The Campaign
To Save the London Trams
1946-1952

Based on the Collected Papers

Of

The late Alan John Watkins

By

Ann E. Watkins

THE LONDON TRAMS CAMPAIGN: 1946-1952

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INTRODUCTION

The reason for writing an account of the campaign to save the London trams is that, to my knowledge, little has been fully recorded or documented concerning the fact that a group of London tramway enthusiasts fought a long hard campaign with which my late husband, Alan J. Watkins, was closely involved to retain the extensive tramway system of London which was threatened with extinction. Unfortunately, the campaign was unsuccessful.

Nevertheless, several years after this event, the need for the development of Light Rail Transit systems in our major towns and cities is growing. Transport planners are beginning to realise that there is a traffic congestion and pollution problem in our large conurbations.

Alan Watkins and his fellow enthusiasts foresaw this happening and argued against the destruction of a fine tramway system. They did not want to retain a decrepit system, but to develop a modern streamlined one akin to those of many continental and some American cities.

Having understood the significance of that campaign, I felt that it was important to research it in order to fill a gap in transport history. I have a collection of material relating to the campaign, which consists mainly of my late husband's correspondence and newspaper cuttings.

My aim is to use this material to document the campaign. As I do not possess any technical or engineering knowledge, and as I have a Humanities background, I shall write this account from a social and historical basis.

London Transport Map of the London Tramway System 1933. © London Transport by kind permission. (A.J. Watkins' collection).

CHAPTER 1

REASONS FOR THE ABANDONMENT OF THE TRAMS IN LONDON

In this chapter, I aim to co-ordinate the various reasons for the withdrawal of trams from London. To the majority of tramway enthusiasts, the reasons for abandonment were all too commonplace, and the subsequent results were an anathema to them.

However, to portray a balanced background to the campaign of Alan J. Watkins and his fellow enthusiasts, the reasons for and against tramway withdrawal need to be stated.

It is apparent that the whole issue was determined by the political attitude of the London Transport Executive (LTE) under Lord Latham and of the London Passenger Transport Board under his predecessor Lord Ashfield. The tram was doomed in favour of the trolleybus and later the motorbus. The London Transport Executive would neither consider any opposing point of view, nor would they consider any form of compromise. The government of the day did nothing to prevent the abandonment of the trams either.

To substantiate this account, various sources of information have been consulted, the main source being *Modern Tramway* 1949-1952, in which lies a wealth of information from articles and correspondence.

Another useful source of information which gives a full account of tram scrapping is an excellent book by Mr. J. Joyce entitled: *Operation Tramaway*. In his book, Mr Joyce states that *Operation Tramaway* was London Transport's code name for the replacement of trams to buses. In the book reference is made to the first post-war annual report wherein it is stated that it was an urgent necessity to replace the trams in South London by a more modern and attractive form of transport (i.e. the bus). Mr Joyce also states that:

As late as 1948, the London Transport chairman, Lord Latham, declared that the conversion of South London tramcars would have to wait probably five years because of slowing down of manufacture of new buses due to national requirements.

The ideas for scrapping the London tramway system came to fruition in 1933 with the formation of the LPTB, which was the result of the London Passenger Transport Act of 1933. Section 23 of this Act stated:

Subject to the provisions of this section The Board may abandon either in whole or in part any tramway forming part of their undertaking.
At least three months before the date on which any such abandonment is to take effect the Board shall give notice of the proposed abandonment and the date upon which that abandonment is to take effect to the highway authority responsible for the road on or above which the tramway is laid or erected.
Upon any such abandonment the Board may, and if so required by the responsible highway authority, shall, within a period not exceeding three months from the date upon which the abandonment takes effect or such longer period as the highway authority may allow, take up, remove and dispose or the rails, conduits, paving setts,

posts, poles, wires and other works used or provided for the purpose of the tramway so abandoned (in this section collectively referred to as "tramway equipment".
Subject to the provisions of this section, the Board in any such case shall forthwith fill in and make good the surface of the road to the reasonable satisfaction of the highway authority to as good a condition as that in which it was before the tramway equipment was laid or erected.
Once the tramway has been abandoned, the Board ceases to be charged for any expenses incurred: and for the repairing of the roads.

This first part of the Act said it all. The London Passenger Transport Board decided to abandon the whole system rather than any part of it.
In a speech entitled "Moving the Londoner" (which is quoted in full in *Modern Tramway* May 1949). Lord Latham stated that:

The urgent problem for the future is the replacement of the tram in South London. Trams were to be replaced by another form of transport, namely buses. Buses would provide a service to the public, which, in the altered circumstances of today, would be no more costly than the trolleybus. The bus, not being attached to fixed wires, was completely mobile. A fixed form of transport would be unsuited to the changing plans and highway structure of London.

In the Journal *Passenger Transport* of August 1949, it is mentioned that:

The changeover from trams to buses in South London was much in accordance with the modern trend of thought regarding the most efficient mode of transport for street passengers.

Surprise was expressed in this journal that there was a body calling itself "The Tramway Development Council."

It was stated in *Modern Tramway* May 1949 that Lord Latham advocated the scrapping of the trams in order to rid the London streets of traffic congestion. It was maintained that because trams ran on rails, thus fixing them to a route, other vehicles could not bypass them and, consequently, caused severe traffic congestion.

Following on from this, in the same article, the Chairman of the British Transport Commission, Sir Cyril Hurcomb, expressed his thoughts on the abandonment of the South London trams.

The decision for the replacement of the South London trams by buses was taken after prolonged consideration of the alternatives:

1. *Buses would give greater co-ordination with existing bus routes.*
2. *Extension of the routes will serve better traffic objectives.*

Sir Cyril stated that the problems of tram retention were as follows:

1. *The necessity of expanding the electricity distribution system.*
2. *Expansion of the cable system would be needed.*
3. *Electrical equipment and cables were in short supply and delivery dates a long way ahead.* [1]
4. *The erection of trolley poles and overhead wires would have to include Westminster Bridge and the Embankment, which were both close to the Houses of Parliament. This would result in a loss of civic amenity in the heart of the capital.*

(That was the real pièce de resistance).

Apparently, the Light Railway Transport League invited Sir Cyril Hurcomb for an interview to discuss these problems. He declined on the grounds that as the League's views were already known, no useful purpose would be served.
There was also a strong financial reason why London Transport wanted to scrap the trams. It was alleged that the trams were losing about one million pounds per annum, and that both vehicles and track were worn out. The cost of replacement and renewal would be great.
As a result of correspondence in the *Kentish Independent* in 1949, Alan Watkins wrote several letters to one of the correspondents, a Mr B. Hichisson. This is Mr Hichisson's first letter:

Whilst agreeing that trams are fast, they can only be silent when run on first-class tracks. However, most of the tracks in London are completely worn out, and I am afraid that if a modern vehicle were run on the Plumstead Road and High Street route the noise would be just as appalling as it is now. There must be many thousands of tons of good metal buried in the roads of our great cities, apart from the overhead wires and standards.
What a great opportunity to make good our shortage of scrap, and how much neater and tidier we shall be without all these hideous wires and etceteras. And lastly it will give us poor main road dwellers a good night's sleep.

In reply to this letter Alan J. Watkins wrote:

Dear Mr. Hichisson,
As the tramway correspondence in the "Kentish Independent" is now closed, I am taking the liberty of replying personally to your letter.
I quite agree that London's tram tracks are in bad condition, but the logical thing is, surely to relay them. Even with the existing trams this would greatly reduce noise and the provision of reserved sleeper tracks (quite possible in the Eltham area) would assist still more in this direction. Finally, new trams, similar to the Blackpool car, would eliminate all objectionable noise. Where reserved tracks cannot be provided, the relaying could be part of a general scheme of road resurfacing and improvements. The fact that tramway equipment would yield much scrap metal should not be taken as a reason for abandoning the trams. All forms of transport use a considerable amount of steel, and if we carried the process of salvage to its ultimate conclusion we would have no transport left.

[1] At that time when these ideas were being discussed, a major war had just ended. There was extensive rationing and many goods were in short supply.

Worn out tramway equipment should certainly be salvaged, but it must be replaced with new equipment. With regard to overhead equipment, I would like to observe that standards (and often overhead span wires) are required for street lighting. Tramway overhead equipment should, of course, be supported by the same standards, and in this case there would not be a great deal of extra equipment.

In reply to Mr. Watkins' letter Mr. Hichisson wrote:

Dear Mr. Watkins,
I thank you for your letter of 29th May 1949, and am glad that at least someone has read my letter to the press with obvious interest. The photos enclosed are very interesting. I do agree that these vehicles are excellent. They could be extremely useful if run, say on the Victoria Embankment but are far too unwieldy for the average London tracks. On the Plumstead route from the Ferry to Abbey Wood – for instance – there are many single tracks and there appears to be no hope of any road widening without terrific cost. I have often got on a tram preceded by a barrow boy pushing his wares and before long a dozen cars were piled up waiting behind. This holds up valuable traffic and taken over the year must cost business firms much delay and incidentally loss of business.
There are many places in London with single tracks, which are a single nightmare to the police; and don't you agree that the overhead wires are an eyesore. Parts of Beresford Square and many other centres are covered with miles of these ugly overheads – which are constantly breaking and causing more traffic delays.
No sir, I think the day of the tram has finished and more vehicle traffic is needed. The modern bus is beautiful to travel in and is very much faster and more mobile.
Incidentally, I notice you live in a quiet road- 25 years in my house has nearly driven me deaf – we cannot sleep at nights with the windows open and at times we can hardly hear the wireless. So roll on the buses!

In reply to this letter, Alan Watkins wrote on 19th June 1949:

Thank you for your letter of May 31st, which I read with interest, although I cannot agree with your views.
Firstly, there are many London roads suitable for street or reserved tramways, and I would mention, among others, Kennington Road, Blackfriars Road, Brixton Road (and most of the route hence to Croydon and Purley), New and Old Kent Roads, Bromley Road, Eltham Road, Westhorne Avenue and Well Hall Road. At bottle-necks and busy junctions (e.g. the Croydon main street, and Elephant and Castle) subways could be constructed. These methods would provide a rapid transit system at a fraction of the cost of tube railway (which, I feel will become necessary if the trams are withdrawn) and would be more accessible. In addition, heavy passenger traffic would be largely removed from the roads, and accidents and congestion accordingly lessened. Incidentally, tramcars of the types shown in the photographs I sent you would not be unwieldy. Trams 40 feet long[1] operate quite successfully on the routes from Embankment to Purley and from Victoria to Southcroft Road via Clapham and via Brixton.
There is not much single track in London. In pre LPTB days, the total single- track mileage in the County of London was about 3.69 miles. Some of this has since been

[1] A 40 foot long tram is a Feltham car.

abandoned, and with the addition of the Croydon area, the mileage cannot now exceed this figure.

The only single- track routes are:

1. *Plumstead High Street.*
2. *Lewisham to Greenwich.*
3. *Brigstock Road Thornton Heath.*

The remaining sections are short, odd lengths here and there, but the above accounts for almost all the greater part of the mileage. The last section mentioned is in a fairly quiet road, and, from personal observation, works quite well. The Plumstead route is, I agree, far from satisfactory, but, quite frankly, I feel that it is hopeless for any form of heavy public transport, and I think that one of the following courses should be adopted:

1. *Widening, the objection being the heavy cost, although this course is most desirable. (Residents and shopkeepers would strongly object to their premises being confiscated and demolished).*
2. *Tram subway, possibly cheaper than the above.*
3. *Doubling the tram track. This could be done, and would establish a "clean" traffic flow. The road is a two-lane one, and overtaking is very undesirable.*

I do not claim that overhead is beautiful, but if we are to have the superior electric traction, either from tram or trolleybus, I think it is worthwhile. Experience elsewhere has, however, shown me that London overhead appears to be unnecessarily heavy, especially that for trolleybuses.
Although I now live in a quiet road, I have had some experience of living on a bus route, and I can assure you that they do their best to drown the wireless. I have been very disappointed in the new London buses, and feel that they are little better than those they replaced. Frequent travelling between Bexley and Eltham has shown me that they have a peculiar and unpleasant motion, which I can best describe as "shuddering". This view is held by several people I know, not all of them pro-tram. I can assure you that the Blackpool type of tram would give no trouble due to noise, and I think that similar trams should replace the present London ones.

