in the UK (up from 683,967 in 2020)**

### **88% - Percentage of owners belonging to at least one historic vehicle club**

"This report underlines just how vital the historic vehicle sector is to Britain's economy, culture and communities. It's worth a record 7.3 billion pounds a year, supports 34,500 skilled jobs, and unites millions of people through a shared love of our motoring heritage.

But we cannot take that success for granted. The average owner is now in their sixties, and we urgently need to inspire and train the next generation. Programmes like our new Youngtimer initiative and industry apprenticeships are key to ensuring these vehicles – and the skills to maintain them – survive for the future."

**David Whale, Chairman, FBHVC**

## NARTM 2024 Survey Results

Yes, it is that time again, for soon we will be sending out the survey about NARTM members' operations during 2025. The results of the 2024 survey are now available and are as follows:

- 50 NARTM members responded, a 53% response rate, but we do recognise that some members are not directly involved in public events or restoration. The organisations that responded have 8,343 members and 1,839 active volunteers and they worked for an estimated 277,473 hours which is pretty impressive;
- We asked about the age groups in your organisations, but perhaps didn't make it clear, or the information isn't available, so we got some very mixed answers;
- Visitors to the members' museums totalled 259,996; but not all responded. Those who did also recorded 696,428 visits to your websites and you had 439,717 followers – presumably many people follow more than one organisation;
- Many members didn't answer the questions about Income and Expenditure. Please try to give this information – it will only be recorded as part of a total and most members' accounts are available online through Companies House, so there isn't really anything secret;
- Members organised 274 events in 2024 and attended 477 others. 37 members organised free bus services and we were advised of a total of 237,541 passengers;
- NARTM members' vehicles covered 109,420 miles during 2024, at least those who answered did;
- In total, 214 vehicles were under restoration during the year and a total of 29 staff were employed, some of the latter being a mixture of part-time and full time equivalents.

This information is very useful, but would be much more meaningful if more members responded every year to make year-on-year comparisons possible. So when we send out the survey about activities in 2025, please do reply, it is only a short survey. If you don't collect some of the numbers, just say so, or give a reasonable estimate. Elsewhere in this magazine, you will see the results of the latest FBHVC survey and our numbers will contribute to their next survey. Remember that if you want to apply for a NARTM Grant in 2026, we need to have your survey completed for 2025 – there's an incentive!

## Land of Hope & Scoring

David Sheppard looks back at a busy year for The Bus Inspectors.

**A question I often ask guests on The Bus Inspectors podcast is how optimistic they feel about the future of bus preservation.**

Usually they pause; often they sigh, as they reflect on the many issues present and future... but frequently, they come back with an answer that surprises. It can sometimes be deep and meaningful. One guest in the forthcoming episode (launching 31 January) is almost poetic in their response, deeply realistic about the challenges but also philosophical about what has kept us all going so far and what, they think, is likely to drive us into the future. It's a tonic to hear.



I must say, I'm beginning 2026 with growing optimism on the subject - I hope you are too. I'm buoyed by the progress made by my own NARTM member organisation, the **Thames Valley & Great Western Omnibus Trust**, to broaden its appeal beyond the established enthusiast market. In the past year we have managed to attract several new volunteers, some in their 20s and 30s, who bring fresh perspective, ideas and energy from quite another world. They've been using their initiative to get things done, they have a thirst to do more – and, excitingly for those of us who have been preserving buses for a long time, they have a growing curiosity about the older vehicles, too. They may be arriving in relatively small numbers but, as you probably know from your own organisation, a few enthusiastic people can certainly spread wide a sense of hope and optimism for the future.



