

# OTA

ONLINE  
TRANSPORT  
ARCHIVE

## Newsletter

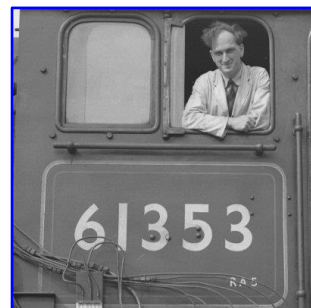
Issue 15  
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Nearly a year on from the start of the pandemic, we still find ourselves in a state of lockdown, but hopefully the roll-out of the vaccines will soon allow some degree of normality to be resumed. We hope that all of our readers are managing to avoid Covid and remain in good health. This newsletter is going out mid-March in digital form, but printing and despatch may be delayed briefly for those who still get theirs through the post.

OTA has continued as described in our last newsletter. Collections are still coming in, scanning continues and there is

a lot of work on book projects, including some recently published titles, although our premises remain closed. Work has restarted on a major programme of film digital transfers and we have taken the opportunity here to say a bit about this. The item below has been provided by Alan Pearce, to whom OTA is extremely grateful for acting as project manager and for liaising with those undertaking the transfers.

We have also been catching up with preparing biographies of photographers whose work is in the archive and we now have quite a bank of material which we will use in future newsletters. In doing this, we realised that OTA has not previously featured a profile of John McCann, so we have devoted the whole of page 2 to his remarkable collection of negatives, slides and cine films.



### Digital film transfers



Over recent years the quality available economically for scanning cine films has increased considerably and thus OTA has been taking advantage with monies donated for scanning. With two professional scanners equipped with modern equipment we have been able to get much more work done so helping us to make more sales to users. Whilst getting this underway it has been realised that there are very considerable variations in the electronic standards used in the industry.

We have worked with the scanners to set good defined standards so we have high resolution scanning that is useable worldwide. We have settled for 12-15MB/s data rate with MP4 standard presentation. From this, all the various productions in PAL or NTSC can be created to make DVD, Blue Ray, Tape and other modes available from our archived files. We are thus trying to make our archive more appealing to television and film companies for them to use and thus improve our income.



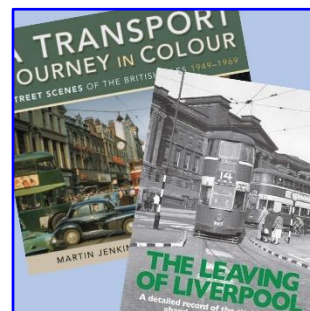
Collections currently underway are those of Fred Ivey (left), John A Clarke and the late Jack Parkinson, and we have just reached an agreement with the family of the late Geoff Todd to make a start on transferring his unrivalled collection of transport films featuring railways and tramways from around the world. It's not a cheap exercise and we have already committed nearly £8000 to the project. We welcome donations for scanning any films we have and for any more film donations, if possible including scanning costs, from enthusiasts needing a permanent home for their work. Getting films scanned makes them so much

more useable for all purposes and thus makes OTA much more appreciated in the world wide video industry.

### News in brief

Many thanks to those who responded to our request in the last newsletter for financial donations. Don't forget that as a UK Registered Charity, OTA is able to take advantage of Gift Aid meaning that the archive is able to claim 25% extra on most donations it receives.

Fundraising books *Tramways in Vienna in Colour (1956-78)* (LRTA), *A Transport Journey in Colour: Street Scenes of the British Isles 1949-1969* (Pen and Sword) and *The Leaving of Liverpool* (LRTA) all came out in quick succession and have been receiving some excellent reviews. *Transport Journey* was even featured on the *Daily Mail* website, although blame the caption errors (such as a 1945-built bus being photographed in Coventry in 1940) on the *Mail's* sub-editors, not the book's authors!



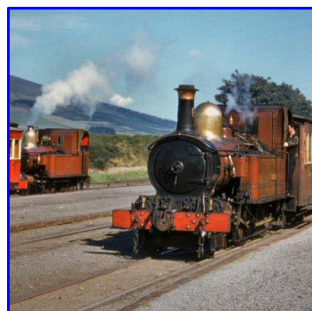
Other releases heavily featuring OTA material which are now available include *Streets of London's Buses* by Kevin McCormack (Capital Transport), *Britain's Secondhand Trams* by Peter Waller (Pen and Sword) and the DVD *Isle of Wight Railways in Colour 1953-1994* (Unique Publishing).