In reply, to Alan J. Watkins' letter of 19th June 1949, Mr Hichisson wrote:

Thank you for your letter and I hope you will forgive me for continuing our little controversy. Evidently we have something in common – an argument – I should like to meet you at my club, Eltham Conservative Club, over a beer or two. The trams for years have been the pet of the LCC - a pet, however, which has been very expensive to the citizens of London as they have never paid (£100,000 down last year on revenue). They are my pet aversion and, believe me, I have cause for complaint. Outside my house there is a tram stop (downhill). Every tram that passes is braked hard (even when stopping for passengers) – there is a further stop 50 yards down the hill and every vehicle hurls down braking and re-braking until the full agony of the full stop is heard.
I have complained of this several times but to no effect. Every driver seems to look upon this stretch as a nice little spot to test out their brakes (at our expense – nerves and all). Heaven forbid one of your Glasgow monsters hurtling by and repeating the same performance – especially at 4 o'clock in the morning when one is supposed to

be getting some sleep! I have taken the trouble to make a note of every tram that is noisy and report them to LPTB. Only recently I was travelling on tram No. 97 – the noise was so appalling that I had to get out and change to another car. How the conductors can stand it all day I do not know.

Car 97 at Woolwich Market (author unknown).
The noisiest tram in London.

No traffic in these modern times should be allowed to run on the streets metal to metal. They may be fairly quiet at first but the tracks soon get worn by the other heavy traffic and we have all this racket over again. Railways are the only exception as their tracks are entirely used for one purpose and last many years. If we are going to pull up tracks let us pull them up for good and have modern travel on rubber tyres as all other traffic has these days. The buses will improve in time. I consider them to be most comfortable and very quiet and very fast moving and no doubt in a few years will be the perfect machine.
I work in Woolwich and am looking forward to retirement some day (if I am still alive and sane). A nice little cottage in the country will suit me – then I can sit down and think of the new owner listening to a Glasgow tram hurtling down the hill outside his house (heaven forbid). The buses can come as soon as they like (the sooner the better for my nerves and health)- and others too!

Alan Watkins replied to this letter as follows:

Dear Mr. Hichisson,

Thank you very much for your letter received this weekend. I shall be very pleased to see you some time, and suggest one Saturday or possibly Friday evening. I leave you to suggest a time, but for your guidance, I am free on July 16th, or any Friday evening.
The trams may have been a pet of the LCC, but they were certainly not expensive to the London public. Nearly every year they continued to make a profit until after the LPTB took over. In fact, they continued to make a profit until 1937/38. The present losses can be attributed to:

1. *Neglect of the system before the war, with consequent heavy maintenance. If a high standard of maintenance had been policy throughout, the present costs would be lower. This applies to tracks as well as cars.*
2. *The running of buses and trams together over the same route. This is very wasteful, as full use is not being made of the tramway assets. London transport is, in effect, competing with itself!*
3. *Payment, from tramway revenue, of outstanding charges on abandoned routes. This has happened in many towns, and is probably occurring in London at the present moment. Such charges should be paid by the replacing form of transport.*

I would stress that, at the present day, it is very difficult to obtain financial figures with regard to London Transport. The tramway account is, in any case, incorporated with the trolleybus account, making comparisons very difficult. At the same time, I doubt whether any London Transport services are making a profit, and I have heard (unofficially, of course) that both the Underground and the Green line coaches are working at a loss. It may well be that the tramway loss is not as heavy as we think when compared with other services.
You will notice that the profits declined as routes were abandoned (as is to be expected), but the loss of 1938/39 can probably be attributed to the large number of trolleybus conversions during the previous year or so.
The trouble of which you complain concerning brakes is obviously due to the form of braking used on London trams (i.e. the magnetic track brake). On many modern systems, including Glasgow, air brakes are used, and they are almost silent in operation. They would certainly eliminate the trouble you mention. Modern trams are very quiet in operation, and experiments in Blackpool (and also the USA) have shown this is so on worn track as well as on good. From personal experience, I have found that the latest Glasgow trams are more comfortable and smooth running than the latest London buses, and they are also fast. I certainly prefer them to anything we have in London, and I certainly think that they should be introduced down here.

Looking forward to seeing you,

Yours sincerely,

A.J. Watkins

The result of the meeting between Mr. Hichisson and my late husband is unknown. It remains a mystery as to whether or not Mr Hichisson was convinced by Alan's arguments. They probably agreed to differ amicably.

There is an excellent essay on the subject of cost by Ian Yearsley in *Tramway London* by Martin Higginson and Ian Yearsley and published by the LRTA in 1993. Mr Yearsley expounds in great detail the economic and financial factors behind the decisions to scrap the trams.

There also appeared to be much apathy on the part of the Londoner regarding the scrapping of the trams.

People did little to oppose the change to buses, yet the passing of the trams was mourned during the last tram week.

In the March issue of *Modern Tramway* 1950, it is written that only organised bodies, acting on legal advice, could make their objections known to a tribunal. Ordinary people did not have the wherewithal to do this.
The April issue of *Modern Tramway* 1950 quotes, in abridged form, correspondence between the Chairman of the LRTL and the Operating Manager (Trams and Trolleybuses) of the LTE. This correspondence shows the intransigent attitude of the LTE towards tramway development and the feasibility of having modern tramcars in London instead of the rundown vehicles now operating.

The League suggests, therefore, that a preliminary demonstration of the modern tramcar be made soon and a frank discussion be obtained for Londoners and that the most suitable routes be reprieved…and a final decision be made after discussion between the Executive and the public.

The Chief Public Relations Officer LTE replied as follows:

As you know the decision to replace the London trams by another form of transport was taken as long ago as 1935, when a large proportion of the trams and of the tracks and ancillary equipment were nearing the end of their useful life. The completion of the replacement plans was delayed by the war and it was in 1946 that the decision was finally reached to substitute oil-fuelled buses for the trams that then remained. The reasons that led to this decision were explained in the report of the LPTB for that year. It was a decision that was reached only after very careful consideration of all the factors that were involved affecting, as they do, not only the operation of the London Transport Road Services, but also every type of traffic that uses the London streets. You will see, therefore, that the London Transport Executive is committed to the policy, which they consider to be right and proper. In these circumstances, the Executive regrets that they cannot avail themselves of the offer you have made.

In *Modern Tramway* November 1950, a letter was published from *Transport World* 5th August 1950 which stated:

The travelling public of London will miss their trams, which for 80 years have served them well and faithfully. Nevertheless, even the most hardened tramophile must admit that they have had their day, and if their departure is tinged with a little sadness, then there is consolation that progress cannot be stayed.

By August 1950 the outlook for trams over most of the country was a bleak one. Tramway systems were abandoned without recourse to the scope and possibilities of the type of public transport advocated by the LRTL. The decision to abandon the trams was made upon the advice of managers and consultants. In July 1950, Lord Latham announced *Operation Tramaway*. The abandonment of the trams was to commence in October 1950 and to be completed by October 1952. In fact, the entire system was withdrawn by 5th July 1952.

The December edition of *Modern Tramway* 1950 reported that London would become an *All bus city.* The London Transport Executive regarded the Light Railway Transport League as a " bunch of cranks."
The London Transport Executive stated that the cost of track maintenance was a strong reason for the abandonment of trams and that many roads were too narrow to take them.
Mr A B.B. Valentine, one of the five full-time members of the London Transport Executive, stated that buses easily deserve first prize for the relief of traffic congestion.

Therefore the main reasons for tramway abandonment can be summarised as follows:

1. Road congestion.
2. Flexibility of the bus.
3. Environmental aesthetics, such as overhead wires.
4. Economic/Financial – cost of replacing tracks and vehicles. (The cost of the new buses was not taken into consideration).
5. Cheap petrol and diesel fuel.
6. Road safety – very often, passengers had to board trams in the middle of the road.

Regarding the demise of the tram, *Modern Tramway* July 1950, stated that:

Tramways have not failed – it is the regulations governing their use which have caused them to fail.

In a personal statement, J.W. Fowler, the chairman of the LRTL, said:

July 5th 1952 was the blackest day in the transport history of London.

Mr. Fowler thanked the members who rallied around the original cause. The attempt to save London trams had failed, but the efforts were worthwhile. Mr. Fowler referred to the Tramways Act, 1870 and the Royal Commission Report of 1930. Both these documents had been damning to trams.
The Tramways Act, 1870 stated that the local authorities had to maintain the road between the track and 18 inches of road either side of the track. The Royal Commission did not recommend that the tramway operators be relieved of this operation. The Commission recommended that no new tramways be constructed and that although no definite time limit would be laid down the trams would gradually disappear and give way to other forms of transport of equal capacity without the disadvantage of the tram. These recommendations were doom for the tram.

It seemed at one time, i.e. until 1946, that London Transport wanted to replace the trams, which still survived after the war, with trolleybuses in the same way as almost all the pre-war abandonment of the trams. However it did not have the courage to say so outright. The whole tramway abandonment scheme was a political decision the part of London Transport, who would not countenance any form of suggestion or compromise. More than fifty years later, it can be seen how wrong and misguided they were.

CHAPTER 2

THE LIGHT RAILWAY TRANSPORT LEAGUE'S REASONS FOR RETAINING THE LONDON TRAMS

Prior to analysing Alan Watkins' material relating to the campaign to save the London tramway system, it is important to outline the general reasons the Light Railway Transport League gave for the retention of the network. As in the previous chapter, the main source of information is *Modern Tramway* 1949-1952, where good documentary accounts can be found concerning the pros and cons of the situation. This chapter aims to co-ordinate the various accounts dealing with tramway retention.

Having read these interesting articles, it is apparent to me that a kind of 'trench warfare' existed between the Light Railway Transport League and the London Transport Executive.

The Light Railway Transport League proposed sensible and valid reasons for the retention of the London Tramway System in a modern form, not the run-down system in being at that time. Notwithstanding any arguments, the London Transport Executive was determined to close down the tramway system in its entirety, and refused to listen to the proposals of the League.

It is ironic that over fifty years after the demise of the tram in our major cities, some of these cities have brought back light rail rapid transit systems, similar to those on the continent. The reasons for doing so are the same as those advocated by the League over fifty years ago and are as follows:

1. Light Rail is a good method of moving large numbers of people in an urban environment quickly and efficiently.
2. Light Rail is beneficial to the environment as there is no pollution from vehicle exhaust.
3. Provided that the tram is modern, the track well maintained, and it is operated in a manner to maximise its potential, there is no substitute for it.

The League wanted the London Transport Executive to adopt a style of vehicle similar to an American vehicle known as the President's Conference Committee tram or PCC that was efficient, comfortable and quiet. It was light in weight, modular in design and very smooth running.

An article in *Modern Tramway* June 1951 entitled *The Case for the Tramcar* by Elmer C. Wrausman, discusses the merits of the modern PCC tram. The excellent characteristics are listed as follows:

1. *The modern PCC car provides a quality of ride and passenger capacity unmatched by any other surface transit vehicle.*
2. *Due to its smooth but rapid acceleration and deceleration, it has the ability to command its place in traffic.*
3. *Unquestionably, it has by far the longest life of any existing surface transit vehicle – at least three times the life of some buses.*

4. *Due to its acknowledged reliability, the PCC car record for availability is very high. Hence the number of spare vehicles necessary to maintain peak hour schedules is less with this proven unit.*
5. *PCC car maintenance and operating costs are low.*
6. *The PCC car can be stored outside throughout the year. It cannot freeze up.*
7. *This modern car not only serves more people per unit than any other surface transit vehicle but serves them with superior comfort, convenience and safety.*
8. *The PCC car is clean. No combustible fuels are used, hence no obnoxious fumes or oily smoke is encountered on the highway.*

This was the type of vehicle the LRTL enthusiasts had in mind. This vehicle would have wide aisles with large double doors at the front and centre, which would facilitate the smooth flow of passengers. Some PCC cars had three door openings, front, rear and centre. For these operations, the PCC car equipment in proper applications has definitely proved its ability to provide pleasing and profitable service.

One of the complaints about the London tram was that it was bone shaking and noisy. This was because the vehicles and track were very run down, especially after the last war.

Charles Klapper in an article in *The Journal of the Institute of Transport* November 1953, called *The Decline and Fall of the London Tramways*, wrote:

It has sometimes been argued that Londoners never had the opportunity of seeing modern type trams for themselves. That is not altogether so, for when the London United Tramways Uxbridge Road cars were re-seated and re-motored the revenue increased. Similarly, with the introduction of the handsome 64 seat Feltham cars which had been designed by the Underground Group with a view to using reserved track light railway to Uxbridge, revenue rose again. Revenue rose still further when trolleybuses replaced the trams.