The Bus Inspectors have found many reasons for such hope, all around the UK, as we continued NARTM's project to record, score and grade the nation's preserved buses and coaches in 2025. The wider project is, of course, all about encouraging thought and discussion about the future of our movement and tackling the issues it faces - some of which are no longer on the horizon but with us in the present day. What we have seen throughout our 2025 visits, talks and

seminars is, I think, a much increased will to engage with difficult topics and an understanding of the pressing need to do so. To me, it feels like “lifting the lid on things none of us have dared to think about before” (as Leon Daniels says of the project in our podcast) has strengthened our collective courage and resolve to dive deeper and consider how we can tackle them head on. As we look back at a busy year for the project, I’ll try to tease out examples where that has been the case.



Thanks to our expanded scoring team of 16, we’ve now made visits to more than a quarter of NARTM’s members. Our first of 2025 was to **Hooton Park Bus Owners**, a group of private preservationists who share premises at the former Hooton Park Airfield on the Wirral. This impressive group were among several who joined NARTM soon after The Bus Inspectors launched and were very keen to be included in the project. Their support and enthusiasm was clear throughout our weekend visit from the constant carousel of owners who, despite very cold weather, turned-out to show us their vehicles and work collaboratively with the team to record what is important about each one. The Hooton site houses a broad selection of vehicles in terms of both operational areas and eras and the group clearly thrives on the diverse interests of the owners involved. A few weeks later, just across

the Mersey at St Helens, we found a similar collaborative approach at the **North West Museum of Road Transport** where privately owned vehicles thrive among the museum’s own collection regardless of their age and type.

The **NARTM Spring Conference** took us to Norwich in March and gave an opportunity both to update and involve East of England members in The Bus Inspectors project. Our presentation to delegates was followed by a Q&A session which led, more naturally than ever before, to those ‘big issues’ of the future. On the topic of evolving interests in bus heritage, it was great to hear input from local voices across the generations, including younger delegates such as Daniel Peart from the **Eastern Transport Collection** (ETC) and Jamie & Kaylee Vendy from the **Eastern Counties Bus Preservation Group**. Indeed, it is notable how these two organisations quite deliberately work in a complementary fashion to represent different eras of bus operation in the East of England, while supporting one another in their overlapping goals – a model that clearly works well. The ETC, who were our hosts for the conference, also made their vehicles available to The Bus Inspectors for a preliminary scoring session at their smart new base. We were so inspired by their recent work to re-locate after being served notice on their previous long-term home – a cause for optimism, indeed.



Following the conference, courtesy of our hosts, delegates were offered an opportunity to visit the recently electrified depot premises of First East of England. The exclusive tour, given to us by Managing Director, Piers Marlow, seemed like a golden filming opportunity for **The Bus Inspectors YouTube channel** – yielding a piece on ‘Inspecting The Future’ which we hoped might appeal to enthusiasts of the contemporary bus network, building a bridge into our more usual fayre. So it has proven, becoming our second most-viewed YouTube video to date! As a lesson for engagement in the wider movement, we are reminded that new audiences are out there for all the things we do, but if we want to draw them closer we must first find ways to connect with them on their own terms.

An important strand of The Bus Inspectors project is to champion our movement and celebrate what NARTM members are doing. An inspiring charity fundraiser was staged in April by the Emerton family, committed NARTM members over many years. **‘Little Bus, Big Ride’** saw brothers Will, Andrew and James driving their 1948 Johnstone’s Midget coach from Land’s End to John O’Groats, sponsored in aid of three carefully selected children’s charities, to mark an important anniversary for their family business. We were pleased to work with the three brothers to record the story of their coach, their long-established family links with bus preservation and their plans for the ambitious run. The resulting Bus Inspectors’ video helped the Emerton’s to grow their audience, particularly among the enthusiast community, and gave them a lasting record of their achievement. They not only succeeded in completing the journey but raised more than £32,000 – along with many thousands of smiles. Well done to them!



