

OLDE WHEELS

The Quarterly Magazine of the Rushden Historical Transport Society

SUMMER 2024

ISSUE 268



Free to Members

RHTS.CO.UK

Non-Members £1

History of the Society

- 1976 Advert placed in Evening Telegraph by the past president Richard Woodcock, 8 people met at the Rose and Crown and RHTS was born.
- 1979 First Cavalcade held in Hall Park, Rushden.
- 1980 RHTS purchase Bristol Lodekka bus "651", the Society flagship.
- 1984 Society obtains lease on Rushden Station Site from NCC
- 1986 Transport Museum opened in the original Waiting Room and the Ladies Waiting Room transformed into a Victorian themed bar
- 1987 Station threatened with demolition
- 1996 Purchased Station site from NCC
- 1998 Society lodges plans to extend railway track towards Higham Ferrers. Arrival of steam loco Barclay 0-4-0, "Edmundsons" and donated by Castle Cement Co Ltd 0-4-0 Sentinel diesel shunter.
- 1999 Excavation of 25,000 cu.yrds waste from railway cutting ,plans grants to lay 700 yards of track beyond Shirley Road Bridge.
- 2000 Sidings laid at back of running line, Gresley Buffet car acquired
- 2002 Arrival of "Cherwell" 0-6-0 , refurbishment of Buffet Car.
- 2003 Ex Rushden fire engine , ENV250T acquired , final payment on HQ
- 2006 Improvements to track layout and Museum site.
- 2007 Station roof re-slatted with grant assistance.
- 2008 Consultation with NCC regards extension of line beyond Shirley Road bridge, the bridge surveyed and vegetation cleared.
- 2009 HMRI permission to run passenger Heritage train service, Edmundsons back in steam, Bristol bus "651" leaves to go for restoration. 50th anniversary of last passenger train to run on line, opening of railway on 13th June 2009.
- 2011 Opening of phase 2 , extension of line to Prospect Avenue.
- 2012 Cavalcade cancelled due to waterlogged fields
- 2013 Visit of the Duke of Gloucester to the Station
- 2014 Repainting of "Edmundsons" , in preparation for trip to Blaenavon Steam Gala
- 2015 Restoration of Scammel 3tonne Mechanical Horse
- 2016 40th Anniversary of the formation of the Society
- 2017 Goods Shed purchased from NCC , Last running of "Edmundsons" before 10 year boiler service
- 2018 Cavalcade cancelled mini Cavalcade held at the Station,.
- 2019 Goods Shed roof replaced with slate
- 2020 Purchase of 2 Pacer train units , RHTS receives a lifeline grant of £32,000 from Government's £1.57bn Culture Recovery Fund.
- 2021 Re-opening of the railway to passenger trains using Pacer units , RHTS receive £12,500 from Government's Culture Recovery Fund
- 2022 R.H.T.S. receives funding for improvement to car parking and new toilet facilities

OLDE WHEELS

The official magazine of Rushden Historical Transport Society
Charity no. 285535

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DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE:

All submissions for the next issue should reach the editor (editor@rhts.co.uk) by **18th of December 2024**.

Whilst every effort will be made to include all articles received in Olde Wheels they may not appear straight away or, if space is limited, We are always pleased to accept members' photographs for publication.

Front images : The Red Arrows over Alfred Street School , V12 Viper engine—Rushden Classic Car Show , 1962 Special train at Rushden Station ,
image Tommy Tomalin.



*** Contributions to the newsletter not necessarily the views of trustees or the editor ***

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT—AUTUMN 2024

Comments

The first thing that really comes to mind is just how fast the year passes. Also with this organisation how much work seems to be done and then like buses there is another load behind. Although, coincidentally, work on the green bus is proceeding in a pretty positive manner now!

We are also rapidly approaching the end of yet another financial year i.e. September 30th. The next AGM should be December but may drift necessarily into January. This will be an important AGM since the changeover to the CIO (Charitable Incorporated Organisation) should take place. More about this a bit later.

The key thing is that we shall be looking for new trustees and key members in order to carry the society forward. Old age and illnesses have been catching up with the existing trustees and key members in recent times. We need new trustees and some new strategic thinking about the way forward.

We had hoped that there would be a major step forward with the railway as a result of a Government Levelling Up Grant via NNC, but the suspicion is now that the new government will not honour this grant. NNC remain partially optimistic but the next budget in October will no doubt be when the decision is finally made.

