

# OTA

ONLINE  
TRANSPORT  
ARCHIVE

This newsletter is being compiled just as some of the more severe restrictions resulting from the global Covid-19 outbreak are being lifted, but for many people we know that their usual activities may be constrained for some time to come. Most of all, we hope that you remain in good health and can look forward to some degree of normality returning. Because of the lockdown, there may be a delay in sending out printed copies of this newsletter by post but it will reach our email recipients on schedule. If you are able to swap from postal to electronic delivery, it would help us greatly, both in

## Newsletter

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administrative and cost terms, so please contact the secretary using the details overleaf. Here goes, with a couple of collection profiles and some other items of news.

### Profile: Jack Law (1926-2011)



Jack Law was born and educated in South London. During 1944-1946 he served in the Royal Signals Corps but was discharged because of an eye injury. From 1946 to 1986 he worked for Decca as a Recording Engineer. A colleague wrote "he was one of Decca's finest classical music engineers recording the best orchestras, operas and concerts especially in Vienna." He was a warm, friendly, well-travelled man with a memorable sense of humour.

By the late 1940s, Jack was one of four enthusiasts who decided to film the passing of London's trams and to also produce authentic tape recordings. Drawing on his professional expertise, he was able to record the 1950-1952 abandonment programme, in particular the late night celebrations on each of the eight group of routes as they closed. He was only able to use minute-long tapes and, in some instances, approached residents on a given route so he could plug into their power supply. In effect, he pioneered the art of recording public transport vehicles in action. His associates were Geoffrey Ashwell, the group leader and filmmaker, and Victor Jones and John Meredith who generally aided and abetted and perhaps, more importantly, shared the finances and also helped to heave the bulky tape-recording equipment on and off the vehicles.

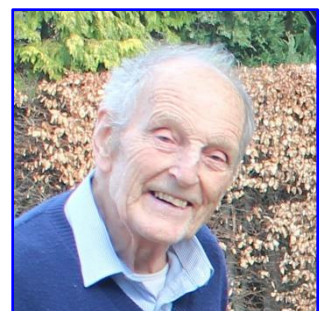
Jack's recordings are truly remarkable. Although tape recorders only became available for the general public in 1950, the group made the first recording that August capturing the unforgettable sound of the magnetic track brakes on car 1768. Initially the recordings were made purely for their own interest but, some 20 years, later a series of records was issued commercially under the Argo label of the Decca Record Company.



As part of this group, Jack was involved in producing seven complete films including one each on London's trams and buses, three early 1950s 'transport scrapbooks' covering everything from paddle steamers to railways and two features – *Manx Excursion* (1953) and *Northern Journey* (1954). Later, the group also covered many of the tours organised by the Southern Counties Touring Society. Jack played the major role in creating all these 'classics'. Once the film sequences were edited, he assembled a sound track consisting of a commentary, music and appropriate sound effects which could then be run in conjunction with the film. Today, these historic recordings, together with some of the group's original films, are lodged with the Archive.

### John Meredith (1928-2020)

Just as this newsletter was about to go to press, OTA was saddened to receive news of the death of Jack Law's long-time friend, John Meredith whom we profiled in an earlier newsletter (issue 6, August 2015) which is available for download from our website if you don't have a copy. John had remained in good health and very active until the last 12 months. OTA would like to send condolences to John's family and friends at this sad time.