Throughout 2025, we have been actively supporting the **London Transport Museum’s Heritage Skills programme**, which is bringing together people and organisations from across the heritage sector to improve skills and contact sharing. I was among the guest speakers at the Spring seminar in May where, as well as introducing delegates from the

wider heritage sector to The Bus Inspectors project, our presentation explored why preserving skills in restoration, maintenance and driving is fundamental to the ongoing health of the vintage vehicle movement and all it represents. The programme itself continues in 2026 and is worthy of your attention and involvement if you haven't already spotted it. Inspired by the conversation, we have dedicated a forthcoming podcast episode to the important topic of heritage skills and are grateful to both Katariina and Sam from the **London Transport Museum** for their involvement.



Speaking of The Bus Inspectors podcast, Episode 5: "Happy Ever After?" launched during the summer, looking at the many reasons why buses and coaches fall out of preservation and what happens to them next. It's a timely topic, with an increasing number of high-profile examples being converted to bars, cafes and glamping pods in recent years; indeed, it underlines the theme of the series so far with a challenge to the notion that preservation means 'forever'. We hear from successive owners of a former Devon General Bristol VR, one who restored and preserved it, and another who now uses it as a café. We also hear a detailed account of the 2023 Penton Mewsey fire, which ended the

preservation of seven historic buses and very nearly claimed the unique Friends of King Alfred Buses Leyland Olympic. Their Chairman (and NARTM President) James Freeman tells the story of the fire and the subsequent fight to re-claim the remains of the Olympic for the ambitious project to rebuild. The podcast continues to be enormously popular, in particular on the Apple and Spotify platforms, and we're very proud to be able to offer a worthwhile and unique showcase for our movement that is being widely enjoyed.

We also worked hard last year to raise awareness of The Bus Inspectors project within the NARTM community, whose help and understanding is vital to what we are doing. I gave seven illustrated talks around the UK in 2025, in locations as varied as Devon, West London, Norfolk and Hampshire, each preparing the ground for our forthcoming scoring visits and, most importantly of all, ensuring that members and supporters of NARTM's own member organisations fully understand the context and purpose of the project. Again, there is a sense of progress since we began. Where, once, we might have found stunned silence at the end of our presentations, we now frequently find ourselves overrunning a slot as the audience speaks back. We have answered some probing questions, dispelled some myths and assumptions, offered reassurance and – perhaps most importantly of all – we have set people thinking about what the future might bring to their organisations.

The summer and autumn months of 2025 took The Bus Inspectors around the UK on several scoring visits, including a series of three to the **Museum of Transport in Greater Manchester**, and the **Merseyside Transport Trust** in Liverpool. In June, we spent a weekend visiting the **Bounty Country Buses Collection** (those Emertons, again!), where we were among the first to see the collection fully concentrated on its smart new base near Nantwich. NARTM members are in for a treat this year, when the Spring conference will give an opportunity for a similar visit. The Bounty collection is exceptional, but so too is the family framework around it; we were helped in our scoring task by four generations of the Emerton family, albeit only briefly by young Daisy who had an important bus tour of her own to conduct...



Also in the autumn, I found out exactly how it feels to receive a visit from The Bus Inspectors, when John Adams, William Staniforth and new recruit Graham Bailey visited the Devon base of **Thames Valley & Great Western Omnibus Trust (TV&GWOT)** and the **Colin Billington Collection**. As Trustees and owners of several of the vehicles on site, Colin and I could not be involved in the scoring process, despite our respective involvement in its design and implementation! Instead, we acted as guides to the collections and found ourselves impressed by the meticulous preparation by John and his team, from which even we learned a thing or two about the contextual significance of our vehicles. A similar arrangement was made for our autumn visit to the **Ribble Vehicle Preservation Trust (RVPT)**, where project lead Ray Bignell is also a founding member and former Trustee and therefore acted as a guide rather than a scorer. Having now watched my own vehicles being evaluated for the project, I feel more content than ever about the objectivity which is at the heart of our scoring system and, importantly, very aware of the distinction between what a vehicle means to its owner and its wider significance to the national collection. The project is, of course, concerned with the latter whilst fully respecting that every vehicle is important to those who own it.