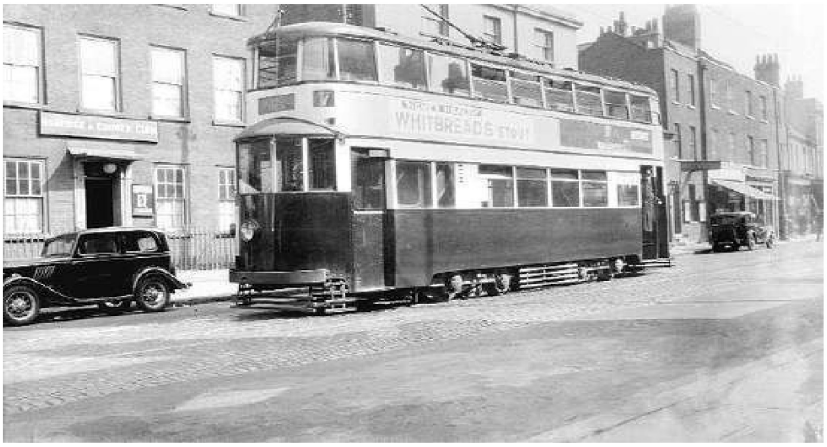
Revamped LUT car at Shepherds Bush. (author unknown).

The tramway enthusiasts believed that a modern vehicle running on reserved tracks could play a vital role in the transport system of London. Their battle cry was:

Let them try a modern tram on an efficient line.

In *Modern Tramway* July 1950, there is an article by. F .K. Farrell entitled *A Future for London Tramways.* The salient points of this article are:

1. *Most of the London lines can be modernised.*
2. *The most suitable lines can be retained in order to operate them as an express service to compensate for the lack of tube service in some areas.*
3. *The single track in Lewisham Road could be an express-way.*
4. *There could be separate lines in an up direction in Lewisham.*
5. *On Lewisham, Lee Green, Woolwich routes, the roads are wide enough for a reserved track.*
6. *Associated North London tramlines offer fair possibilities of modernisation, especially if the Manor house line were to be diverted via Petherton Road.*
7. *Junction layouts could be simplified.*
8. *In conclusion, this could be a short-term experimental programme to lead to a future development of rapid transit transport.*



LUT Feltham car at Uxbridge. (author unknown).

The London Transport Executive stated that the bus would provide a smooth comfortable and efficient service. However, it was pointed out that more buses would be needed to replace the tram because the tram had a greater passenger carrying capacity. For example, on the Catford to Victoria via Camberwell route, 109 buses replaced 99 trams. This constituted a wasteful use of resources.

The closing of the Kingsway Subway was another folly. This route could have remained a fast link connecting North and South London. The route was put forward as a prototype for an express-way. The Light Railway Transport League said about this closure:

The closing of the subway to trams was the crowning folly of London Transport policy.

It was during this time of arguments and counter-arguments that Alan Watkins was active. He spoke at the meetings of the South London Group where he put forward various enthusiastic proposals for tramway retention. He gave one lecture on the possible local applications of trams in the Brixton area. He was always in favour of a balanced integrated public transport system, as his campaign literature shows.

In *Modern Tramway* December 1950 is a report of the South London Committee of the LRTL of which, Alan Watkins was the Chairman. He said that:

The public campaign had included meetings at Streatham, Brixton and Lewisham. These meetings were preceded by handbill and leaflet distribution as well as postal distribution of literature. The activity of the few members who had distributed leaflets was appreciated. The Press Campaign in the local papers had been reasonably successful, but less successful in the national and evening papers. In general, the Committee received less support from League members than might be expected and hoped that the position might be improved in this respect.

In the Chairman's opening address at the LRTL annual general meeting, which reported in *Modern Tramway* December 1950, it is stated that:

The London situation is pretty grim. It has long been threatened and now looks as though we shall be fated to be an all-bus town, in spite of the warning of Manchester (to choose a place of considerable size as an example). We are asked from time to time what we are going to do about it. What can we do? We have put in our protests several times, we have sent out many thousands of circulars, we have had an enormous expression of support for our efforts from citizens in South London and we know that thousands of people are dissatisfied with the decision of the London Transport Executive.

I am afraid that the London Transport Executive are inclined to look upon us as a body of cranks, whereas all we want to do is to obtain a fair hearing and to represent the views of a considerable body of their "customers", who are totally unrepresented at 55, Broadway. The select body of the Executive have such power that it is impossible to find a parallel anywhere.

I'll say no more on the subject, but I feel, as you all do, furious that there will not be even one tramline in London in a few years time. Even the Kingsway Subway and the Embankment routes will go.

Another reason for the abandonment of the London trams was the cost of running the system. London Transport stated that the system was losing one million pounds per annum at 1950 prices. However, there was no forthcoming information about the cost of track maintenance.

An article written in *Modern Tramway* 15th March 1951 entitled *Track Costs* wherein an eminent transport officer in England stated that:

One mile of double track would cost £36,290. The overhead construction would cost £2,670. The total cost of a mile of double track street tramway at the present day is thus under £40,000, and after allowing for all possible contingencies it is difficult to see how it can be legitimately increased to more than £45,000. This is a 25% reduction on the commonly accepted figure of £60,000.

In the long term, a replacement bus service could be more costly as more vehicles would be required to move the same number of people and more crew would be needed to man them. The LRTL proposed a single-deck tramcar with a pay-as-you-enter system. A letter by Gerald Druce advocating this idea, was published in *Modern Tramway* in February 1952.

Sir,
I congratulate you on the leading article published in the January issue of "Modern Tramway" suggesting the introduction of high-capacity single-deck cars on British tramways, with which I am in full agreement. Whilst the design of car would have been modified to suit the needs of each individual system, it would be a great advantage if a standard design could be evolved which would be capable of running on the majority of the existing systems. Since this design would then be required in relatively large numbers the initial cost of each car could be kept to a minimum.
Whilst the pay-as-you-pass system of fare collection would not present many difficulties for a system with a simple fare structure, such as Edinburgh, some delays might be caused through the slow collection of fares on systems that have a large range of different fares. On such systems the introduction of season tickets and the provision at busy points of ticket machines (similar to those in use on the London Underground) might be desirable.

When considering the economics of single-deck operation, the reduction in track maintenance costs due to the better riding qualities of these cars compared with a double-deck car, and the reduced cost of any future subway construction, should be borne in mind.

Yours faithfully,
Gerald Druce.

The late. John Walton, also a close friend of Alan Watkins, wrote a letter in a similar vein to *Modern Tramway* in April 1952.

Sir,
Regarding single or double–decked trams, I believe that any attempt to foist on the travelling public in this country a street vehicle with a high –standing capacity is doomed to failure. While they will put up with the overcrowding which occurs on the London Underground and on most suburban railways, I very much doubt if they would put up with it on trams and buses.

As single- deckers are usually cheaper to construct and maintain, I suggest that a type could be evolved to seat about the same number as the existing London double-decked trams, with a standing capacity of about 25 which would bring the total capacity to 100. The dimensions of this type would have to be those of the PCC type, i.e. 51feet overall (50 feet body) and 9 feet wide with 3 and 2 seating. The conductor's position would be fixed, and as the design I have in mind would be double-ended, the

conductor's desk itself could be made so as to be easily transported from one end of the car to the other, the seat at the end not in use could be used for passengers.

Trusting this suggestion will make a good compromise between those who believe in single-deckers, and those who, like myself, believe in high seating capacity.
Yours sincerely,
John E Walton
London 19th February 1952

The LRTL had contacted all the political parties but, although the main political parties expressed some interest, the result was still negative.

The Department of Transport examined the situation and the reasons for and against tramways; but because of the highly complex legislation concerning tramways, it could not recommend the extension of tramway transport.

An address given by Mr G.F. Sinclair, Chief Technical Planning and Supplies Officer of the LTE, at a Passenger Transport Association conference was published in *Modern Tramway* June 1949, in which he stated:

What was needed was a broad system of transport with a close affinity to the lives of the people.
There should be a functionally sound relationship between transport and town planning.
Roads should be on two levels. Upper level for buses, lower level for a subsurface railway, plus high speed motor roads.
He continued to say that the size of the bus was inadequate to carry large numbers of people and what was required was a longer traffic unit to bridge the gap between the double-decker bus and the multiple-unit stock train.

The tramway enthusiasts argued that the tram was the very vehicle to do this. The enthusiasts also maintained that a tram running on rails took up no more lateral space than its own overall width, whereas any large steered vehicle needed a considerable margin of safety on each side.

The arguments and ideas for tramway retention in London of the late Alan Watkins and his contemporaries, some of whom are still with us, were ahead of their time. Like many visionaries of previous centuries, they were not taken seriously. They were *"voices crying in the wilderness"*.

However, the ideals and principles held by Alan Watkins and his fellow enthusiasts are alive today and are beginning to bear fruit.

The following items are copies of material published by the LRTL at the time of the campaign to raise public awareness of the importance of modernising and retaining the London tramway system.

Re-Develop London's Tramways,
and relegate buses and trolley-buses to lightly loaded outer routes.

MODERN TRAMWAYS

———Are safe, swift and silent.
———Assist the orderly flow of traffic.
———Deal easily with large crowds.
———Cause queues to clear quickly.
———Provide the most comfortable travel.
———Use neither imported oil fuel nor imported rubber.
——Use British coal for power and British steel for track.
———Do not wear out the roads.
———Emit no poisonous fumes.
———Operate equally well in streets, in subways, or on special private tracks.
——CHARGE LOWEST FARES.

Publicity material produced by the

THE LONDON PASSENGER TRANSPORT BOARD

has scrapped more than half of the tramways which formerly operated in and around London.

In consequence———

—Street fatalities have increased.

—There is less room in vehicles.

—There are* more *replacing vehicles on the road to cause congestion.

—You have to wait longer to board vehicles.

—Journeys are no quicker.

—You travel over bumpy roads instead of smooth steel rails.

—There is no passenger transport available in foggy weather.

—THE CHEAP FARES of tramway days have DISAPPEARED.

***TRAM SCRAPPING POLICY**
has so far cost the Board several million pounds. YOU are helping to pay for this mistake.

DO *YOU W'ANT THE DOSE REPEATED?*

*** See over for the solution of London's Transport Problem.**

Issued by the LIGHT RAILWAY TRANSPORT LEAGUE a voluntary non-profit-making body independent of all political and commercial interests, and working for the public good by advocating the greater use of modern tramways and light railways. use of modern tramways and light railways. London Office: 245, Cricklewood Broadway, N.W.2.

CHAPTER 3

CONGESTION, SAFETY, POLLUTION

The main reasons the enthusiasts had for tramway retention were:

- Many people could be carried safely by tram.
- The air was not polluted by petrol and diesel fumes.

In a letter to the *Reveille* newspaper on 20th June 1949, Alan Watkins wrote:

Unrationed petrol will bring severe road congestion, especially in big cities. To ban private motorists from central city areas would help, but it is obviously unfair.
Another solution is to remove heavy public transport from the roads. This can best be done by a system of electric light railways, operating in shallow subways or on reserved tracks along main roads. In addition, such lines, operated by fast, silent electric rail coaches at cheap fares would greatly benefit travellers.

There was a valuable informative book dealing with this subject entitled *Towards Ideal Transport,* by CR Bizeray, published by the LRTL in 1947.

The London Transport Executive's argument for abandoning trams was that they caused traffic congestion in so much as they run on tracks, so they could not swerve to avoid other vehicles thus resulting in a traffic jam.

The supporters of the tram argued that as trams ran along parallel lines, they would impose road discipline onto other vehicles.

There was much concern about the overall safety of tram travel, especially for cyclists because the front wheel of the cycle would catch the edge of the track and the cyclists would be thrown off.

In a letter to the *CTC Gazette*, May 1949, Mr. Smallwood, referring to the Birmingham tramway system, wrote:

Leeds has tram tracks wide enough to allow cyclists that extra bit of scope for cutting across the lines and straightening up; but in Birmingham, there are
narrow-gauge tracks and, in most places, wood setts. That makes a great deal of difference, and in wet foggy weather a cycle requires a great deal of careful handling when braking on wood blocks and crossing tram lines, though travelling in a straight line. Moreover, in wet weather, the tramlines collect water after a storm, as every car passes it splashes water on to you. I shall therefore be glad to see the tramlines removed.
As for buses, in Birmingham, we have some bad drivers, but a large proportion of good ones.

