

# Wargrave Local History Society

Latest News - May 2006

## The Thames Valley Traction Company

The Wargrave Local History Society meeting in May began with a period of reflection following the death of Brian Fennemore. Brian had been a member of the committee since 1984, vice chairman from 1985, and chairman from 1990.

Our guest, Paul Lacey, told us about the Thames Valley Traction Co in the 1930s and 40s. The early fleet was based on ex War Department lorry chassis from WW I - the company engineer being fond of those of Thornycroft make. They had over 100, and when they moved to a new garage in Reading, found enough 'spare parts' to build another one! A couple of these small buses were retained at Maidenhead, as being built higher from the ground, they could pass along the Cookham road in time of flood - the drivers navigating by means of the iron railings at the roadside. An aerial photograph from the early 30s showed a large bow-wave around the double-decker on this road.

The company had many garages across its area - some large, such as Maidenhead or Reading, some small, like Ascot (many staff were related, and there was a 'family atmosphere'), or 'dormitory' sheds, as at Crowthorne. They were basic structures, often a corrugated iron frame, with minimal facilities, but enabled earlier morning and later evening services to be run than if the buses came out from Reading. The sheds were painted green - the original colour of the buses - and many of the staff also had house doors, windows and garden sheds of exactly the same shade!!

The 'main road' routes were from Maidenhead to Reading and on to Newbury. Many of the other routes were determined by the position of river crossings., and the fundamental pattern has not changed greatly. A number of services were started by the Marlow and District company, founded in 1925, including that from Marlow to Henley, Wargrave and Wokingham. Marlow and District was founded as a testing ground for Karrier Motors, of Huddersfield, by two of its directors Herbert and Reginald Clayton. The former lived in Wargrave, the latter at Marlow. Some of their buses had locks on the bonnets, so that only authorised fitters could work on the engines. In due course, the Marlow firm was taken over by Thames Valley, who diverted the route south of Wargrave to Reading and numbered it 28 - now-a-days the 328.

Another innovation came when Robert Thackray, who had experience of 'pirate' buses in London, retired to Calcot. He noticed the increasing number of express coaches coming past from Bristol, South Wales etc, but that these were usually full by the time they got to Reading, so he started a Reading - London service - to the surprise of Thames Valley. Using fast Gilford coaches, they ran from Thackray's coach station at Cemetery Junction along the Bath Road - at one stage every 30 minutes. Thackray added a connecting service from Wokingham to Wargrave, and then to the Queen Victoria, where passengers could change

into the London service. Thackray also bought up two small firms running through Remenham and Crazies Hill. Due to the narrow lanes, the licence allowed buses with not more than 14 seats - as his smallest vehicles had 26, he merely took out 12 seat to 'comply'! Thames Valley responded to the challenge by spending money on new coaches in 1932 - probably the finest the company ever owned. At times there would be as many as 16 vehicles on the run, such was the demand, with fares about a third of that for going by train. The engines on these coaches were 8 litre 6 cylinder petrol engines, and very quiet in operation.

Thames Valley was never a 'well off' company, and so when they next wanted to invest in new coaches, it was not easy. The company engineer even arranged for petrol engines, being replaced by diesels, to be reconditioned and fitted in the later coaches they had, as a way to achieve what was needed.

In much of the area around Wargrave, the coming of the bus routes led to a lot of development, particularly alongside the main roads between the towns. People - few of whom had cars - could live in pleasant surroundings but easily travel to a place of work, or to town for the cinema, shopping etc. For those interested in knowing more, Paul has written several books on the history of the local bus companies.

Paul has written many books on the subject of local Bus and Coach Services, and these can be seen on his web page, [www.paullaceytransportbooks.co.uk](http://www.paullaceytransportbooks.co.uk)

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