The autumn also saw us return to the **London Transport Museum's Acton depot** for scoring – our second visit to complete the vast array of early motorbuses which individually, and collectively, demonstrate so much about the evolution of the bus in London – and our inaugural scoring appointment in Scotland at the **Aberdeen & District Transport Preservation Trust**. This followed a warm welcome to Caledonia (as Ian Souter would say) in September for the **NARTM AGM & Autumn Conference** at Lathalmond, hosted by the **Scottish Vintage Bus Museum**. A really valuable element to the weekend, alongside the more formal business and social aspects, was an open-floor discussion about **how to attract younger members to our movement**. If you haven't already discovered the video (available within the Members' Area of the NARTM website), this was a lively discussion with many



excellent points made by voices from across the generations. Some key points included the need to understand younger people – who they are and their motivations – and to meet them where they are, both physically and in terms of building bridges to their current interests in order to draw them closer

to ours. In particular, it was felt, this extends to younger bus enthusiasts who might be attracted to our groups by more contemporary vehicles but, once involved, may expand their interests to include the older ones. So many other great points were made during the 35 minute discussion which, like so much else we've mentioned, give cause for optimism; we recommend you take a look for yourself (the discussion starts at 02:09:45).

Finally, The Bus Inspectors made many friends and allies within today's transport industry during 2025, following a tireless flying of flags (and relentless distribution of Bus Inspectors postcards!) at industry events up and down the country which I attended professionally. In particular, the dozens of events I hosted for the bus and rail industry, operating groups and industry bodies such as the Confederation of Passenger Transport, were seldom without mention of our project, the podcast and, of course, a recommendation to visit the local NARTM members. We currently have a small queue of industry professionals who are keen to appear on the podcast and it's really heartening to see our enthusiasm for bus heritage is shared by so many in today's transport world – yet more reasons to be positive about the future.



## NARTM Grants

The Autumn 2025 Round of the NARTM grant scheme was well subscribed and it took some time to select the ten successful applicants. In alphabetical order here are the ten NRTM members.

APPLICANT	PROJECT DESCRIPTION	TOTAL COST	GRANT AWARD
Canvey Island	New water boiler and tea room window glazing	£1,842	£1,842
Friends of King Alfred	New volunteer mess room	£3,500	£2,000
London Bus Museum	Power starter pack for remote sites	£1,995	£1,995
Merseyside TT	Upholstery skills training	£1,906	£1,906
Oxford Bus Museum	Install CCTV inside museum buildings	£1,450	£1,450
Portsmouth CPPTD	Replacement engine for Atlantean	£1,060	£1,000
Ribble VPT	New secure site gate	£5,580	£2,000
Swansea Bus Museum	New glazing rubber for Leyland National	£2,000	£2,000
TVaGWOT	New 36inch wide scanner -posters, plans etc	£2,456	£2,000
Wythall	Specialist workshop tools and floor cleaner	£3,862	£2,000

The funds were sent out in December so by now these projects should be underway and good luck to all.

The Spring 2026 round will open for entries on 1st March and close on 30th April. Conditions will be much the same as before, an important one being that we need to have your completed NARTM survey of 2025 returned as noted elsewhere. Application forms and Guidance notes will be sent out during February. If there are any questions, just ask.

The Spring 2025 projects agreed last year are all coming to fruition and it is good to see the results of the first round. Here are a few examples -

“On behalf of the **Aycliffe and District Bus Preservation Society**, I would like to extend our sincere thanks to NARTM for awarding us a grant of £2,000. This funding has made a significant contribution to the continuing development of the Aycliffe Bus Museum, supporting us in improving our facilities and enhancing the experience we can offer to our visitors.

We have constructed a new lobby area in front of our conference room. This addition has allowed us to section off part of the museum from the neighbouring factory unit, creating a safer, more comfortable, and welcoming environment for everyone who visits. The new space also gives the museum a more defined public area, helping us to present a professional and engaging first impression.

We were able to purchase essential materials for the building work, ensuring that the lobby was completed to a high standard. The funding also supported the purchase of new display poster boards and educational posters, which are already being used to create informative and visually engaging displays around the museum.”

