

Update 67

15 May 2025

Richard Bourne

Chair

Speeding Up

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The early weeks of 2025 have seen increased activity on a number of fronts. In the background has been the recognition that September 30th this year will be the 70th anniversary of the final absorption of Chatham Traction into Maidstone and District. Whilst this may sound as if it was the end of all things Traction, much lingered on especially, perhaps, the can-do approach of Luton Depot and its staff, which we're told by many who experienced it lasted well into the years beyond.

For the restoration effort there's now definitely a sense of at last aiming at the finished job. We'll mention below some significant items remaining to be sorted, but added input has helped things along.

AGM March 1st

Before the formalities, we had two invited speakers:

- *Imogen Robertson (Medway's Heritage Place Project Officer) explained that initial work was to determine who should be involved locally and how audience participation could be broadened. An audit of what already exists, including people, places and things, is being carried out to establish where investment would be most effective.*
- *Roger Stagg (Rolling Stock Director, London Bus Museum) spoke of the issues around keeping heritage vehicles operational. The LBM had a collection of around fifty former London buses from a horse bus to a modern accessible electric vehicle; twelve date from the 1930's, when there were major advances in bus design. Preserved buses can be idle for 99% of the time. Consequently an effective maintenance regime cannot be mileage-based; machinery likes to work, at least to modest levels, so as to maintain lubrication and reduce corrosion risks. Components will deteriorate without regular lubrication while some gentle use produces heat and air flows which help such things.*

We look to develop relations with both Imogen and Roger as things progress.

The "official" meeting with 29 attendees in total saw a re-election of the Committee, save for Richard Ratcliffe's withdrawal from Trusteeship after having served from the Friends' earliest days. Financially we were still healthy, although one or two as yet outstanding technical issues may generate significant bills. Another change saw the retirement of both our book-keeper Janet Dyjak and Financial Examiner John Croucher. Our thanks to both for their services. Chatham-based Accountant Andrew Svirskis has now been engaged to handle our finances.

People progress

Seats are one area where the relative simplicity and the number of remaining tasks makes joining in reasonably easy. Seat frame restoration, upholstery and cushion fitting were already complete, but there remained screwing together backs onto frames, and fitting grab pole cushions, seat back grabs and ashtrays (the latter upstairs only, of course...). New volunteers Peter Allen and Robin Watson joined in. There are still things to do, so more scope for such input. Meanwhile James Hodgson, who's been supporting Ian Marsh on the technical stuff for some time now, has indicated his interest in staying with us as things move into the operational phase. To gain an idea of how much fun he's been having have a look at his blog here: <https://forum.retro-rides.org/thread/211037/1939-bristol-k5g-weymann-body?page=23>

Detling

We attended as usual, attracting a good range of interest and hope that bus would be there next year. There are, however, other dates of note before then.....

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How's GKE Doing...?

Ian Marsh took a break from GKE during April, but was keen to have a view on the state of the mechanical work from someone independent with appropriate knowledge. Enter Steve. Now retired, he used to work on buses of similar age and features as GKE. On a Saturday in late March GKE found itself hoisted aloft on Nu-Venture's ramps. A thorough looking-over produced a list of just the sort of detail issues that Ian was expecting, even hoping, would arise. They were divided roughly into things needing a tweak and others needing bedding-in. Brake performance checks were done too, which showed not unexpectedly there was some way to go to achieve satisfaction, but the brake system did work!

Perhaps most importantly the bus is getting the best of attention, plus increasing support and enthusiasm from N-V staff. Our thanks as ever.



Its Down to the Detail.....

Some smaller but prominent items have been appearing in recent weeks. A bit more of this sort of thing still to do - interior mirrors for example, and bell pushes to fit and wire - but its nearly finishing touches time!



Hand grips and Ashtrays by
Peter Allen and Robin Watson



New STOP sign by Phil Paine



Refurbished original platform
light by James Hodgson

Other Things

Destination boxes.

Three on GKE - front, rear and side (over the platform). All three are made to carry single-display blinds, with route numbers included with destination wording where necessary. A dimensional check is needed to ensure all three can accommodate blinds of the same width, and have not been altered by the bodywork attention received during restoration. Photos show that the side boxes were painted over during the war, but we have other possibilities... GKE as we acquired it had no blind rollers, but Nu-Venture have come to the rescue by passing on items from roller blind mechanisms which have become surplus following their replacement by modern electronic indicators.

New blinds will be purchased from Replica Blinds by PWC, who operate from France, but seem to have become the go-to supplier for UK restorations. The new blinds are produced from digital photos of original blinds (some of which we have, thanks yet again to the late Brian Smith).

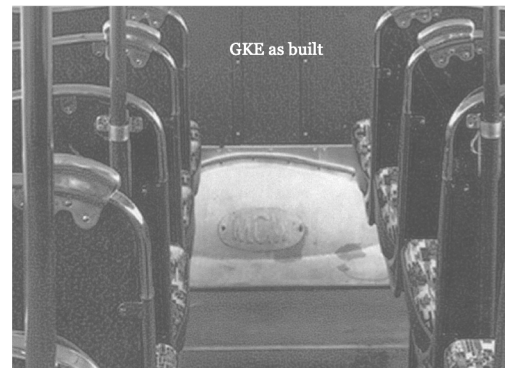


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Gearbox Cover.

This item has haunted us almost from the start. Most will recognise the metal hump that buses of the era had at the front of the lower deck floor. They were aluminium castings, designed to be removed easily for maintenance purposes. Unfortunately this also made theft much easier, and GKE's disappeared long ago whilst the bus languished at Canvey in the 1980s. This being so, we've had to find a way to copy a relatively complex shape with few reference points. After a couple of failed attempts using guesswork supported by photos to produce a pattern for casting we're biting the bullet and going digital. The ability exists to scan items to capture shapes and dimensions, and adjust them to suit and we're talking to people who have the kit and the expertise.



Painting

Probably the last thing to happen. We need to discuss details with James Dawkins, but we're all looking forward to the end result!

GKE 65 is coming home!

We acquired 65 in August 2014, having kept in touch over some years with owner David Moores. He had acquired the vehicle for spares but decided that all his wished-for restorations (of NW Road Car Bristols) were unlikely to come about. Storage for 65 at a farm at St Neots in Cambridgeshire was organised by Paul Baker. Things move on, however. Last year the farm owner gave notice that he was negotiating its sale, and so 65 needed a new home. Richard Ratcliffe used his wide circle of contacts around mid-Kent to find storage in a newly-refurbished farm building on the North Downs. The move south is likely to happen in the summer.



What future for such a vehicle? The chassis and drive train will need similar attention to that received by 68, but restoration to its original stores lorry/breakdown condition would be relatively simple. All the ironwork exists, although new timber is needed for floor and sides. As ever some funding would be necessary. At some time in the future we might consider how the vehicle might help more widely with aspects of Medway's Heritage Place development.

Traction Accessories

We have underway the first batch of leather accessories made from seat trim leather offcuts. Wendy contacted local artist Libbie Watson some time ago, and an arrangement was made to produce some samples to test the likely appeal. Such items are bookmarks, card holders and glasses cases. We'll advertise these when initial quantities are available.



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