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The Southampton Tramways

Introduction

The first trams were horse-drawn, in competition with horse-drawn omnibuses, on routes where it was anticipated that the efficiency of steel wheels on steel rail would justify the expense of laying and maintaining fixed track.

Street tramways were introduced to this country in 1860 at Birkenhead, by an American, George Francis Train, followed a year later by three separate routes in London. Unfortunately, these early lines suffered from the handicap of the rails being laid so that they stood above the road surface, with consequent inconvenience and damage to ordinary traffic. As a result the London lines closed within 12 months, although the original route in Birkenhead survived, to be rebuilt in 1864 with recessed grooved rail, the use of which opened the way for the acceptance of street tramways throughout the U.K.

Generally speaking tramway systems in England went through four phases. Horse trams (c.1870), Electric trams (c.1900), Trolley buses (c.1930), Diesel buses (c.1950). The horse era was mainly privately financed and operated. The change to electric operation in most cases involved municipalisation, in association with the purchase of existing, or new building of electric power generating stations. This was followed by a change to Trolley buses, which still used home generated power, until eventual replacement by the Diesel bus and, in accordance with current government edict, return to private ownership.

Southampton might have followed this pattern, as, in the 1930's, Parliamentary powers were obtained to replace Trams with Trolley buses. However, enthusiasm waned during the decade, and war in 1939 finally ended this prospect. It is probable that wartime economies and their aftermath extended the era of electric transport in Southampton, until its eventual demise on the 31st December 1949.

The Horse Tramways

The issue of *The Southampton Times*, dated March 23rd 1872 carried an item on a recent debate by the Council concerning a Works Committee report on a proposal to lay and operate street tramways in the Borough and suburbs. Apparently the Works Committee approved the proposals by 5 votes to 4, with the Chairman's casting vote being decisive. However, before the full Council there were many objections, in particular regarding the use of Trams along Above Bar and High Street.

Some detail is provided by Sir James Lemon in his Autobiography, where objections mentioned include:- "that they would be dangerous, ruin would befall tradesmen in the High Street, and the only benefit would be for wheelwrights and doctors." One of the objectors was the editor of *The Southampton Times*, Mr Charles Cox, whose editorial stated that the High Street would be greatly deteriorated by the introduction of Trams, which would cause traffic

blocks at the Bargate, however skilfully it was to be regulated. James Lemon was himself in favour of the idea. Although he was confined to bed he presented his views by letter, stating that Trams, in his opinion, caused if anything less obstruction than an omnibus (horse-drawn bus) as Trams had to follow the track, also their breaks (sic) were more efficient, etc. Notwithstanding these points the Council decided that Trams should not be allowed below the proposed junction at Commercial Road.

In spite of this setback the British and Foreign Tramways Company obtained an Act of Parliament dated 6th August 1872 to authorize the construction of Tramways in and near Southampton. However, section 7 required the consent of the Council to be obtained at a special meeting; an attendance of at least 66% being obligatory. If approval was obtained another meeting must follow, not less than one month and not more than two months thereafter, to be of the same opinion. In the event, no change of heart of the Council came about and the Parliamentary powers lapsed after three years.

In the Act, "The Southampton Street Tramways Company" was authorized to construct the following Tramways:-

- 1) Commencing in the main upper turnpike road between Southampton and Winchester, near Alma Road, and proceeding southwards along The Avenue, Bellevue Place, Waterloo Place, East and West Marlands Parks, Anglesea Place, Above Bar Street, High Street, Bridge Street, Bernard Street and Oxford Street, terminating opposite John Street; the line to be single with 8 passing loops.
- 2) Commencing in Portswood Road on the lower turnpike road to Winchester, opposite Highfield Lane, near the Belmont Inn, proceeding south-westwards along Portswood Road, turning along Bevois Road to a Junction with Line 1 in The Avenue; the line to be single track, with 2 passing places.
- 3) Commencing in Shirley at the Junction of Park Street and High Street, passing south-eastwardly through High Street, Shirley Road, Romsey Lane, Four Posts Hill, Commercial Road and the street in front of Anglesea to join Line 1; the line to be single with 4 passing loops.