In a letter to the *Evening News* dated 11th July 1949, Alan Watkins wrote:

Cyclists might be more willing to see cycle tracks if they were decently paved, did not throw you on to the roads at awkward and dangerous places, and were not used by pedestrians.
Why should tram tracks stop cyclists pursuing a straight line? I have cycled extensively in London and Southampton, and have noticed no tendency to swerve, nor have I experienced any inconvenience from the presence of trams or tracks.

Overall, the tram was quite a safe vehicle. In a letter by T.F. Dowden of Thornton Heath dated 1949 it is said:

Trams do not normally skid, they slow up and regulate the traffic and it is the pace that kills.

Another argument was that tram travel was unsafe because people had to walk out into the middle of the street in order to board them, this would have been a dangerous thing to do even taking into the consideration the lower traffic levels of that time.

In a letter to *The Star* in October 1949, Alan Watkins advocated the use of loading islands in the road for passengers to board the tram, thus obviating the necessity for people to walk into a busy thoroughfare to board a tram.

Some people, not just tramway enthusiasts, were concerned about the increased level of air pollution from petrol and diesel powered vehicles should the trams be abandoned. Alan Watkins, writing to the *News Chronicle* (now defunct) in July 1949, said:

Exhaust fumes from vehicles must be detrimental to public health but, despite this, there is a growing tendency to replace electric public service vehicles by motorbuses. The air in large towns would become purer if trolleybuses were to replace motorbuses.
Among Alan Watkins' papers relating to this campaign, I found an interesting letter written by the prospective Liberal candidate for South Lewisham and published by the *Kentish Mercury* on 8th December 1950 entitled:

Abandoning the Trams – Ridiculous and Stupid

Ridiculous and stupid was the opinion expressed by Mr. K. C. Korn on the decision to abolish the London trams, the last of which will leave the rails at the end of 1952.

Mr. Korn was speaking at a meeting of the Light Railway Transport League, held at St. Dunstan's Hall, Brookehowse Road, Bellingham, on Saturday.

How would Rushey Green look at the end of the peak hours with buses following each other at 20 second intervals? It would spell chaos and hopeless congestion and would it not be wiser to spend the money on the modernisation of trams?

However he made it clear that he was not advocating the retention of the present out-dated trams. Modern tramway systems, such as operated in Blackpool, Leeds, Aberdeen and Glasgow and in various parts of the world, would on the other hand,

immensely benefit the public not only from the point of view of speed and comfort, but also because of their low cost.

What would happen to those tram drivers who had given up a lifetime to their job? He asked. *It is not easy for a man of 45 or 50 to learn to drive a bus. There were also the skilled engineers whose job was to maintain the trams. What is going to happen to these people?*

He believed they would be thrown out of work and eventually become a burden on the taxpayer. There was also the question of extra fuel needed for the running of buses. It would have to be bought from dollar areas.

And where are they going to get the rubber for the tyres from? I haven't seen any rubber plantations in this country. Obviously we have plenty of hard currency to throw away. He commented.

(This was written five years after the end of the Second World War, when rationing was still in force).

Replying to these statements, Alan Watkins wrote to the *Kentish Mercury* 9th December 1950 and said:

In these days of traffic congestion and economic problems, it is refreshing to hear of a realistic approach to the transport problem, and Mr. K.C. Korn is to be congratulated on his remarks relating to tramway abandonment, especially as regards imports.

It is essential that imports be reduced to a minimum, yet they will be increased by the vast quantities of oil and rubber required for the additional buses. Trams, however, use home produced power, and the hard currency saved by tramway modernisation could be used for more essential imports (e.g. food).

In addition, tramway abandonment means inferior facilities, as witness the strong complaints about the replacing buses in the Wandsworth area, and the heavy fare increases when the first tram routes were closed.

On balance, it was felt that the tramway system in London needed to be modernised and not abandoned. Much work needed to be done, but the motorbus, with its tendency to swerve and its unreliability in bad weather as well as its choking exhaust fumes was clearly not the answer to the problems of urban public transport and of the transport of London in particular.

CHAPTER 4

THE COST OF KEEPING AND ABANDONING THE TRAMS

From 1935 to 1939 the London Passenger Transport Board stated that tramcars ought to be replaced with trolleybuses. Those plans were put aside, resulting in the part completion of the trams to trolleybuses conversion. The LTE said now that the motorbus, being the more modern and attractive vehicle, should replace the trams.

Regarding these statements, J. Eldridge in a letter to the *Evening Standard* on 4th December 1951 wrote:

Both statements cannot be correct, and, in my opinion, the modern tramcar is still the ideal vehicle for the busy route. Besides being cheaper to run than the bus, the modern tramcar is more comfortable, faster and safer. It also has a greater peak load capacity.

The above letter expressed the main feelings of the pro-tram group at that time.

The financial details of the cost of running the London trams are mentioned in a recent publication called *Tramway London,* by Ian Yearsley and edited by Martin Higginson published by the LRTA, 1993.

The aim of this account is to document the thoughts and ideas of those involved in the campaign to save the London trams.

At the time of the campaign, it was thought by the pro-tram group that London Transport was secretive in not giving any statistical evidence for the economic details of tramway conversion. The public had a right to know, but that right was denied. The following letters by Alan Watkins illustrate this point.

The Chief Public Relations Officer of London Transport stated that the change over from trams to buses would improve services. (London Transport was asked for further details).
From the non-appearance of a reply from London Transport, I presume that these details have not been supplied. Doubtless there are facts and figures to support the tram scrapping policy, but as they were not produced, it is not surprising that there are people who have no faith in the buses-for-trams scheme.

Alan J Watkins, the Kentish Mercury 28th April 1951

The scheme to replace trams was a costly one, and consequently, an increase in fares was announced. Although it would cost a lot to modernise the system, the cost incurred would be comparable to the cost of abandonment. The LTE maintained that with tramway abandonment, services would be cheaper to provide when the buses took over.

Those who supported the trams said that more buses would be needed to carry the same number of passengers and that petrol and diesel oil would be more expensive than electricity.

Alan Watkins wrote in the *Sunday Graphic* on 4th October 1949:

The devaluation of the pound is leading to increased prices for petrol and oil. In addition, considerable quantities come from dollar sources, and dollar saving is important. In view of this, it is not desirable that buses should replace electric transport, yet some authorities intend to replace trams and trolleybuses by motorbuses. This should be stopped immediately.

L. Scadding of Richmond wrote in the *Evening News* on 23rd May 1950:

Fares must go up in London when trams are due for scrapping. Yet the manager of Blackpool Corporation stated a few weeks ago:
"The trams in Blackpool still run at pre-war fares and contribute £1,000 a week to the local rates. What is wrong in London?"

Similarly, a letter in the *Streatham News* dated 7th October 1949 by G. Druce, stated that without the trams, fares in London would be higher and Londoners would be more disgruntled. Mr. Druce's reasoning is that if other tramway systems can make a profit, why cannot London?

There were also great social implications concerning tramway abandonment. There could be much unemployment as no overhead wires and no tracks would be made. Tram depots would be closed. There would also be the health hazards from atmospheric pollution from diesel and petrol fumes, which would add to the cost of medical care under The National Health Service.

In a letter to the *Kentish Independent* of 8th May 1949, Alan Watkins wrote:

The threat of unemployment to many workers at the London Transport Executive Charlton repair shops, due to the proposed move to Ruislip, must largely arise from the decision to replace the 800 trams by 1100 buses, and the consequent necessity of a repair depot to deal with the 300 extra vehicles. If the tramways were retained and modernised, Charlton works would be tied to South London, and the threat of unemployment removed.
When the trams are withdrawn, the electrical and permanent way staff will also be likely to become unemployed.

Writing in the *Kentish Independent* dated 14th May 1950, Alan Watkins stated:

As a passenger who is likely to help pay for the tram scrapping by 100% increase of his daily fares, may I protest about the expenditure of several thousand pounds on the construction (and subsequent demolition) of a large depot[1] the purpose of which is the scrapping of tramcars.

[1] Penhall Road "Tramatorium" at Charlton, Woolwich.

Disposal of the trams must create a problem, but I have heard of no other system that has employed such expensive means.
Also, the twenty-four permanent way men would be better employed on the much needed relaying of existing tracks.
Regarding the new garages that are required, the one at Stockwell necessitates the demolition of several houses. In view of the present housing situation, this should not be allowed.

(There was a serious housing shortage after the 2nd World War).

On studying this correspondence, it seems that yet again, London Transport failed to think things through regarding the overall implications of abandoning the trams.

The economical statements said that buses were cheaper to run – yet more were required to provide the same level of service.
More than fifty years on from the abandonment of the trams in London on 5th July 1952, the reasons, expressed above, for retaining the trams still ring true.
In order to give a balanced account of the battles raging around the abandonment of the trams, I have included some anti-tramway correspondence published in the *Kentish Independent* on 21st October 1949. J.I. Taylor wrote:

I see by your editor's table that the LTE has definitely decided to dispense with trams in London. This dispelled the pro-tram Canutes as far as the sea of people in London are concerned. One has often read letters in the Press from those who declare trams are cheaper to run, yet I see that figures produced by the LTE for 1948 show a loss of more than 4 million pounds.

A Plea

How can anyone honestly say that they like riding on or even hearing a tram? The RTL bus type is progress, and you always get these people who don't like it. I myself would like to have my own car, but being a humble shop assistant, I have to use public transport, and I know that the bus will be much better than waiting at Dickson road each morning and sometimes getting one out of three trams going only part of the way to Beresford Square, rain, snow or sunshine. Also, need the oil only come from dollar countries? So, I say, hurry up with part 2 of stage 3 of the changeover from trams to buses for the Woolwich area.

R.J. Young of Well Hall.

CHAPTER 5

FARE INCREASES AFTER TRAM SCRAPPING

All the trams in South East London will be replaced by the end of 1952. We trust that this will contribute a noticeable improvement in transport facilities in that area.

So stated George Dodson-Wells, the Chief Public Relations Officer for the London Transport Executive, in the *Kentish Mercury* on 16th February 1951.

During the period 1949-1952, much concern was expressed about increased passenger fares after the demise of the trams.

K.G. Harvie wrote a letter to the *Kent Messenger* dated 18th May 1951, which was entitled:

London Transport and the Passengers
Since London Transport's compulsory acquisition in 1933, trams and track have been neglected and no new vehicles built. The two penny cheap fare, one shilling all day return and workmen's tickets have been abolished together with the useful transfer facilities. Last October fares were raised to offset the cost of tramway abandonment, and now we face another fare increase. London Transport has not inherited the LCC's concern for the passenger's welfare.

Replying to this letter F. Muskett said:

Yet, we are told, buses are cheaper to operate than trams. If this is so, why do not fares drop when the trams are withdrawn?
The truth is that trams have always provided the cheaper fares, and this is still true in cities using the modern tram. In London there have been heavy fare increases since tram scrapping began, in some cases of 200 or 300%.

In a similar vein, a letter was written to *The Star* on 6th September 1950.

A Word For Trams

London's fares are high enough now. Would these increases be necessary if the trams were modernised instead of being scrapped? Modern trams give a better service than is possible with buses.

A .J. Watkins replied:

In all large towns that have abandoned tramways, fares have risen steeply, and are still rising. Let Londoners take warning and press for tramway modernisation even when there are hints of still more increases.

The matter of fare increases was also debated by the London County Council, and was reported by the *Evening News* on 7th March 1950, under the heading:

Tory Challenge On London Fares

The Leader of the London County Council asked: *Is there a safeguard?*

Mr. I. J. Hayward, Labour leader of the LCC, will be asked at tomorrow's council meeting if he proposes to take any steps to safeguard the interests of the travelling public in London in view of the Transport Commission's proposals to revise passenger fares in London.

The matter is expected to be raised by the Tory councillor for the Hampstead division, Mr. Geoffrey Hutchinson, KC, who leads for his Party on the Finance Committee.

Mr. Hutchinson has tabled a question asking the leader whether the proposals will involve an additional burden amounting to £3.5 million a year to the travelling costs of the people of London, and whether they will involve abandoning workman's fares on trams and trolley buses without providing an adequate compensating advantage.

Many Londoners were concerned about the loss of workman's tickets. Apparently, trams and trolley buses were legally obliged to provide workman's fares but the buses were not. This amounted to an increase in fares for the travelling public.

Mr. Clayton, branch organiser of the London Passenger Association, said that:

The public were not informed as to what may or may not happen – so they thought that nothing would happen.

. A .J. Watkins wrote in *The Star* on 7th February 1950:

The proposed fare increases will cause hardship to the average passenger. Although cheaper rail fares are promised, this is no comfort to those who have no convenient railway to use, whilst the railways cannot, at peak hours, absorb additional traffic resulting from fare increases. Passengers will have to continue to use road transport – at higher fares.