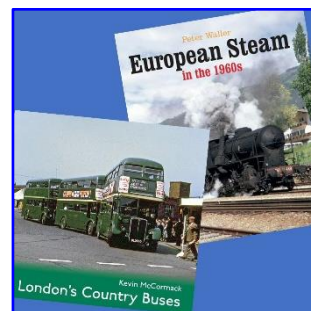
### Facebook



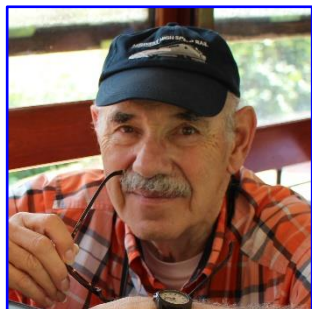
Since the last edition of the newsletter, OTA's Facebook presence has been attracting an ever-growing number of followers ([www.facebook.com/OnlineTransportArchive](http://www.facebook.com/OnlineTransportArchive)). In the knowledge that people might be spending more time on social media during the lockdown, we made the decision to ramp up our posting from one to three a week, generally two archive postings, and one of a more 'administrative' nature, telling people about the workings of the Archive. If you use Facebook and haven't paid the page a visit yet, please do so. Almost every picture generates a series of appreciative comments. One nice touch was when we put up Richard Thompson's image of a steam loco driver leaning on his steed at Liverpool Exchange in the 1960s (left). Within a couple of days, we received a comment

from an Alan Penketh telling us the driver in question was Jack Penketh, his uncle! OTA was delighted to send the family a high resolution scan of the picture.

'Admin' posts have included a number of 'Meet our Trustees' profiles. An item about sorting collections (see later) featured a picture of your newsletter editor's dining table, which was shared by many other organisations, giving the table an unexpected 15 minutes of fame! We've also used it to publicise recent books which feature OTA images, such as *European Steam in the 1960s* by Peter Waller and *London's Country Buses* by Kevin McCormack. OTA relies on outlets such as these for much of its income, so please keep buying even during the current crisis



## Profile: Ray DeGroot



It is no exaggeration to say that Ray is among the most widely-travelled of all enthusiasts and photographers. He was born in 1930 in Chicago, a city which has been his home for his entire life. Professionally, he graduated from Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois before carving out a career in the emerging intermodal freight sector, working for companies such as the Southern Pacific Railway, American President Lines and Mitsui OSK Lines before he retired in 1995. His passion for transport grew from an early interest in trams and expanded into collecting tickets, maps and timetables to travelling within the USA and across the globe. He was also an early convert to colour slides.

An early camera was an Argus C3 'Brick' which he still has today, on which he mastered the techniques of colour photography. He worked his way through a succession of makes, including Contaflex, Ricoh and Canon, but has resisted the move to digital, still being able to buy slide film in Chicago and have it developed. He travelled extensively around his home country before branching out into overseas travel from 1955 onwards. To many British people, he is best known for his trip to the British Isles in the period 12 May to 1 June 1955, during which he visited just about every electric railway and tramway, taking many rare photographs along the way, and maintaining a detailed trip diary. OTA is grateful that these are all secured through the Archive and that it has already been able to incorporate the excellent images into many fundraising books.



From that first overseas trip, Ray singles out the Isle of Man. In his words "It has to take top honors with the variety of rolling stock and lines, and its very survival today as a major tourist attraction and railfan center today." Other favourites he remembers are Rio de Janeiro and other South American systems with their second-hand trams from US systems, and the Syrian city of Aleppo. He has been a long-standing member of many enthusiast bodies – he is particularly proud of having been an LRTA member since 1952 – and preservation centres, such as the Illinois Railway Museum. Ray turns 90 in July and OTA would like to wish him a hearty Many Happy Returns.



## Sorting of slide collections

Although the Archive has, effectively, been closed since the beginning of the lockdown, OTA trustees have been able to continue working at home on sorting, scanning and writing work. We have mentioned in previous newsletters how we



have often received collections in a totally unsorted fashion and it can be a very daunting prospect at times, knowing where to start. Significant help has come through the acquisition of a supply of bespoke low-acid slide storage boxes obtained through The Bus Archive. Just in the nick of time! – we collected them (in flat-pack form) on 18 March, literally days before the lockdown started and immediately before The Bus Archive themselves shut down. Holding anything up to 1000 slides each, the boxes not only aid the sorting process, but also reduce the physical space need to store certain collections.

Purchase of the slide boxes – which cost £8-9 each – was funded by a generous donation from 'Curly' Cross. Profiled in Newsletter 3 (August 2013), Curly has been a long-standing supporter and benefactor of the Archive, for which OTA is extremely grateful. He also turns 90 this year, in June this time. So we finish with another rousing chorus of Happy Birthday!

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