Also, one line was rejected; this being the continuation of Line 1 from Oxford Street along Canute Road to a terminus near the Floating Bridge, which required several level crossings of the London & South Western Railway Co's lines into the Docks. It was the LSWR's objections which had this section removed.

In passing it is of interest to note changes of street names, viz; Line 1 would now read- The Avenue, London Road, Above Bar, High Street, Bernard Street, Oxford Street; in Line 2 Bevois Road is now Lodge Road, and in Line 3 Romsey Lane has become part of Shirley Road. The upper turnpike road is that to Winchester via Chandlers Ford, and the lower, that to Winchester via Eastleigh and Twyford.

The total route was 4 miles 4 furlongs 8 chains (7043m) and for this distance the number of passing loops appears very sparse, though as presumably it was intended only to run the cars at 30 minute intervals there would not have been any operational problems.

The remaining clauses were mainly as to be expected, being in line with the general provisions of the Tramways Act 1870. Specific clauses included the following:-

- Chapter 9 Only carriage with flanged wheels to run in ground rails to be used, with animal power only.
- Chapter 12 The capital to be £50,000, in five thousand units of £10 each.
- Chapter 27 The first three directors to be:-
Lieutenant Colonel Charles Napier Stuart, Herman Gustav Erichsen and William Morris.
- Chapter 38 Every passenger is entitled to personal luggage not exceeding 28lbs (13 kilos) in weight, without charge.
- Chapter 39 The company may carry small parcels not exceeding 112lbs (51 kilos) at no more than the following rates.
Not exceeding 7lbs – 3d (3.2kilos – 1.3p)
Not exceeding 14lbs – 5d (6.4kilos – 2.1p)
Not exceeding 28lbs – 7d (12.7kilos – 2.9p)
Not exceeding 56lbs – 9d (25.4kilos – 3.8p)
Over 56lbs – any sum which the Company shall think fit.
- Chapter 41 The Company shall run two carriages each way mornings before 7am, and after 6pm evenings (Sundays, Christmas Day and Good Friday excepted) for artisans, mechanics and daily labourers at a fare not exceeding 1 1/2d (0.2p) per mile.

Following the failure of the first proposals the idea of a tramway in Southampton was not allowed to drop, and “new” plans were deposited in 1876 by the “Southampton Tramways Company”. The proposers were William Marshall Cochrane, Woodbine Cloete, George Thomas Harper and Alexander Clunes Sherriff; and with more local backing this time, the blessing of the Corporation and the LSWR was obtained for the full system. The act received the Royal Assent on August 10th 1877 and contained the following clauses which, in effect, overcame the objections which were the cause of the earlier failure:-

1) Tramway No. 1. Between Commercial Road/Terminus Station, and No.2. between St. Lawrence Road/Floating Bridge Road... and the loops or passing places connected with and subsidiary to those tramways, shall be paved with wood (blocks) between the rails, and so much of the road as extends eighteen inches (459mm) beyond the rails on each side of the

tramway shall be paved with granite setts; all to the reasonable satisfaction of the surveyor for the time being of the Borough of Southampton. This solved the problem re. the High Street and Above Bar. Then came the clauses protecting the London & South Western Railway Company...

2) The crossings on the level shall be at the cost of the S.T.C. and also maintained by them at all times to the satisfaction of the LSWR engineer. The traffic of the LSWR shall at all times have precedence over the S.T.C and the cars of the Company shall not approach or pass over any of the lines of the LSWR at a speed greater than four miles per hour, and the cars of the Company shall not on any pretense be permitted to stop upon any of the lines of the LSWR. In working and using the tramway the Company shall at all times, before any car approaches or passes over any such lines of rails, announce and give proper and timely warning of the approach of such car by means of a bell or horn or other such agreed means sounded from such. However, immediately upon the exhibition of a red flag or red light, or ringing of a bell by any servant of the LSWR any such car shall be stopped before it passes over any line of the LSWR.