It is significant that the increases are to take effect in October, when the Wandsworth tram routes are to be withdrawn. Tram scrapping has always resulted in higher fares, apparently London is to be no exception.

To summarise:

- Tram scrapping would result in higher fares.
- Trams were more economical to run.
- The system had to be modernised and improved.
- The ideas of the pro-tram group were not heeded by the LTE.

The Modern Tramway March 1950, has an article entitled *London Transport Fare Adjustments.* The article states that:

Under the title of the London Area (Interim) Passenger Charges Scheme, the British Transport Commission is submitting to the Transport Tribunal a number of proposals for the elimination of the "many inequitable anomalies" which result form the "existing different levels of fares" obtaining on the various modes of transport in the London area, including the suburban services of the Railway Executive.

Among other things, it is proposed to replace the workmen's fares at present limited to trolley bus, tram and train by a system of cheap early morning fares available on all forms of transport except Green Line coaches. The new early morning fares will be higher, in general, than the present workmen's fares and in all cases lower than the proposed ordinary fares. These, on London Transport services will b e revised to a basis of about 1 ¼d a mile. The existing 1½d minimum fare for about one mile remains; the 2½ fare is raised to 3d ; the 4d and 5d fares remain: above that, fares will be increased as required to the 1¼d a mile scale. Transfer fares (mainly confined to trams) will cease.

The commission are seeking authority to introduce these changes on 1st October 1950, when the conversion of the South London tramway to bus operation is due to begin. The estimated net effect of the lowering of some fares and the raising of others is to increase the gross receipts from passenger services in the London area in a full year from about £74,250,000 to about £77,750,000.

I conclude this chapter with a lengthy letter to *The Star* 14 – 8-1950 written by A. J. Watkins in which he set out clearly his reasons for not scrapping the trams.

The Editor The Star

Dear Sir

At the end of 1949 I offered some comments on the effect that the London tramway conversion scheme could have on fares, and you raised the matter with London Transport. I stated that the authorities refused to give an assurance that the scheme would not entail higher fares, and this led me to the conclusions:

1. *Economic implications of the scheme were not known, which rendered commencement of work unjustified.*
2. *That the general effect was known, but the authorities did not wish to divulge this until the full scheme was prepared. The statement was made in February 1950, by which time work on conversion was in hand.*

Subsequent events justified conclusion (2), but in view of the date of publication, it is evident that the general information that I desired could have been given when requested.

The evidence given at the Transport Tribunal has made it clear that the conversion scheme has considerably influenced the fare proposals. Although the reason given is

an intention to 'level' road and rail fares, it should be stressed that the bulk, if not all, of the increased revenue (£2.5 to £3.5 million) will go to a concern already making a profit. Rail single fares will, in some cases, be reduced but day return tickets do not appear to be altered (e.g. Bexley to Charing Cross will remain at 2/10d), and most people use return tickets. It is therefore reasonable to assume that the increase is to pay for the tramway conversion scheme, and this has been partially admitted. It is also verified by the fact that, in most large towns to scrap trams, fares have risen considerably, as witness the following examples:

1. *Manchester* — *Trams gone and fares are still rising.*
2. *Liverpool* — *Fares rise and cheap facilities are withdrawn as each tram route is closed.*
3. *London* — *There have been two fare increases since tramway abandonment commenced.*

Witnesses at the Transport Tribunal have suggested that tramway modernisation could remove the necessity for such heavy fare increases, and certain figures were published in "The Star" recently. It should be stressed that heavy capital expenditure after a short period is an economic necessity with the bus programme, but the expenditure on a tramway modernisation programme could be spread over a period, as much of this equipment could be used.
It has been suggested that London's trams are on their last legs, but while this is true of some, it is not true of the whole fleet. 92 trams are to be sold to another authority, and about 200 others may also be sold. Transport authorities would not buy old junk! An improved standard of maintenance would eliminate the present uncomfortable riding and breakdowns, and in connection with this I append details of capital expenditure over the period 1941-1947.

Another aspect is that of fuel and rubber. Both buses and trolley buses use rubber and buses imported diesel oil, but trams use neither apart from the comparatively small amounts used for insulation and lubrication. In view of the economic situation it is necessary to curtail imports to a minimum, and the increased use of trams, and, to a lesser extent, trolleybuses, would help in this direction.

I appreciate the publicity "The Star" has given to the efforts to prevent the fare increases, and hope these comments will be of use to you.

Yours faithfully,

A. J. Watkins

CHAPTER 6

A QUESTION OF CAPACITY

Replace trams, cut down queues!
This was one of the arguments of the LTE for tram scrapping. The LTE implied that the bus would be more flexible and thereby cut down long queues.
The pro-tram group argued that this could not be so as a 56-seater bus would replace a 74-seater tram. They said that more buses would be required to carry the same number of people as were carried by tram.

A letter was published in the *Kentish Mercury* 19th May 1950 entitled:

Buses for Trams - A Question of Capacity.

I do not know whether the public of South London have considered the difference in the number of passengers which will result from the conversion of trams to buses, but the outlook is rather gloomy.
In a recent "Mercury" article it was stated that 800 trams are to be replaced by nearly 1200 buses. The great majority of trams are 74-seaters, with a total carrying capacity of 59,200, but the new buses only carry 56, which means the total capacity of 1,000 buses will be 56,000. Assuming all vehicles are on the road at the same time, 3,200 passengers will be left behind. Add to this the fact that the buses almost certainly will not cover exactly the present tram routes but will no doubt extend beyond, it is easy to see now that more buses will be needed to provide the same service.
What are these other 3,200 would be passengers going to do to get to work? Go by Underground? Impossible, there is not an adequate system in any part of South London; there is, of course, the Southern Electric, but these trains are grossly overcrowded as it is. To provide a complete and satisfactory service, I think at least 1,200 buses will be needed to replace the trams.
We in South London, especially the South East, must see to it that we are not left behind, as so often has happened in the past.

Alan F. Deverell

In reply to the above letter, A. J. Watkins said:

Mr. Deverell's fears that tram replacement will result in a lower passenger carrying capacity are well justified, as tram scrapping elsewhere has often resulted in longer queues. This would be overcome by providing additional vehicles, but is influenced by the problem of street congestion. This is steadily growing and several extra vehicles will only hasten the trend towards chaos. A large increase in the number of road vehicles is undesirable, and high capacity passenger vehicles are necessary.
In London, these are supplied by 74 seat tramcars, whilst higher capacity trams, e.g. Blackpool's 84-seaters, are operated on modern systems. The use of similar cars in London would mean better services with no extra vehicles.

I do not suggest that London's tramway system be retained in its present form, but modernised until it can be replaced by electric light railways, running on reserved tracks or in subways, and operated by high capacity rail coaches.

Here are some extracts from readers' letters published in the *Kentish Mercury* in 1951. The letters quoted below illustrate the need for good public transport in London.

S.E. London Transport. A Reader's Demands

When the LPTB took over the running of buses and trams after smashing all private enterprise, they gave us a slogan: " Cheapness and Efficiency." Those in Lewisham who have memories now emit a hollow groan every time they recall –as they must do- the very many efficient services we used to have under private competition.

There are no prizes for the answer, but can anyone tell me if there is any worse service anywhere in the world than a number 58 service tram.

Perhaps the LTE would like to explain to the hundreds of people who wait anything from 15 to 25 minutes at King William's Walk, Greenwich, in all weathers after working all day, their idea of "Cheapness and Efficiency." When the LCC ran the cars along that route we had two services (Nos. 58 and 62) and a rush-hour service (No. 50).

We have repeatedly been told that the LTE are taking the trams off the roads and substituting three buses for every two trams, but I invite the people to consider carefully what will happen when they do. During December we had a fair example of different classes of weather and what happened? Buses were practically at a standstill in fog and frost. The people who on one night waited over half an hour for a bus opposite the Town hall, Catford, could give an answer to that. The trams were still moving occasionally, although perhaps not in the direction that everyone wanted.

The South-East of London is being very badly served and everyone could demand that we should have the services we are entitled to, and if the LTE cannot supply them, someone else should be allowed to.

A tube should at once be considered and started. This would serve a dual purpose of providing an atom bomb shelter and a passenger transport service in any weather.

A .B. Stewart

Arrangements made to send letter and literature to Mr Stewart, and an official letter to the paper. (A.J.Watkins)

In reply to Mr. A.B. Stewart's letter to the *Kentish Mercury*, Mr. George Dodson-Wells, Chief Public Relations Officer for the London Transport Executive, wrote:

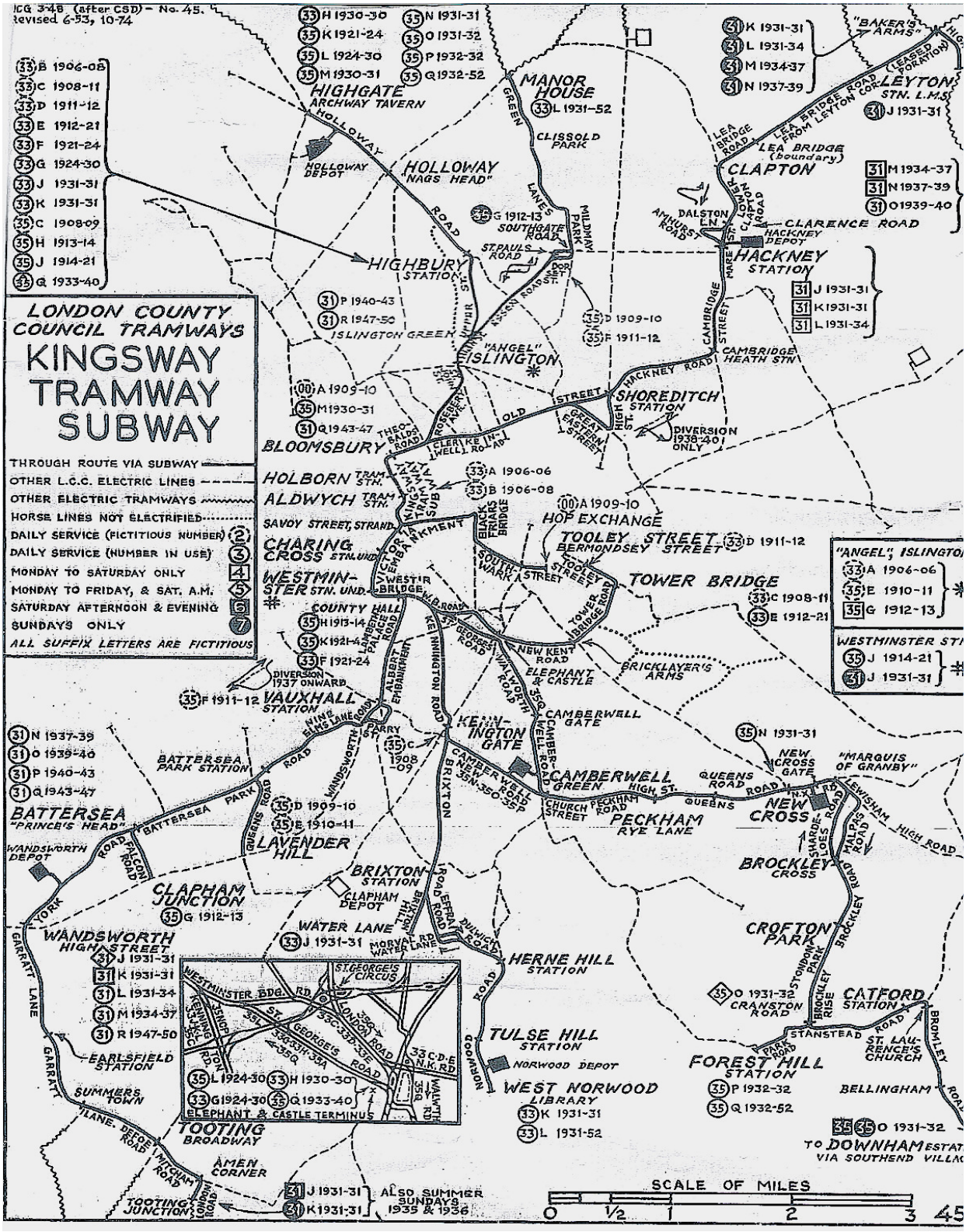
I would assure you that we are doing all we can to give travellers in this part of London the best possible facilities. As regards tram route 58, to which your readers particularly refer, a service of 15 trams an hour is scheduled to operate on this route during the peak periods, with six extra trams to Catford, at the busiest times, in the evening.