So now that the nights are rapidly dropping in, there is much more time for members to think about the way forward.

Activities and Thanks

After the quieter start to the year's events, we have seen a lot of activities across the patch. My personal thanks to everyone who helped with the Classic car Show. This year we were the sole organisers and some 110 marshals helped out on the day. Some 30 of these were drawn from other charities and without whom we would have had difficulty running the event. The planning for next year will begin in January and more volunteers are needed for the working party. Quite a few new members were able to help this year, and I think we can say that we pretty much know how to run it now. Our thanks must go to Rushden Town Council and several of their staff for the excellent venue and support we get for the event.

But thanks also to the helpers and organisers of the other events so far which include Armed Forces Day and Dance, Teddy Bear Expresses, Sausage and Cider weekend and the Oompah Night. A new event was the first 'Site Experience' with a group of people visiting most of the locations on the site. Hopefully these will become a regular feature in the future.

These fundraising events are absolutely essential in order to keep the society financially sound. The increase in overheads in the last few years means we have to “pedal” hard to virtually stand still.

My thanks also to the unseen helpers that are essential for the finances, membership and general organisation of the society ie the backroom keyboard operators who would sometimes love to get away from their desks!

There is a very active calendar of events, no doubt covered elsewhere, to take us to the end of the year and well done and thanks to all of the organisers.

Membership

The membership continues to rattle along around the 500 mark. Overall the rate at which we gain members is almost exactly matched at the rate we lose members, around 50 per year. One thing we are rather poor at is welcoming new members and talking to them about how they can help with our activities. New members put down their interests if any on the application form so there are some starting points, Hopefully it's something which we can work on improving.

The Shed

I keep this in as a separate item since this is where most changes are taking place at present and potentially should enable us to raise more revenue. The new toilets are beginning to look more like toilets and we could be getting around to the plumbing fairly soon. Sadly some of our key helpers in this area have had health problems and I extend our best wishes to them for speedy recoveries.

The heating grant application will be going in very shortly to the Heritage Lottery Fund and another application has already gone in to Mick George which is to screed the lower shed floor. Many attempts at properly sealing this floor have failed and hence a new screed with damp proof membrane is necessary. The shed is still being used as normal but a new screed will be a significant improvement. Discussions have also taken place with NNC about other potential shed improvements as well as other parts of the site.

This leads conveniently on to the next point.

Volunteers

Several of our events are organised, many thanks, by some key members, but there is then near the event a request for volunteers. Maybe if we could get an Events Group through which all events were generally coordinated, albeit in conjunction with the key members, and had a general register of helpers then things could run more smoothly and without last minute panics.

To pick a couple of key areas, we need more help in running events in the shed and in particular where the shed is hired out for wedding receptions, parties and corporate events etc. Plus people to coordinate the general hire enquiries and activities. In some cases it will be possible for some payment to be made for this assistance. Please contact me and have a chat.

As before, we need more volunteers to maintain the railway and also to operate the trains when we are running events for the public. Some training for key posts is required but none of the tests are really onerous and we have some good trainers!
Coincidentally the last 'Volunteer Day' which was basically for members did bring in a couple of new members, so we shall be trying this again.

AGM and CIO

As mentioned above we are nearly at the end of the financial year when we should see that we are about holding our own financially. We have now fully paid NNC for the Goods Shed and have also made some repayments to the Town Council.

The changeover to the CIO from the accounts point of view is all in hand with the accountants.

The other key area, as has been agreed at the last AGM, is the transfer of assets. This basically is a lock, stock and barrel transfer of assets and overall there will be no outward signs that the change has been made and operations will be exactly as before. These procedures are now being progressed. As with all AGM it will be necessary to elect new trustees, and this year these will now represent the CIO. This means added protection for the trustees which hopefully will make the positions more attractive. Full details will be issued prior to the AGM.

Contact

I have only covered some aspects of our activities and I am always pleased to have a chat about any items on 07960 950821 or via secretary@rhts.co.uk. Alternatively come down to the station on a Wednesday or Saturday which are volunteer days.

Best regards

Richard

Class 309—“The Clacton Express”

Twenty-four Class 309 "***Clacton Express***" electric multiple units (EMUs) were built at York Carriage Works in 1962/3. These units were the first express 25 kV AC units to be built by British Railways and were the first EMUs capable of 100 mph.