It then goes on to state that the Railway can take the Company to court to recover any damages caused by the company or its servants, and that not more than one car or carriage shall be drawn by one team of horses.

Of these clauses, the ringing of a bell by a Railway Company servant to warn of a train crossing Canute Road has persisted until recent times, and this is the only reference I can recall of trailers or a train of cars on a horse-drawn passenger tramway.

The other clauses of the Act were as would generally be expected, but I have selected some of the more interesting points as follows:-

6) The Corporation may and shall have power to use the tramways for sanitary purposes at any time between the times of twelve o'clock at night and five o'clock in the morning, paying such tolls as may be agreed between the corporation and the Company.

7) It shall not be lawful for the proprietors at any time to take up or set down any passenger or parcel, or to allow passengers to enter or leave any of their carriages, between a point of ten yards northward of the north side of Hanover Buildings and a point ten yards northward of the subsidiary tramway F shown on the deposited plans (this is the passing loop on the south side of the Bargate). For every such offense ... liable to a penalty not exceeding forty shillings (£2), and any person entering or leaving or attempting to do so (having been warned by a servant of the Company) shall be liable to a like penalty of forty shillings.

10) All carriages used on the tramways shall be moved by horse power only.

29) The tramways shall be completed within two years and six months from the passing of this Act.

33) Every tramway to be made, formed, or laid down under the powers of this Act shall be constructed with two rails on the gauge of four feet eight and a half inches (1435mm), to be laid at a distance (between the outer edges of each rail) of five feet three inches from each other.

38) The Company may widen and improve in the manner shown upon the deposited plans so much of Shirley Road (otherwise Romsey Lane), Four Posts Hill and the Commercial Road ... and may alter the levels of the said portion of road in the manner shown on the deposited section, and may enter upon, take, and such of the lands shown on the deposited plans ... as may be necessary for the purpose of such widening and improving.

48) Gave the Corporation powers of compulsory purchase of the Company any time from eleven years after completion of any section of tramway, but not later than twenty years from the passing of this Act, and allowed for the parties to seek arbitration should they be unable to agree to a price.

Clause No. 38 requires amplifying. As much of the line to Shirley was outside the Borough Boundary, which ran close to the route of Hill Lane, from Burgess Street at the top of The Common, and along Rollesbrook to the River Test (near the present Booking Office on No.1 platform of Southampton Station) in an almost straight line, and this put Four Posts under the jurisdiction of the Shirley Local Board. Owing to the route along Commercial Road/Four Posts Hill rising very steeply, and therefore being unsuitable for horse tramway operation, discussions were held between the interested parties which resulted in an agreement, whereby the S.T.C would pay Southampton and Shirley £500 and £750 respectively for the main works. Also a contribution would be made by the County Authorities, which included widening the bridge (over the Rollesbrook). this left only some £200 to be provided from Shirley funds with, apparently, a lesser amount from Southampton.

After inspection by Major-General Hutchinson, of the Board of Trade, on Saturday May 3rd 1879 the Portswood section was opened on Monday 5th May, with receipts of £26 on that day. The officers of the Company were:- Chairman, Mr. G.T. Harper, Engineer, Mr. Wilson, General Manager, Mr. W.G. Lankester and Secretary, Mr, J Barber-Glenn.

So Southampton entered the era of public transport within the reach of most people, which generated development of the suburbs, as it was now possible to live away from the workplace and travel in comparative comfort. Also, perhaps it made possible family excursions, which up to then, for the vast majority had entailed walking.