When fully operated, this service is ample for the requirements of the traffic. The trouble to which Mr. Stewart refers, which is greatly regretted, has occurred because the route has been affected by acute staff and rolling stock difficulties, which depleted services on a number of occasions.

Supervision is given by an official to the queues at King William Walk, Greenwich, on all possible occasions to ensure that the services are operated to the best advantage. A separate queue for route 58 faces the queue for routes 36, 38, and 40 to make conditions as easy as possible, and, when the situation permits, trams are turned back towards Catford and Forest Hill.

Perhaps, I may add that the trams on route 58 are to be replaced by buses in October this year and that all the trams in South East London will be replaced by the end of 1952. We trust, despite your correspondent's fears, that this will contribute a noticeable improvement to transport facilities in that area.

Published in the *Kentish Mercury* 16th February 1951.



Map showing the Kingsway Subway drawn by the late John C. Gillham and given to the author. Reproduced with his kind permission.

CHAPTER 7

THE KINGSWAY SUBWAY

A tunnel running from the Embankment, under Aldwych through Kingsway, to Bloomsbury still exists. This was once part of a tram route linking South and North London.

The Kingsway Subway was five eighths of a mile long. The gradient from the Kingsway to the Strand was one in twenty. It had bright new stations and there were trams every six minutes from five o'clock in the morning until ten minutes past midnight. The journey from Southampton Row to Charing Cross took six minutes. The subway was an excellent fast link from North to South London giving good connections with the East End of London.

Tram entering the Kingsway Subway. (A.J.Watkins' collection).

There is a very detailed account of the history of the Kingsway subway by C. S Dunbar in his book on the Kingsway subway, entitled:
London's Tramway Subway, published by the LRTL in 1948.

In his account it is stated that approval for the subway was granted in 1902 to link Theobalds Road to the Embankment at Waterloo Bridge.

On 29th December 1905, a new line was inspected by the Board of Trade in Rosebery Avenue and St. John's Street to the Angel at Islington. Public service from the Angel to the Aldwych began on 24th February 1906. Smoking in the cars was not permitted because of the risk of fire. On 16th November 1906 the route was extended to Highbury station. The Embankment tramway also opened as powers for the subway link had been obtained. Through services using single deck F Class cars commenced on 10th April 1908, but the tunnel was not high enough for the double-deckers.

In 1929 the London County Council decided to increase the headroom to sixteen feet six inches. The roof of the tunnel was raised at the northern end and all the rest of the

tunnel was deepened. Service using double-decker vehicles commenced on 14th January 1931 and a batch of new E3 cars were allocated to subway services.

Sadly, on 5th April 1952 trams ran through the subway for the last time carrying members of the Light Railway Transport League.

The members of the Light Railway Transport League wanted to retain, extend and develop this route as a rapid transit route.

In a letter to the *Evening Standard* 18th May 1950, J. Thompson of Tooting wrote:

Why Not Retain the Tunnel?

Reader W.H. Bett says that the Kingsway tramway tunnel is unsuitable for motor traffic. Surely this justifies the retention and modernisation of the three tramway routes using it?

As an advocate of a modern light rail transit system for London, Alan Watkins was strongly in favour of retaining the Kingsway subway. Writing in the *Evening News* dated 27th June 1950 he said:

In suggesting that London trams should be replaced by some form of railway, reader A.P. Tatt, writing in the "Evening News" on 26th June 1950, apparently realises that replacement by buses will not improve the transport situation, but will worsen street congestion and slow down services. Abandonment of the Kingsway tram subway means three surface bus routes, which may disorganise traffic in this area. Retention of the subway and development of a system of reserved-track tramways and subways would, therefore be beneficial.

In a letter to *The Star* dated 18th October 1949 entitled *Tramway Sub*ways. S.P..Harris wrote:

One of the most useful and efficient methods of underground travel – the Kingsway tram subway from Bloomsbury to the Embankment- may be abandoned when South London's trams are replaced by buses. The principle of tramway subways is one that has not been exploited sufficiently in London.

In a letter to *Modern Transport* dated 25th January 1950 Alan Watkins wrote:

Mr. Joyce's Birmingham experiences confirm my own. The tramways there have many good points, and are superior to London's, being in better condition, and providing more reliable services. I found congestion to be mainly away from the tram termini, the present trouble in Martineau Street being non-existent as the Perry Barr and Witton trams were then running. Trams were arriving and departing regularly, as was the case at the other termini.

The reserved tracks are an asset to the city, and should be a feature of most large towns. In conjunction with tram subways, they give many of the advantages of an underground railway (and are cheaper to construct) combined with the accessibility

of street tramway and bus routes, and greatly assist in improving traffic conditions. The replacement of trams by buses does not lead to better traffic flow, and the only real solution is to remove the heavy passenger transport from the streets.

Reserved tracks exist in many systems and are capable of considerable expansion, whilst the value of tram subways is shown by the speedy and congestion-free services given by the Kingsway subway in London.

Tram in the Kingsway subway 1946© GF Ashwell.[1] (AJ Watkins' collection).

The following extract is taken from an article in the *Kentish Independent* dated 12th August 1949 entitled:

They want Trams under the Streets

The members of the Tramway Development Council, anxious to stop London from discarding its tram system, visualize modern subway tram systems bigger and better than the Kingsway Subway, capable of carrying thousands of passengers in silent comfortable high-speed trams. These could speed safely through the tunnels at 25 second intervals. Subway tramways are cheaper to build than tube railways. It says that its system could be installed for an average cost of £200,000 a mile, and no costly signalling equipment would be required. A tube line costs more than £1,500,000 a mile.

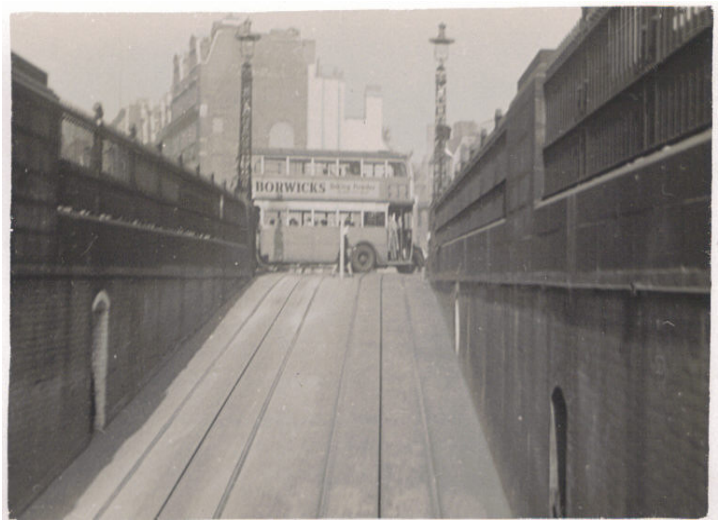
Although the proposed scheme would mean that subways would have to be built under the streets in congested districts, the trams would come to the surface where there is sufficient room, and run on lines fenced off from the adjacent roads. In this way, it is claimed, that the trams would offer no obstruction to other traffic.

The leader of Woolwich Borough Council said*:*

[1] The author has been unable to trace the present copyright holder of GF Ashwell's photographs that the late Alan Watkins had in his collection.

As I don't think the proposal would be acceptable to the LTE I have not given it any further consideration.

To summarise the thoughts expressed in this chapter, the foundations for a rapid modern improved tramway system for London were in situ. Instead of developing this system, the LTE abandoned it.
Their philosophy of total tramway abandonment did not bring order out of chaos instead it eventually led to greater congestion, chaos and atmospheric pollution that London's legacy is today.



Bus above entrance to Kingsway subway 1947 © G.F. Ashwell.
(A.J.Watkins' collection).

The Last Day of the Kingsway Subway Tram in London. (A.J. Watkins' collection).

CHAPTER 8

THE END OF THE ROAD

During the years 1951-1952, the Light Railway Transport League accelerated its campaign to modernise and retain the London tram. On 7th April 1951, there was a special tram tour of South London. This was held on the last Saturday along the Purley and Thornton Heath route before stage three of the abandonment, seventy members attended. *Modern Tramway* reported that the well-known driver, Stan Collins drove the last tram. Proceeds from the sale of tickets went to charity.

Stan Collins driving the last tram on 7th April 1951 (LT Museum).

In March 1951, Croydon passengers complained of inadequate bus services along routes not served by trams.

On 24th November 1951, the Chairman of the LRTL gave an address that was damning to the enthusiasm of the South London campaigners. He said:

Although we still believe in our principles, the weight of the LTE is too much for us. The London Transport Executive is a power of its own. I have come to the conclusion that no matter how one appeals to them with reason, they will not budge from their position that they will supply the type of public transport they think fit. The public have no voice whatsoever, even Parliament, I understand, has no voice in this matter. Alan Watkins, referring to the Chairman's address, asked that an Extraordinary General Meeting be held to determine the future of the League.

In *Modern Tramway* December 1951 there is a letter from Ken Farrell advocating tramway retention and I quote from part of it.

The case for tramway retention is undoubtedly stronger in Glasgow, Birmingham, Pittsburgh and Lille than in London…but, nevertheless there is a strong case for trams especially for outer suburban and interurban services.

In London the South London trams served an area penetrated by only one underground railway, already loaded to capacity, as were also the surface electric lines of the Southern Region.

There were various factors for tramway abolition, many of which have already been mentioned heretofore. The major factors were:

- London Transport did not like them!
- Buses were cheaper to run and were more flexible.
- Trams were regulated, but buses were not.
- Expiry of 21year tram leases whereby the local authority was given the right to purchase a privately owned undertaking after a period of 21 years from the time when the providers were empowered to construct it and for every seven years after the initial twenty one as stipulated in the Tramways Act of 1870.
- Vehicles and tracks were in need of renewal and repair.
- Buses were a cheap alternative to this.

Charles Klapper in an article for the *Journal of the Institute of Transport* November 1953 wrote:

After the formation of LPTB in 1933, it was decided to extend the trolleybus route to the rest of the South London system to Bexley, Erith, and Dartford where the track and cars were worn out. When the South London scheme came up for review in 1945 after the second world war, the motorbus was favoured instead of the trolleybus. At that time (before taxation changes) diesel fuel cost less than traction current. In 1946 a bus scheme for London was prepared. In the last stage, 114 buses replaced 162 trams. 737 trams were taken out of service and were replaced by 768 buses.

In volume 10 no. 2 September 1989 of *The Journal of Transport History* Richard J. Buckley wrote:
Capital cost was the reason for tramway abandonment. Once fresh capital expenditure was envisaged. It became clear that the tramway would cease to be viable. In 1951, bus capital costs were less than the capital costs for trams. This was largely due to permanent way renewal.

In 1952, at the time of the abandonment of the trams, *The Economist* dated 5th July 1952 published an article entitled: *A Street car named Defunct* wherein the reasons for tramway abandonment were listed:

- Trams were not allowed to run in the West End of London.
- Prejudice against trams.
- Limited allowance of trams into the City.
- With its narrow streets, London was not like continental cities.
- 1870 Tramways Act, which stipulated that the road between the rails and pavement 18 inches either side had to be maintained by the operating powers.

- Housing developments which were away from tram routes made tramway extension expensive.
- Continental cities did not have the same amount of urban sprawl. Therefore, tramways were economically viable.

The article cites costs:

RECEIPT FOR TRAMS	EXCESS RUNNING COSTS	VEHICLE COSTS	
£2,360.000	£1,250,000	TRAMS	£8,000-£11,000
		BUSES	£3,500-£5,000
		TROLLEYBUSES	£6,000

The article states that:

The capital cost per seat provided is about the same for a bus and trolley bus – and about half what it is for a tram.

.

The article concludes with the negative thought:

The tram is still a major form of transport in Europe, with the exception of France…yet there are signs on the Continent that the tram will not go on forever.

During the years from 1948-1950, the campaign to save the tram became very vigorous. In 1948 the LRTL South London Branch sent postcards to 6,000 people.

One tenth of the replies received favoured modernising the trams.
At that time, the South London Press was sympathetic towards the trams and printed many pro-tram letters, articles and reports on what was happening. On the whole, the national press was not sympathetic and seemed to be indifferent to the whole matter.

Tram 1951 at New Cross Depot 5th July 1952. (Author unknown).