The pictures below show a new Sealy air operated trolley jack with the Devon General Omnibus Trust, and a 36 inch wide scanner added to the Ipswich Transport Museum Archives. More details of grant success stories next time.



## **Devon General Omnibus Trust**

Purchase of workshop equipment using grant from NARTM

A grant of £1,418 was received from NARTM on 12th June 2025. Our grant application outlined our wish to “purchase a heavy duty trolley jack and a pair of axle stands to improve the working environment for the volunteers who maintain our vehicles.”

Upon receipt of the grant, detailed research was undertaken into the types of trolley jack available. The specification was considered carefully, as the jack needed sufficient reach to access - and get under - the axles on our buses. The decision was made to purchase a pneumatic trolley jack, along with the air compressor to power it, which would also enable us to attach other air-operated tools.

The supplier selected was Parts for Machines, who were very helpful in identifying the optimum equipment for our needs:

- Sealey YAJ20B Air Operated Trolley Jack 20 Tonne
- SIP 06476 BD 3hp 150ltr Belt Drive Compressor
- SIP Air Hose Reel 20mtr
- Sealey AS10000 Axle Stands (Pair) 10 Tonne Capacity per stand

We discovered on delivery that the axle stands were too tall to fit under the front axles of our buses, so we returned them to Parts for Machines and obtained a pair of Sealey AS70 axle stands instead. Parts for Machines credited us the price difference of £48.60.

Parts for Machines also offered us a further £150 credit if we made a short video about our purchases, for them to use on their Facebook page.

We used that credit, along with the credit for the axle stands, towards the purchase of an air-operated impact wrench, which is driven from the same compressor as the trolley jack.

We are delighted with our purchases, and very grateful to NARTM for providing us with the core funding for the project, to which we were able to add value with a modest investment from our own funds. In effect, we obtained £1,775 of equipment for £357.

The equipment has already proved to be a boon in changing the front tyres on our AEC Regent III, NTT 661, and the power of the new air compressor made checking the tyre pressures on the six buses we entered in the ‘Devon General Remembered’ running day in 2025 much easier.

## **Friends of King Alfred Buses**

FOKAB was successful in being awarded the full cost (£1747.20) of the purchase of a set of steps, to enable washing of the upper deck of vehicles, plus other maintenance work. There was a slight delay in the purchase of the steps following receipt of the grant money, as we had to vacate our engineering base and

negotiate a new lease on our main storage site near Romsey. Once this was completed, the steps arrived and were soon pressed into use. We have been able to reach areas not previously accessible like the roof of our highbridge Leyland PD2 HOR 811.

We will be making our membership aware of the new steps, and the assistance of the NARTM Small Grants Scheme in their purchase, through our magazine The Broadway Bulletin, due out in January.

## NARTM Spring Conference 2026

Our Spring Conference will be held on Saturday 7th March at Rookery Hall near Nantwich in Cheshire and will be hosted by Bounty Country Buses. Gerald, Simon, Leona and all the Emerton family look forward to welcoming NARTM members to see their collection. Those of you who follow the lives of the celebrities will know that Rookery Hall was where David Beckham and Victoria Adams announced their engagement in 1998. You all knew that didn't you? Accommodation will be at the Premier Inn Crewe West, which is about 10 minutes away by road. You could stay at Rookery Hall, but rooms are currently £250 per night, so it's the Premier Inn for me! The suggested Premier Inn provides breakfast on site; the confusingly named Premier Inn Crewe (Nantwich) does not.

We plan to follow up the format of recent meetings with breakout sessions, this time focussing on **skills** retention and training and also on **governance**, which should be relevant to all of us. The aim of these sessions is to share knowledge and experiences between us that may benefit other NARTM members while at the same time allow the NARTM Board to ensure that they are as well informed as possible of the nature of any issues out there. We'll also give feedback from the previous sessions.