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So the service commenced, but not without problems – financial and otherwise. At a public meeting held at the Victoria Rooms on July 29th 1879, the ‘Anti Sunday Service’ lobby canvassed for support. The Southampton Tramways Company Chairman G.T. Harper was brave enough to attend and commented that cars did not run during the recognised times for

speech the Chairman asked the Mayor to take over the tramways on behalf of the town. The Mayor accepted the responsibility and the company sang ‘Auld Lang Syne’.

The following evening the other half of the staff received their supper and speeches, but obviously the occasion had lost the drama of the previous evening.

APPENDIX A

DIRECTORS	W. Cloette	1879
	F.B. Turner	1879 – 1881
	J.W. Greig	1879 – 1881
	E. Bance	1881 – 1892
	A.W. White	1881 – 1882
	J.B. Concannon	1882 – 1898
	P.E. Marshall	1892 – 1898
CHAIRMEN	G.T. Harper	1879 – 1881
	W. Roebuck	1881 – 1892
	E. Bance	1893 – 1898

APPENDIX B STOCK AS SHOWN IN THE CORPORATION VALUATION OF FEBRUARY 1898

HORSE CARS (All double deck with knife board seating)

<u>Car Number</u>	<u>Purchase Date</u>	<u>Builders Name</u>	<u>Estimated Value 1898</u>
1	1879	Bristol Wagon Co.	£40
2	1879	Bristol Wagon Co.	£40
3	1879	Bristol Wagon Co.	£40
4	1879	Bristol Wagon Co.	£40
5	1879	Bristol Wagon Co.	£40
6	1879	Bristol Wagon Co.	Withdrawn
7	1879	Bristol Wagon Co.	Withdrawn
8	1879	Bristol Wagon Co.	£40
9	1879	Bristol Wagon Co.	£40
10	1879	Bristol Wagon Co.	Withdrawn
11	1879	Starbuck Co.	£40
12	1879	Starbuck Co.	Withdrawn
13	1879	Starbuck Co.	£40
14	1879	Starbuck Co.	£40
15	1879	Starbuck Co.	Withdrawn
16	1879	Starbuck Co.	Withdrawn
17	1881	Starbuck Co.	£50
18	1881	Starbuck Co.	£50
19	1881	Starbuck Co.	£50
20	1881	Starbuck Co.	£50
21	1890	North Metropolitan Tram Co.	£105
22	1890	North Metropolitan Tram Co.	£105

23	1891	North Metropolitan Tram Co.	£110
24	1893	North Metropolitan Tram Co.	£120
25	1893	North Metropolitan Tram Co.	£120
26	1893	North Metropolitan Tram Co.	£120
27	1893	North Metropolitan Tram Co.	£120
28	1896	Brush Electrical Engineering Co.	£140
29	1896	Brush Electrical Engineering Co.	£140
30	1896	Brush Electrical Engineering Co.	£140
31	1896	Brush Electrical Engineering Co.	£140

OMNIBUSES (Double-deck garden seats)

118	1892	G. Roe, Hammersmith	£80
119	1892	G. Roe, Hammersmith	£80
130	1892	G. Roe, Hammersmith	£80
138	1892	G. Roe, Hammersmith	£80
122	1887	Andrews, Cardiff	£40
131	1887	Andrews, Cardiff	£40
140	1887	Andrews, Cardiff	£40
141	1887	Andrews, Cardiff	£40

HORSES

Stabled at Portswood for Tramcars	63
Stabled at Portswood for Omnibuses	24
Stabled at Highfield for Omnibuses	24
Stabled at Shirley for Tramcars	70
Total	<u>181</u>

All horses for identification purposes given a Stud number and at the time of this valuation the horses still in use were numbered between 171 and 522. The longest serving, No. 171, had been purchased in 1883 aged 6 years and had been at work for 14.5 years !!!

This article first appeared in two parts in issues 5 and 6 of the *Southampton Local History Forum Journal*, Spring 1996 and Spring 1997. It is included here as a tribute to Jeff Pain, long time Chairman of the Local History Forum, who sadly passed away in December 2013.