In 1949, the Tramway Development Council, whose headquarters was at Peckham, was formed to save the London trams. The Council staged a leaflet campaign that advocated modern single-deck trams to carry about 80 passengers. There was also a South East London Action Group, in which the late Alan John Watkins was involved, which met at the Progress Hall, Eltham.

On 25th March 1950 a meeting was held at St. Leonard's Church Hall, Streatham, at which 80-100 people were present. It was proposed to delay tram scrapping in favour of replacement by modern vehicles.

On 15th June 1950, a public meeting was held at the very large Lambeth Town Hall, Brixton. Several speakers for tramway retention were present, but the hall was only half full.

London Transport publicly stated that the trams were to be scrapped in order to secure integration with other transport services!

In 1952 the campaign to save the London tram ended in failure.

Fletham Tram in 1952 at Penhall Road waiting to be scrapped (A.J. Watkins' collection).

The last tram week in London, which signified the end of a particular transport era, has been well documented by both the national and local press as well as by some transport journals. The selected letters and articles used in this account tell their own poignant tale.

However, 1952 is not the final chapter in the story of this campaign. The seeds for a good clean efficient transport system sown by those who campaigned for one fifty years ago are beginning to germinate. There is now the Croydon Tramlink and the Docklands Light Railway in London. There is talk of bringing more trams back into Central London. Suddenly, the tram seems to be a good idea. Politicians are at long last beginning to agree with the pro-tram arguments of 1952.

Front and reverse of tram ticket portraying Last Tram Week July 1952. Given to the author by Diana Burfield. Reproduced by kind permission.

Last tram week in London. July 1952. (A.J. Watkins' collection).

CHAPTER 9
THE EFFECTS OF TRAMWAY ABANDONMENT

The late Alan Watkins early in 1952 wrote the following account of the repercussions of abandoning the trams in London:

Recently London Transport has stated that the abandonment of tramways has resulted in a big improvement in traffic conditions. This has not been the experience of several independent observers (except in the lane of New Cross Gate), and it is suggested that, where there has been some slight improvement (as at Kennington), the same could have been achieved by road and track improvements, which, in most cases, have been long delayed. The following examples are selected:

1. ***New Cross Gate:*** *Considerable delays have always been experienced owing to the trams running in and out of the depot, and the changing of crews which was often carried out with anything but smartness. This point is unsatisfactory for a depot, but the following improvements could have been made:*

    - *A double triangular junction into the depot, eliminating the necessity for reversing cars running in.*
    - *Quicker crew changes.*

Even so, little improvement could have been effected by the use of buses had not many of the replacing buses been operated from Rye Lane garage, Peckham. This has quite naturally led to coincidental improvement at New Cross Gate, but much of the trouble has been transferred to the narrowest part of Peckham High Street, almost on top of the busy Rye Lane junction.

2. ***Elephant and Castle:*** *Improvement here can be attributed to the new traffic arrangements, whereby road traffic is now controlled by the general flow of the trams.*
3. ***Brixton:*** *The position here is steadily worsening as the trams are removed. Large traffic blocks are prevalent, and conditions are so bad that the buses are forced to load and unload in the middle of the road. This represents deterioration as tramway passengers could use a loading island.*

Some years ago, an independent body proposed a tramway subway under Brixton. Had this scheme been followed, considerable improvement would have been effected, as the following services could have been removed from the street (based on existing routes):

TRAM	NOW BUS
8-20	57
22-24	50
16-18	109
10	95
78	178
33	Tram service still running

4. ***Victoria (Vauxhall Bridge Road)*** *Considerable improvement has been claimed. This can hardly be so as some bus services now turn in the middle of Vauxhall Bridge Road, blocking all traffic by so doing. This was not so in the days of the trams as, although there were often several trams waiting to enter the terminus, the rest of the road was free for other traffic.*

5. ***Embankment*** *Traffic congestion has increased since the introduction of buses. Formerly, all public transport was virtually segregated from other traffic. There have been at least two serious accidents due to the conversion.*

6. ***Kingsway Subway*** *The full effect in Kingsway cannot be judged until the withdrawal of tram routes 33-35 in April. Despite several questions, no authority has yet explained how closing the subway can improve traffic conditions in this part of London.*

From the foregoing it will be seen that:

1. *The improvement in traffic conditions due to withdrawal of the trams is generally negligible.*
2. *That the reverse often occurs.*
3. *That at least £9,000,000 has been spent on the conversion scheme that will show no long-term good results. The money could have been better spent, with better results, on tramway modernisation.*

Before proceeding to discuss the advantages of installing a new rapid transit tramway system, the effects of the conversion on services should be mentioned. It should be said that the tram services were far from satisfactory. Journeys were often delayed and many cars never reached their destination. The vehicles were often dirty and bad riding.

It is quite true that in many cases the buses are running less erratically and are keeping better to schedule. This has been claimed as a vindication of the scheme, but the following should be borne in mind when considering this aspect:

- *Operation of the trams was inefficient. Many tram drivers deliberately went at a slow speed, even when higher speeds were possible. It is doubtful whether any encouragement was given from higher quarters.*
- *There is no doubt that the trams could have been operated more efficiently and it is interesting to note that many tram systems operate their cars regularly, frequently and efficiently.*
- *The London trams were dirty because no one bothered to clean them, and bad riding because maintenance was poor.*
- *No effort was made to put the track into first-class condition. In the circumstances, it was hardly surprising that the trams were unpopular.*
- *As regards the effect on passengers waiting to board vehicles, the result has been definitely retrospective. Queues have lengthened because the capacity of the routes has, in most cases, dropped considerably.*
- *On top of this, many services have been cut.*
- *The result of the conversion is therefore, in general, a deterioration of services.*

Economics
It has been claimed that the trams in South London were losing £1,000,000 per annum. For 100 miles of route, this is fantastic. It is suggested that, if they were losing this amount of money, the department concerned is inefficient, and the matter should be investigated. Glasgow has the largest tramway system in the country and, although, at the moment it is also losing money, it is doing so at only a third of the rate in London. (The financial result of the re-introduction of penury. Fares on the Glasgow trams, and in some cases, buses will be watched with interest).

It was admitted at the Transport Tribunal in 1950 that the increase in fares (which came into effect on October 1st 1950) was not considered unreasonable in view of the cost of the tramway conversion scheme. Now fares are to go up again!

General
Despite the objection of many Londoners to the trams, several quarters have asked for a trial of modern trams. London Transport has refused all these requests and also turned down all offers to provide a tram for this purpose.

It will be seen that the public have not been allowed to have a say in the matter. It is feared that the authorities have decided that the trams must go, and that the policy must be carried through despite all protests and adverse effects.

It has already been mentioned that the public were not given an opportunity to see a practical demonstration of modern tramways. Despite this, a modernisation plan, based on existing routes, was prepared and submitted to the Executive for their consideration. The plan could not be considered on the grounds that the Executive was committed to the tram scrapping policy – a rather peculiar statement, since they instigated the scheme.

In a letter to the *Kentish Mercury* on 18th August 1950, Alan Watkins wrote:

Sir,
As a regular user of London's trams, I welcome the scrapping of the existing vehicles, but do not think that buses are best as their replacement. Having subscribed to the cry "Scrap the trams," I have since experienced all forms of public road transport, and visited cities where trams are modern, fast (no swaying or lumbering), and operated efficiently at cheap fares (Glasgow- 14 miles for 4d). Also, the usual results of tramway abandonment have been longer queues, inferior service, more accidents and congestion, and higher fares. This will be so in London if the trams go; and one major inconvenience is the increase of the 7d maximum fare to 1s. 3d. I therefore welcome, however belated, any plan for tramway modernisation as an alternative to these inconveniences.

Yours faithfully,

A. J Watkins

CHAPTER 10
CAMPAIGN SATIRE

Participants in this campaign produced a satirical magazine called *Bell Punch*. I have a copy of some of these magazines in the late Alan J. Watkins' handwriting. I thought that it would be interesting to include some excerpts from them. One article is particularly amusing and not entirely related to tramway campaigning.

WRITING TO THE PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICER.
The diversion of writing to the PRO is a most unrewarding one. Those used to it do not usually expect a reply, but do at least get a good laugh from it.
The life history of a letter to the PRO is interesting to trace.

Having arrived at the headquarters of the transport authority in question, all letters are sorted into grades labelled:

1. *Praise*
2. *Enquiry*
3. *Protest*
4. *Stinking*

The number of letters in the first and second categories is negligible, while categories three and four comprise the bulk of the correspondence. Letters in the first and second categories are normally answered promptly i.e. in ten or twelve days. Letters in the other categories do not usually receive answers for some time, this presumably in the hope that the writer had forgotten what he protested about, for the reply often bears no resemblance to the subject of the original letter.

Category four is the most interesting, and we will follow the history of such a letter.
A gentleman one day waits an abnormally long time for his transport, and decides to tell the operators where they get off, and with pen dipped in poison, proceeds to retail the sins of his local transport services.

The massive missive is conveyed via the usual channels to the palatial headquarters of the wrongdoers and together with other similar epistles is sorted as above.
"Stinking" letters are conveyed by officials wearing rubber gloves, gas capes and respirators to a place where they are allowed to cool off.

When the dust is thick enough the letter in question is first opened, then read and forwarded to the "Stock Phrases and Platitudes Dept." Round the walls are large cabinets full of phrases designed to confuse the issue and divulge nothing.
The reply, having been duly processed and vetted, probably appears as follows:

Dear Sir,
We thank you for your letter of the 14th ult.
Buses on service run at 3 minute intervals and full investigation has failed to reveal any irregularity at the time and date to which you refer.
As you are no doubt aware, the trams are being replaced by a more mobile form of transport, but trolleybuses were not chosen as these vehicles are route bound in much the same way as trams.

We are sorry that the state of certain trams gives cause for complaint, and sections of track are, in your opinion, in bad repair. Last year, miles of track way were relaid, and tramcar maintenance accords with the highest standards of safety.

You refer to the apparently unnecessary removal of stop signs, station nameplates, etc., and their replacement by new type signs. We assure you that all signs replaced have reached the end of their useful life.
We thank you for drawing our attention to the above matters.

Yours , etc.

And this is what he could have written in an uncensored reply:

Dear Sir,
After several weeks of dust gathering, the department has condescended to open your letter.
We agree with you that service is atrocious. The buses run how and when they like, but we do not intend to do anything about it.
So you dare to question the policy of replacing trams by buses, instead of trolleybuses! We have no more to say on this subject.
We agree that the trams and tracks are falling to bits, but you must realise that specially low standards of maintenance are part of our policy.
Perfectly good signs and nameplates are removed and replaced by others bearing garish replicas of our insignia, the sign of the greatest transport authority in the world.

So, if you intend to write to the PRO you know what to expect!

Another amusing item was a satire in verse that could be sung to a chorus from "The Pirates of Penzance" by Gilbert and Sullivan. It is entitled:

,

TRAMATHOLOGY

O! What a glorious opportunity
To scrap the trams with impunity
For we must have vehicles with elasticicity,
-We want nothing on the road that runs on electricity.
At Penhall there is every facility,
To carry out our latest imbecility
For it can be nothing but insanity,
Preventing this is an asset to humanity.

Satire was also portrayed in this mock advertisement:

LATHAM BARNES & CO. UNLTD.
DEMOLITION CONTRACTORS
FA(I)RE RAISING A SPECIALITY
ALL FORMS OF DESTRUCTION WORK UNDERTAKEN.

SPECIAL TERMS FOR RAILED VEHICLES
OUR NEW REFUSE DESTRUCTOR CATERS FOR ALL TYPES OF BUSES.

NO ONE CAN MATCH OUR QUOTATIONS WHICH ARE HIGHLY FARE.
HEAD OFFICE: BROADWAY THEATRE, LONDON. TEL: RELapse 000 Dear.

WORKS: PENHALL ROAD, CHARLTON. TEL: CRD 1597 (No Extensions).

TELEGRAMS; TRAMAWAY, LONDON, E.1.

FIRE SUBSTATION: CHANGE-PIT, DOWNHAM. TEL: C(L)A 1796.

CIRCUMSTANCES (FORTUNATELY) BEYOND OUR CONTROL

LEADS TO OUR FELTHAM DEPOT BEING

CLOSED.

TEL. ENQUIRIES – B (R) N 109.

On the political front in December 1951:

The motto of the new Government seems to be, 'Nothing succeeds like recess.'

A complaint from the LRTL.

The League complains that little information is forthcoming from members in tramway centres. Certainly news from London, Liverpool and Birmingham is on the scrappy side.