ImIm : British Railways Eastern Region, -- Great Eastern Railway Society,

The units were originally planned for use on the proposed East Coast Main Line Electrification Scheme. However, when that project was abandoned the units were deployed on Great Eastern Main Line express services from London Liverpool Street to Clacton-on-Sea and Walton-on-the-Naze. Hence the nickname “*The Clacton Express*”.

The entire fleet was refurbished in the period 1985-1987, with the single-glazed wooden framed windows being replaced by aluminium-framed double-glazed units with hopper ventilators, and 2+2 seating in open saloons replacing the second-class compartments.

In 1989 new Class 321/3 units were introduced and slowly the Class 309 units were phased out; the last set being retired in January 1994. However, not all the units were scrapped. Seven were retained for use in the Manchester area.

With the introduction of new diesel multiple units, the Class 309s became surplus to requirements and were withdrawn from service in late 2000 and placed in store. Two were converted to Class 960 departmental three-car units for cab-signalling tests at the Old Dalby test track. They were painted in a blue and white livery. They were designated 960101 (ex-309616) *West Coast Flyer*, and 960102 (ex-309624) *New Dalby*. The remainder were subsequently scrapped.

After the withdrawal of the two departmental units in 2004, following the completion of the tests, they were stored at a Ministry of Defence depot near Shoeburyness. In 2009, units 309616 and 309624 were successfully preserved and went to the Electric Railway Museum in Warwickshire.



The units at the Electric Railway Museum ,image: British diesel and electric train survey

However, the museum was forced to close in 2018 when Coventry City Council took back possession of the land. The rolling stock and exhibits were sold. Unit 309616 ended up at the Tanat Valley Light Railway in Oswestry. Here it has remained as a static exhibit with the interior now used as a Cafe and tearoom, titled "The Clacton Cafe “.

Unit 309624 was sold to the Lavender Line in East Sussex, arriving there in 2018. Minor conservation work was carried out but, due to changing priorities at the railway, the set was put up for sale in 2021. In March 2022, the unit was privately purchased by Clacton Express Preservation Group..

The group's aim was to restore the unit to working order. However, in early 2023, the benefactor who had helped secure the initial purchase of the unit decided to step away from the project. 309624 remained in storage at the Lavender Line until October 2023 when the storage contract expired.

In the spring of this year two of the three cars were donated to East Anglian Railway Museum, securing the vehicles' long-term future. They will undergo full cosmetic restorations, alongside developing interactive displays and exhibits throughout the vehicles. However, the museum had insufficient space for all three vehicles, so the group needed to find a home for the Second Class Driving Trailer DTS.



Units BDT 75965 and MBS 61928 at their new home at East Anglia Railway Museum

At this point, the RHTS stepped in to offer a new home for the DTS. The Clacton Express Preservation Group was happy to donate the vehicle to the Society, subject to a conservation agreement. Things moved quickly, and the vehicle arrived at the station in May. Thus, the Rushden, Higham and Wellingborough Railway has a new asset. The DTS will be paired up with our MK 1 carriage for use with our Class 31 locomotive, so providing an alternative to the Pacer diesel unit.



(Below - Arrival at Rushden—May 2024—image CEPG)

RUSHDEN AND DISTRICT QUERY MOTOR CLUB – PART 2

From Bikes to Cars - 1940 to 1960

The tale ended last time around 1940 when the war was in progress and quite a few members were on active service. During this period the competition side of the club was pretty much dormant but the social side carried on as did the monthly meetings. In 1940 Sidney Hawkes was the president and the vice presidents included several well known people including John White, Arthur Allebone, Dr Crane, J Drabble and R Paragreen. An extract from the club magazine of June 1940 is below and shows the social events for June 1940. Quite an active calendar and the 'big effort' is the carnival on June 29th.

<u>CLUB PROGRAMME</u>		1940
<u>SATURDAY, 15TH JUNE.</u>	Flag Day for Services Queens. Back your fancy, lads. Result will be announced from the Council Buildings about 8.0 p.m. Dance at night at the Windmill Hall 8 - 12. The Queens will be on view in all their glory. Price of Dance 1/- each and the Band is the Richardson Players.	
<u>SUNDAY, 16TH JUNE.</u>	Trip to Overstone. Go as you please. Picnic Tea.	
<u>SUNDAY, 23RD JUNE.</u>	Trip to Dean. Again go as you please. Tea at 4.30 p.m.	
<u>SATURDAY, 29TH JUNE.</u>	Our big effort - The Carnival Day. Followed by a Dance at the Windmill Hall 8 - 12 midnight. Tickets 1/-.	
<u>SUNDAY, 30TH JUNE.</u>	Concert at the Ritz for the Serving Men's Parcels Fund. "Dorothy Holbrook and Her Hussars" are the stellar item, supported by others. Doors open 7.10 commence 7.45 p.m. For prices etc see bills.	