The format of the breakout sessions is more informal allowing discussion in smaller groups as well as space to let topics be explored in a bit more depth. We have successfully held these type of sessions at Wythall and Norwich and looking to ensure that this type of engagement between everyone is a regular feature.

We would like our members to have a think about these topics ahead of attending the conference and be ready to have the discussion.

So, for '**Skills**', here are some of the sorts of things you could have a think about:

- What are the skills we need in preserving and restoring vehicles, to work in the heritage sector, to run our events or to manage our organisations?
- What other knowledge do we need or resources at our disposal to help support these skills?

- What might be the different ways that we could get the skills we need? Are there some examples of good practices already out there?
- What skills does your organisation already benefit from?
- What gaps in skills do you currently have? Have you any thoughts as to how you might close that gap?
- What skills are at risk and need to be secured for the future?

On the topic of '**Governance**', perhaps have a think about:

- How is your group organised? Why are you structured the way you are?
- Are you aware of the rules that need to be followed for the type of organisation that you are? Would you know where to go to seek help and advice?
- What sorts of issues do you experience in running your organisation?
- Have you any real life examples of issues that you've encountered and ways you've addressed them when it comes to running your organisation?
- How are you looking to make your organisation sustainable? Have you thought about succession planning?

Hopefully this gives you a flavour of the discussions we'd like to have. So, thinking caps on! We look forward to the discussion and debate at the conference.

Booking details will be sent out separately at around the time this Newslink is issued. We look forward to seeing lots of NARTM members at this central location.

## Membership Update - Steven Booth

NARTM has hit a membership milestone. We have crossed the 100 member threshold! In fact, our membership currently sits at 101. The members who are new to NARTM in the last few months or so are as follows:

- Chester City Transport Bus Preservation
- Dewsbury Bus Museum
- Friends of East Kent
- Lodge Coaches of High Easter
- Lothian Bus Consortium Trust
- Online Transport Archive
- United Counties Preservation Group
- White Rose Bus Group

Please join with me in welcoming them to NARTM. I look forward to seeing them at future NARTM conferences and networking with them.

Whilst our membership has steadily grown over the last few months, there are many more potential members out there who do what we do and who would also benefit from being part of a national association. I have a list of over 50 likeminded organisations who I think could be NARTM members. If you know of any organisations who aren't NARTM members then please drop me a line at [steven.booth@gvvt.org](mailto:steven.booth@gvvt.org) and I can follow up with them to see if membership is of interest.

Very many thanks to all members who renewed during the second half of 2025 - much appreciated! There are a very small number of members yet to renew. You know who you are! I'd be very grateful if you could get in touch to renew as soon as you can. We are in the process of preparing a new NARTM leaflet which is distributed UK-wide. Any member not having renewed will therefore not be included in the member listing of the new leaflet.

A last request please. If you have any changes to points of contact for your organisation, or new email addresses or phone numbers, then please message me at [steven.booth@gvvt.org](mailto:steven.booth@gvvt.org). It's good for us to have the latest information so that we can keep in touch with you.

## Excerpts from other magazines

Reviving this regular feature which has been squeezed out of recent issues of Newslink due to pressure on space. A number of property-related matters have appeared in recent magazines.

### **From 'KBMT News', the magazine of the Keighley Bus Museum Trust**

An extreme 'property issue' referred to in a previous Newslink is the nearby fire which has seriously affected Keighley Bus Museum. The nearby fire was the 22nd at the derelict Dalton Mills and fortunately it happened on a Saturday when volunteers were present and were able to put out some small fires started by burning embers. One member even tackled the fire on the roof with his own fire engine until the fire service arrived, preventing further damage. The fire in the roof smouldered for several days and after a fire inspection, the building was closed to all members until some remedial fire precautions had been put in place. These included improved fire escape routes and walkways and a new fire alarm system and NARTM has offered some support in the light of this extreme event. We send the team at Keighley all good wishes in their recovery from this incident.