## Profile: J B C McCann (1925-1996)



John McCann was an excellent photographer with a real eye for composition. He took his first black and white photos shortly after the end of the war. He was also early in the field of colour taking his first slides in the early 1950s including a couple of London trams as well as some delightful scenes on the Isle of Man, one of his favourite haunts. Determined to leave a lasting record of the things he loved, he also invested in a cine camera and, from the mid-1950s, he also began to travel abroad where he focused mainly on steam, especially narrow gauge.

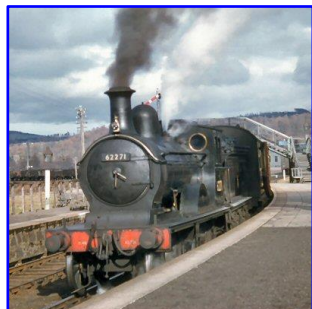
He was born in Wirral on 13 July 1925 and lived in Wallasey until beginning work for the railways. He served an engineering apprenticeship at the Doncaster Plant of the LNER, where he worked on the Peppercorn A1 Pacifics which were passing through the erecting shop at the time. He obtained a BSc degree from Sheffield University, going on to achieve Chartered Engineer status through the IMechE. He subsequently joined the initial staff of the Locomotive Testing Station at Rugby, just prior to its official opening in October 1948, where he was involved in the development of new data recording equipment allowing much more accurate measurements of horsepower to be obtained. One of John's favourite stories involved a day when they were testing a Class 9F 2-10-0 when they had an extended lunch and then went back to the loco only to find the fire had gone out!



In the late 1950s, John transferred to the Research Department at Derby, where he initially worked on wind-tunnel projects. Later he joined the Field Trials section which organised various tests, such as vacuum brake trials on very long freight trains hauled by double-headed 9Fs. He then specialised in investigating and analysing freight train derailments, which had become a major



source of concern during the 1960s and 70s. Towards the end of his career, he was in charge of the investigation team when he and his team would be on 24/7 call out to incidents. They and their findings were highly respected throughout the industry and also by HMRI.



During his time at Rugby, in particular, he frequently rode the footplate, especially to and from his family home on Merseyside. Although his initial career largely involved Gresley locomotives, he had the very highest regard for the Stanier Pacifics and the Edge Hill crews. Always with his camera, he took many shots on the running lines around Rugby as he took the 'short cut' from his place of work to the station. His images were supported by good supporting notes, although deciphering his spidery handwriting is an acquired skill!

He had a wide range of interests in railways and tramways, with some particular favourites being the remaining 4-4-0s of the former Great North of Scotland system (in the early days travelling all the way to Speyside on his trusty Vespa scooter); Switzerland and its railways (particularly the Berner Oberland-Bahnen) which he and his family visited almost every year; and the Isle of Man. The combination of his interests, his considerable professional experience, and his excellent still and cine photography, enabled him to give outstanding lectures to railway societies and other groups. He was in great demand and unstintingly travelled the length of the country to oblige.



John retired in the mid-1980s and continued to live at Derby. He was then able to devote more time to Crich Tramway Museum, where he became one of its leading stalwarts, and also to societies such as the RCTS and SLS. After much soul-searching, John decided to pass his important cine film collection to the fledgling OTA. He died on 24 May 1996 at his home on Derby at the age of 70. Subsequently, his widow Mair and son Andy, passed his negatives and slides to the Archive since when they have appeared in many publications. Martin Jenkins remembers John as "A generous, open, highly-knowledgeable, convivial family man who loved sharing his passion for trains and trams. He was also a memorable demon behind the wheel of a car!"



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In preparing this long-overdue profile, we would like to thank: Martin Jenkins, Mike Crabtree, and Ted Buckley and Gerry Nicholls of the Stephenson Locomotive Society. A full obituary appeared in SLS Journal Vol 72 p126, from which we have drawn some of the material above.