After the war the competitions started again and the James Cup Trial for motor cycles took place on October 20th 1946. Part of the instructions are seen in the next picture. This was basically a time trial where you had to maintain an average speed of 24mph. At checkpoints along the route your time was recorded and any variation from the average speed was penalised. The winner being the one with the least penalties.

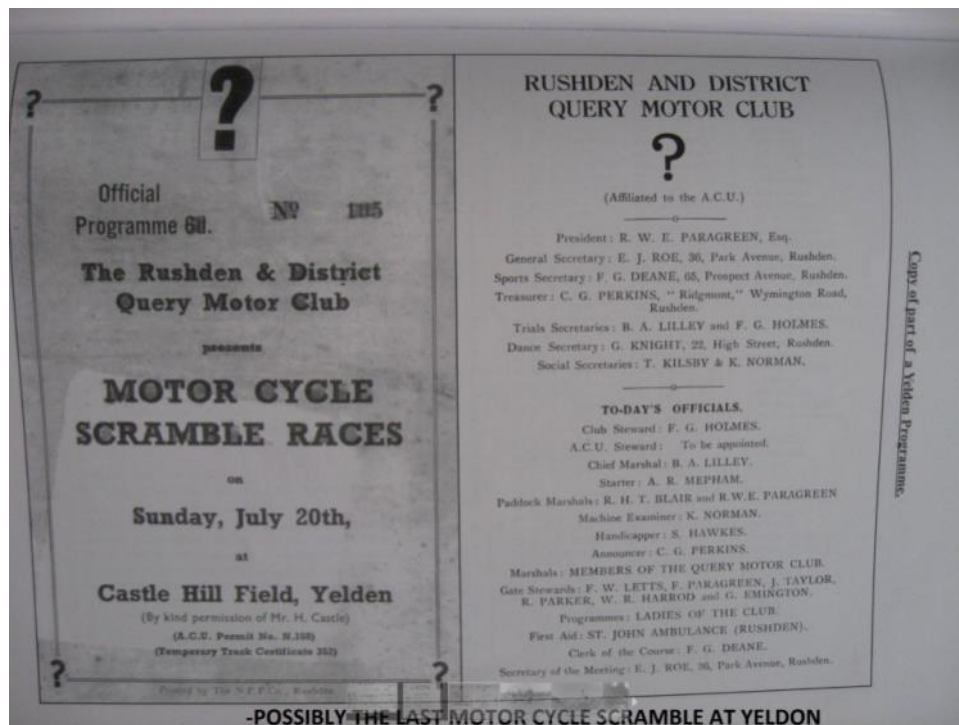
RUSHDEN AND DISTRICT QUERY MOTOR CLUB.					
SUNDAY, OCTOBER 20th, 1946.					
JAMES CUP TRIAL,					
Speed 24 m.p.h. 2-minute intervals, Start 2.30 p.m.					
Miles.				Zero Time.	Your Time.
0	COURT ESTATE	...	Bear R. R. and L. to YELDEN. Through Village R. to S.P. Dean, T.L. and S.O. to UPPER DEAN. T.R. in Village and S.O. to TILBROOK S.O. to	2.30	
10	KIMBOLTON SCHOOL	...	S.O. through Village. T.R. at S.P. Bedford (B600) and S.O. to PERTENHALL. Bear L. at bottom of hill (S.P. Bedford) and S.O. to	2.55	
4	KEYSOE MILL	...	T.R. (S.P. Thurlough) and S.O. to	3.61	
3	THURLEIGH CHAPEL	...	T.L. and in 300 yards T.R. (S.P. Bedford), S.O., T.L. at T. Road and S.O. to RAVENSDEEN CROSS, over Main Road and in ½ mile T.L. (S.P. Ravensden) to	3.13½	
4	RAVENSDEEN Horse & Jockey Inn	...	Through Village and S.O. to WILDEN. Through Village to CHIQUEERS INV. S.O. and in about 1 mile bear L. (S.P. Little Straighten), R. at T. Road (S.P. Wyhoston). In about ¼ miles. T.L. (S.P. Honeycote) and S.O. In ½ mile T.L. at letter box on pole and in ½ mile R. at T. Road and S.O. to	3.23½	
8	UPPER STAPLOE Tally-Ho Inn	...	T.L. at TALLY-HO INN to STAPLOE, through Village to DULOE and S.O. T.R. at Main Road and S.O. through EATON SOCCIN to WYHOSTON. Through Village and in 100 yards T.R. to Chawston. T.L. at S.P. Easton and S.O. to Main Road. Bear R. in 100 yards, T.L. at PEAR TREE INN to	3.43½	
7	ROXTON Post Office	...	S.O. over Cross Roads to Main Road. T.R. and after River Bridge T.L. (S.P. St. Neots) and S.O. to	4.11	
2	LITTLE BARFORD Post Office	...	S.O. through Village to RYNEBURY, through Village and after Bridge T.L. at Church. Turn left at Traffic Lights, and S.O. along Main Street through Station to	4.61	
2½	ST. NEOTS Market Square	...		4.12½	