Another (not very complimentary) advertisement:

VISIT THE FLEECE SHOP
55, BROADWAY, S.W.1.
THE BEST SHEEP LIVE HERE
Let us pull the wool over your eyes.

ADVICE TO BEGINNERS:
HOW TO TRAVEL BY BUS
OR
DID YOUR MOTHER COME FROM
LEYLAND?

Owing to circumstances beyond their control, many people are faced with the frightening necessity of having to go about their daily business by bus. This article is designed to lessen the fears of those unaccustomed to this form of transport.

The first thing to do is to find the bus terminus. This is not as easy as it sounds. In districts where tramways have been scrapped this is usually hidden cunningly away in some inaccessible side street.

This is done on purpose, so that the service seems adequate to cope with the traffic. There is no redress, however for the Executive is not responsible for the failure of passengers to find the bus terminus.

The exhausted passenger arrives at the terminus, the conductor and driver, who the moment beforehand, have been loafing against the radiator, leap into frenzied action. The bus starts with a jolting, and all standing passengers assume a horizontal position. If one intends to brave the top deck, the conductor may ask for one's fare on the platform; at this instant the bus turns a sharp corner, and it is a toss up between you and centrifugal force.

It is well to read the regulations regarding public service vehicles before travelling. How many passengers know that it is an offence not to raise your hat when entering the London Transport area; also that it is an offence to alight from a vehicle other than by the doors and openings provided for that purpose. Though we feel that an exit from the top deck window would prove hazardous in normal circumstances. The regulation forbidding the throwing of money on the pavement to be scrambled for seems unnecessary; you couldn't do this after paying your fare.

The sensible passenger thus boards the bus and mounts the stairs, bracing himself against the top of the staircase for the first pause in the transmission. If he hurries to his seat, he will be just in time to miss the second pause. However, his troubles have just started. A sharp look out should be kept for ruts in the road, drain covers and the like.

Looking out of the window, the passenger observes little groups of people waving at the bus every few hundred yards. This is not applause, but (intending) passengers waiting at request stops. The usual method of obviating the nuisance of having to stop is for the driver to wait for the bus in front to stop, and then rush past the stop. How can a driver keep to schedule if he has to stop on the route?

Sometimes drivers become lonely when there are no other buses about, and so run in convoy; this is "a banana service." Other bus driving tactics include the "pincer movement", in which any vehicle approaching a bus stop is forced into the kerb, and the "kerb-polishing erosion service," much in evidence in narrow streets.

Some years ago, the heads of the bus industry got together to design a bus in which the lower deck passengers would bump their heads, and the upper deck passengers would be unable to see out of the windows. This is known as the low-bridge bus, and the occupational disease of their passengers is "low-bridge bus neck."

The observant passenger notices that buses are divided into different types: Uncomfortable and very uncomfortable. The Regent Type (AEC) is chiefly distinguished by the fact that it is the only bus that lurches violently when it is standing still. This is due to the improved air compression brakes which announce

their approach by a loud shrieking noise. The foregoing remarks also apply to the Regent Type (Leyland), but in addition, this type can be identified be the pneumatic drill motion of the steering column, to which drivers are introduced by a spell with a permanent way gang.

Of course all these bumps and vibrations cause such a rattling in the bus that, after a time, conversation is impossible, and this is out of the question anyway on one type of bus that has such a rough engine that ones voice is turned to sand paper.

Sometimes in winter bus drivers haven't the foggiest idea where they are going, but the passengers are taken on a cheap mystery tour. The torchlight processions are one of the sights.

Even the hardiest bus traveller must recoil from a journey in icy conditions. If there is a steep camber on the road, it often happens that the vehicle cannot restart, which is, perhaps, just as well. It is useful to remember that, if the bus cannot remain in an upright position, passengers may break the glass to escape (having previously obtained the permission of the Executive.)

But, strange as it may seem, there are still people who actually **like** buses!

This article concludes my selection from *Bell Punch*. The magazine during its brief period of publication contained many satirical articles, poems and advertisements. Maybe, the enthusiasts and campaigners felt that a little fun at the LTPB's expense helped to keep them sane.

The last tram in London. 21/7/1953. © F. Merton Atkins. [1] Under this tarpaulin is snow broom 022 , former LCC B class car 106 at Penhall Road . This has now been restored by London County Council Tramways Trust as an open top car and now runs at The National Tramway Museum at Crich in Derbyshire.
(A.J.Watkins'collection).

[1] The author has been unable to trace the copyright holder of Mr. F. Merton Atkins' photograph.

CHAPTER 11

CONCLUSION: THE END AND A NEW BEGINNING

On July 5th 1952, the last tram ran in London. Most of the trams were burnt at the "tramatorium" at Penhall Road, Woolwich. Julian Thompson in his book *London Trams in Camera* states that on July 4th 1952, the League said:

Tomorrow we come to what is surely the blackest day in tramway history.

A few trams were saved for posterity. July 5th 1952 marked the apparent failure of a long campaign.

No one would have imagined that 35 years later a light railway would emerge in London. The Docklands Light Railway opened in 1987, and has proved to be so popular that it has been extended to link Lewisham with Greenwich thus providing a vital link between South London and the City.

THE DOCKLAND'S LIGHT RAILWAY
A FLOURISHING AND GROWING SYSTEM

Docklands Light Railway cars at Greenwich Station 2008. (Author's photograph).

In 1991 the feasibility of a tram link in Croydon was mooted and in 1992 the Croydon Tramlink Act was passed. The construction of the tramway system caused much disruption to the centre of Croydon and some people were opposed to Tramlink. Nevertheless the year 2000 saw trams running again on the streets of Croydon. The livery of the cars is the same as that of the old trams and the numbers of the cars followed on from the last number of the last old tram, which was a nice touch! Tramlink is proving to be very popular with people and one can now hear being said

You can take the tram to such and such a place!

The Croydon Tramlink begun. (Author's photograph 1994).

New tram tracks in George Street, Croydon. (Author's photograph 1994).

The seeds of modernising the trams to provide a fast, clean and efficient transport service were sown in that campaign. As a result, the campaign did not fail.

The vehicles of both the Docklands Light Railway and the Croydon Tramlink are well designed, light and airy and cater for the needs of all passengers.
Other light railway systems have been developed in some of our other major cities namely:

System	Year Opened
Tyne and Wear Metro	1980
Manchester Metro	1991
Sheffield Supertram	1994
Midland Metro	1995
Nottingham	2004
Dublin	2005

Readers of *Tramways and Urban Transit*, formerly *Modern Tram*way, will be aware that there are now many proposals for further tramway development in London and other large conurbations.
It must be a wonderful feeling for members of the Light Rail Transit Association, previously the Light Railway Transport League, who participated in the campaign of 1946-1952, to be able to see the positive results of their action.

However, articles in *Tramways and Urban Transit* stress that the campaign for light rail must continue.

In the June 1998 issue of *Tramways and Urban Transit* there is an article entitled, *London is Grinding to a Standstill.* It states that the average speed of vehicular travel is 10 mph on account of traffic congestion! It is very strange that the argument for getting rid of the trams in London in 1952 was to cure traffic congestion! The enthusiasts for retaining the London trams always said that the trams would alleviate congestion! Today, those in power and in charge of transport development embrace this philosophy! If these people had been listened to then, London trams would have been modernised to a high standard, and much money would have been saved.

In the November 2001 issue of *Tramways and Urban Transit* there is a brief report entitled:

Livingstone seeks public views on the London Tram.

Forty seven years after 1952, a leading member of the Light Rail Transit Association Mr. G.B.Claydon writing in Tramway and Urban Transit" July 1999:

Reliable, fast, frequent,clean, safe and secure – that's the tram!

The tram is dead! Long live the tram!

Trams outside East Croydon station. October 2000. (author's photograph).

CHAPTER 12

ALAN JOHN WATKINS 1926-1993: SOME BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS

Alan John Watkins was born in Welling, Kent, on July 7th 1926, the only child of Florence and Walter Watkins. His father became Senior Technical Officer at W.T. Henley's Cable and Telegraph Works at North Woolwich; and his mother trained as a dressmaker, but did not work after her marriage.

Passport photograph of Alan John Watkins.

Alan had a middle-class upbringing and received a mainly private education, namely at the now defunct Upton College, Bexleyheath, and, from 1940-1944, at Dartford Grammar School for Boys. He experienced some state education during the early part of the Second World War when he went to stay on the Isle of Wight. Alan had a year in the Sixth form at Dartford and wanted to attend University, but his parents refused. Alan was disappointed – but did not argue with his parents!

To avoid going into the armed forces, Alan was apprenticed as a Mechanical Engineer at Eastleigh Locomotive Works. Alan suffered from asthma and the apprenticeship was considered to be better than square bashing! The apprenticeship was commensurate with a degree from Southampton University, but work and asthma took its toll and he failed to graduate.

Later, in 1955, he embarked on an external course in Transport Studies at London University and obtained a Certificate in 1963. To gain the Certificate, Alan had to sit several examination papers and write a dissertation, which was entitled:
The Social Effects of the Motor Car on Public Transport.

In 1950, Alan left British Rail Southern Region locomotive works at Eastleigh to commence work as a wages and general clerk with F. Trevillion Ltd., which was a firm of haulage contractors at Slade Green, Erith, Kent. From 1951-1964, he held a post as a cost and invoice clerk with the Reliance Telephone Company Ltd. Cheapside, London. The firm relocated to Wellingborough, but Alan did not wish to

live there, so he took voluntary redundancy, and subsequently obtained a post with Engelhard Industries as a sales and invoice clerk.

On account of relocation to St John's Street in London and the poor working conditions there, he took early retirement with voluntary redundancy in 1983. A few months later, he obtained a post in the Works Department at Queen Mary's Hospital, Sidcup. In 1990 he contracted cancer and retired early.

Alan's hobbies and interests were wide-ranging. He was passionately interested in transport, especially tramways, railways and paddle steamers. In connection with his interest in transport, Alan and various friends travelled extensively, especially in the Home Counties.

In connection with his interest in transport, Alan would occasionally meet one of the apprentices from Eastleigh works, a Mr. E. Trotter, who told me that in 1946 Alan had invited him to Bexley where they travelled by three tram routes and one trolley bus. Mr Trotter had hit his head on the trolleybus roof. Alan said *"you can't stand up in these, you are not on a tram, now."*" This rather tortuous journey from London to Bexley was primarily to show Mr Trotter a part of the tramway system. The return journey by rail was much shorter.

Alan, together with fellow enthusiasts, travelled over all the tram and bus routes of London, thus acquiring an encyclopaedic knowledge of transport in the Capital. He went on many of these journeys in the company of Mr. John Walton, now many years deceased, and the well-known author of tramway books, Mr. Julian Thompson, who now resides in the Philippines. Being interested in various forms of public transport, they visited the newly opened Shenfield Electric line in 1949. They took paddle steamer trips to Southend and did the return journey by train. Mr. Thompson informed me that, until 1954, you could ride on the trolleybuses there.

Later Alan met Mr Trotter at a boat show! Apparently, Alan was contemplating a narrow boat holiday. (Alan could not swim!)

Mr Trotter last saw Alan was at Neasden Works open day in 1963 to commemorate the centenary of the Metropolitan Railway the predecessor of the London Underground. Knowing his interest in steam traction, Alan said, rather drily, "*What are you doing among all this electrical equipment?"*

On one occasion, Alan did the journey by paddle steamer from Ilfracombe to Swansea, arriving at Swansea at 2a.m., and was surprised to find that there was nowhere open for breakfast, especially after a very stormy crossing!

Not only was he interested in transport but he also was a keen rambler and a member of Morley College Rambling Club, where he used to lead walks and youth hostelling weekends. He had a detailed knowledge of Ordnance Survey maps and railway timetables, which made him an invaluable member of the club. Alan was patient with people and took great trouble in giving fellow members the help and information they required. He also enjoyed classical music, especially the music of Elgar, Holst and Vaughan Williams.

It was through Morley College rambling club that Alan met me, as I was working in the library there at that time.

We were married on 25th March 1972 and were very happy because we were able to share very many interests together walking music travel and transport.

Alan contemplating the scene at Cwmcarn Scenic Drive, Gwent. June 1989. (author's photograh).

We had many interesting discussions on wide ranging topics. He was a very knowledgeable and stimulating companion. Alan died on 10th August 1993. His demise was untimely, and I hope that by writing this account of his part in the campaign to save the London tramways I have contributed a little to transport knowledge.

Alan at Smallbrook Junction Isle of Wight Steam Railway. July 1990. (author's photograph).

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