### **From 'MDOG', the newsletter of the Medstead Depot Omnibus Group**

Having existed for some years without mains water, the original connection to the mains supply was 'discovered' at the adjoining Medstead and Four Marks Station on the Mid Hants Railway. A stopcock was turned and water flowed to the site. A new water meter and second stopcock are awaited. It is also proposed to install smoke alarms and LED lighting in the depot, but this has led to investigation of the depot wiring, which is now 25 years old.

### **From 'Duplicate', the magazine of the Scottish Vintage Bus Museum**

Several hundred miles further north, the water supply to the Lathalmond site has finally been repaired, a task not eased as the supply pipes were four metres underground. New mains cables are also being laid around the site, and this has been an ongoing process for the last 25 years,

each run of new cables costing tens of thousands of pounds, one of the downsides of having such an extensive, but otherwise attractive, site. As the magazine says, that is where a significant chunk of their income has gone. To address the poor wi-fi connectivity on site, Starlink has been installed giving connectivity in the workshops, archives, Exhibition Hall and bothy.

### **From 'The Journal', the magazine of the Greater Manchester Transport Society**

Another site undergoing electrical works. A routine check revealed a potential overload on some cabling, so a new feed was put in from a different part of the building with new trunking and new power and light circuits and fittings. Work has been done by volunteers under close supervision from a qualified volunteer.

### **From 'Sandtoft Scene', the magazine of The Trolleybus Museum**

Continuing an electrical theme, on a public open day, a group of workers from National Power Grid arrived unannounced. Apparently, they were laying a new main power system to Sandtoft village where new houses are being built, which was overloading the existing equipment and there had been regular power outages. What they wanted to do was to fit a smart power measuring device and measure the peak demand of the Trolleybus Museum. That meant getting all available drivers and conductors to run all available trolleybuses at once, and without the usual care over quick acceleration to increase the peak demand still further. And all available kettles were boiled to draw more current and provide tea for thirsty crews. The exercise was successful and a suitable new main was laid in the coming weeks.

### **From 'Wheels', the magazine of Leicester Transport Heritage Trust**

A remark about safety that is relevant to us all is raised following another successful (and safe) event at Quorn on the Great Central Railway. Reflecting on the event, the number of movements requiring buses to reverse was noted and although banks-persons are used to supervise movements, revisions to the layout are being made to reduce the amount of reversing. A good example of risk assessing an event ahead of any issues actually happening.

### **From the Albion Magazine**

Not a magazine we feature often but I am always impressed by the number of Albions in preservation and being restored and the level of activity reported. Equally impressive was the display of three Albions dating from 1901 at the 50th Biggar Vintage Rally. The three were a Dogcart, a Station Cart and a Tonneau.

### **From 'Whott's News', the magazine of the West Country Historic Omnibus and Transport Trust**

Very sadly, with issue number 99, the Trust found itself in financial difficulties and had to close down. Even more tragically, Robert Crawley, the long-term Chairman, Archivist and magazine editor, sadly passed away in December. There is an obituary by Colin Billington elsewhere in this Newslink. The vehicle collection has been dispersed, mostly to other preservation organisations while the extensive archive has largely been transferred to TVaGWOT as noted below. It was good to see the magazine retained its usual high standard to the end, but very sad to see a well established NARTM member close down.

### **From 'To and Fro', the magazine of the Thames Valley and Great Western Omnibus Trust**

As noted above, TVaGWOT came to be offered much of the archive material and five vehicles from WHOTT. Three of the vehicles were already on TVaGWOT premises but the archives presented a logistical challenge, as everything had to be moved by the end of August. There were almost one thousand archive boxes, 38 metres of full bookshelves, filing cabinets, plans chests as well as uniforms, blinds and the usual items we all collect. It is good to note that 28 members of WHOTT have become supporters of TVaGWOT.



Some of the splendid vehicles in the Bounty Country Collection. Come along to our Spring Conference to see them for yourselves and get all the details about their history.