MOTOR CYCLE TRIAL OCT. 20TH 1946

The club had been a member of the Auto Cycle Union (ACU), which was the governing body for motorcycle events and the club representative for many years was Ray Robinson who lived in Hall Avenue. In 1949 the club agreed to pay the entry fee and insurance premium for a Barry Barker to ride in the Isle of Man TT races. I could not find how much this was and I wonder what the insurance covered!

The 1950's were very active for the motor cycles with scrambles, trials and grass track events. It is also when more photographs of events have found their way into my hands. Additionally the Rushden History Society 'Hearts and Souls' website carries quite a few more pictures.

The next picture shows the programme for a motor cycle scramble on July 20th 1952. This was probably the last scramble that was held at Yelden and it is quite possible that my father took me to see it – as a birthday treat! The old field is still there with the hills and hollows.



It is rather noticeable that although the club organised a lot of events during the 50's the number of actual entries from the club was rather small.

This is a known fact, since thanks to one of the founder members of RHTS, Richard 'Spud' Field, I have a complete set of programmes for all of the motor cycle events from 1953 to the final one in 1964. It was thanks to his sister just after Spud died that the programmes were saved from going in the skip!

I was also given in a similar manner some 120 photographic negatives of events which were on large glass negatives. Several of the pictures from these negatives follow.

The next picture is for a grass track meeting at Overstone in 1954 and is a race on flat grass in this case for motor cycles and sidecars. You need to be a brave person if you are in the sidecar!



The next picture on the right shows a motor cycle scramble held at Wymington in 1951 which was a regular venue for scrambles. Two fields were used which were separated by a brook and on each lap you needed to go through the brook twice. A large number of muddy encounters took place at the brook!



The club was able to attract some very good scramblers to their events and the image right shows John Stonebridge, the 1952 World Champion, at a Wymington scramble in 1951. Sadly he was killed not long afterwards in a car accident while out with the Bert Greeves the owner of the Greeves Motor Cycle Company.



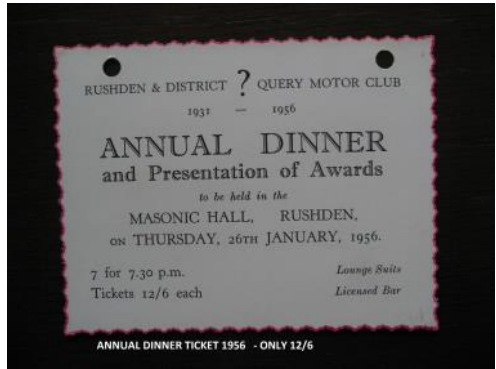
The image on the left picture another scramble in 1951 at Wymington, with a rider just entering the famous brook and you can see how deep the mud is. I have several pictures showing marshals with rope pulling competitors out of the mud!

During the 50's motor cars were becoming much more available and popular and slowly the membership of the club started to include more car owners. These were of course much easier and probably cleaner to drive than motor cycles. Thus in 1952 the very first car rally was held and the James Cup was used for cars rather than motor cycles.

With a large number of events, the club had assembled a wide selection of trophies as seen in the image on the right. Many of the early trophies were solid silver and consequently worth quite a lot of money. This picture is from Sidney Hawkes' book.

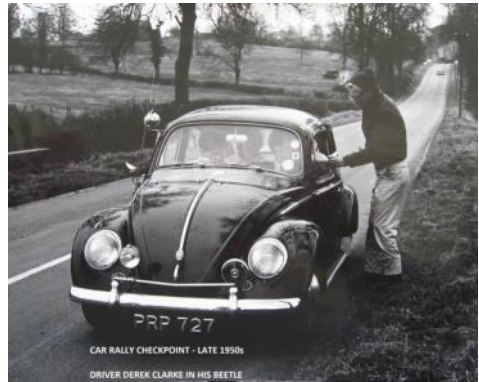


The annual dinner continued to be the main social event of the year and in 1956 this was still held at the Masonic Hall in Rushden at an amazing price of 12/6. The next picture shows a ticket for the 1956 annual dinner. The dinner was supported by the mayors of both Rushden and Higham Ferrers and John White who was a vice president.



The rise of the motor car continued apace, with car rallies being organised on a regular basis for cars only. By 1956 half of the awards were for motor cycles events and half were for car rallies. Classes were introduced for the car rallies for 'expert' and 'novice' classes so that the awards were spread out more amongst members. Initially for drivers and later for navigators. The car rallies were generally held on a Sunday afternoon when very few other motorists were about. Competitors could be charging around the local roads and complaining about 'Sunday Motorists' who were just out for a ride but kept getting in the way!

Pretty much any car could be used for the car rallies since the average speed was normally 24mph but could rise to 30mph. Of course if you went wrong you then went faster catching up! The 24mph average though increased the number of members and sorts of car who could take part in the car rallies. Checkpoints would be set up on the side of the road where competitors would check in with their times recorded. The image opposite shows a typical checkpoint with Derek Clark in his VW Beetle.

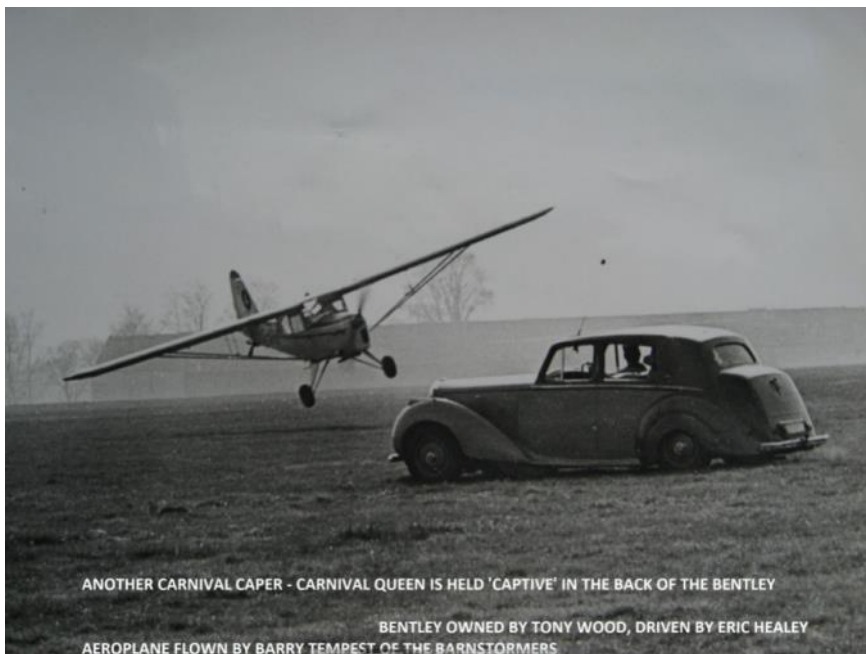


The advent of motor cars also meant that a new type of entry could be used for the annual Rushden Carnival. The club could put up to four old cars in the parade which would generally commit havoc along the whole carnival route. A typical car entry in the parade is seen in image on the left with Steve Joyce, ably assisted by Bob Darlow being two of the nuttiest carnival drivers for many years.

Many pranks took place during the passage of the carnival parade and in the late 50's the Carnival Queen was captured by the club and driven off in an old Bentley owned by Tony Wood.

The Bentley was then dive bombed by a light aircraft flown by Barry Tempest.

Several members of the club were involved in the Barnstormers who flew old planes from Podington Aerodrome, long before Santa Pod, and hence the next picture showing the dive bombing of the Carnival Queen. Work out the health and safety for that one nowadays!



We have now pretty much reached the end of the 1960's by which time motor cars had become the largest part of the club membership and car rallies and off the road events were held on a monthly basis. This was also the advent of the car 'Treasure Hunt' type of event where clues had to be collected en route. Car rallies were easy to organise and did not rely on the availability of fields to run events and were independent of the weather. The majority of members were now involved with motor cars with very few real motor cycle competitors.

More changes were to come as the 1960's progressed which will be covered in the next Part – 'The Roaring Sixties'.

Richard Lewis

Rushden's Tank

At the end of WW1, the Government donated 265 redundant tanks to towns and cities in recognition of their efforts in buying War Bonds and Savings certificates. In February 1920, Rushden was presented with a Mk 4 tank by the War Savings Association to mark the contribution of the town in subscribing to the different bond and savings schemes.

The tank was delivered by rail to Rushden Station by the Tank Corps on the 13th February 1920. The next day, people lined the route from the Station to Spencer Park. Rushden Town Band was present at the Station and played suitable music as the tank was being started. The tank proceeded down to the High Street bridge and headed for the park.



A ceremony took place, during which the Tank was presented by Lieut. A. L. Roberts to Mr. Spencer (chairman of the Rushden War Savings Association.) Mr. Spencer said he had pride and pleasure in accepting the Tank and in presenting it to Rushden. He hoped they would continue to invest in National Savings.

Councillor F. Knight accepted the Tank on behalf of the town and said it would be a reminder to rising generations of what had been done for them in the war. A bottle of wine was broken over the Tank which was christened "Rushden". Before leaving, the military personnel removed the chains driving the tracks from the engine to prevent the tank from being moved.

(all images www.rushdecheritage.org.uk)



The hand-over party, from left to right three members of the Tank Corp, Mr Spencer from the War Savings Association, Councillor Knight, Miss Claridge and further members of the Tank Corp) – image www.rushdenheritage.org

During the 1920s and 1930s, countless youngsters spent many happy hours playing on and around the tank.



But
in

1939, when the Second World War broke out, there was a need for raw materials for the war effort. A letter from the Ministry of Supply in May 1940 stated that the Director of Scrap Supplies had been informed that the Council possessed a 20-ton tank, and asked, in view of the urgent need for scrap iron and steel, could the tank be released for this purpose. Rushden Urban District Council made the decision to donate “Rushden” to the war effort.

So, sadly but all in a good cause, the tank was removed and the scrap metal used in the war effort.

The Mark IV tank.

The Mark IV tank was introduced into the British Army in 1917. The tank was a development of the Mark I tank first used at the Battle of the Somme in 1916.

The Mark IV tank weighed almost 28 tonnes and had a crew of eight. These including a driver, commander, two gearsmen, two gunners, and two loaders. Tanks were either "Male" (four machine guns and two six-pounder guns that were mounted on side extensions called *sponsons*). By contrast, "Female" versions only had four machine guns. It is thought Rushden's tank was a "Female" version.

Crews developed real affection for their metal beasts, insisting that each machine had its own unique ways and personality. By 1917 standards, the Mark IV proved to be a very effective weapon when the ground was good, surprise could be achieved, and infantry support was available.

Apart from the danger of being hit by artillery shells destroying the tank and killing the crew, there were other issues to overcome.

In action, the inside of the tank was not a pleasant environment. The noise was so great that commanders had to scream at the tops of their voices, and temperatures often reached over 100 degrees Fahrenheit. The crew sat beside the engine and transmission which meant breathing a cloud of vapours including those of petrol, carbon monoxide, oil smoke, and cordite from shells. Crews had to endure such conditions for as long as seven or eight hours at a time during a major battle. Sometimes crew members would pass out or become violently ill.

However, at the Battle of Cambrai in November 1917 over 450 Mark IV tanks were used. The battle showed that a large concentration of tanks could quickly overcome even the most sophisticated trench systems. The age of the tank had arrived.



Image – Mark IV tank – Tank Museum Bovington

 Rushden, Higham & Wellingborough Railway



Santa Special

Sat 7th, Sun 8th, Sat 14th & Sun 15th December

Take a ride on our Santa Special and visit Mr & Mrs Claus!

Tickets include: A diesel train ride, a drink & biscuit (mince pie for adults) and children receive a present.

Train Times: 11:00, 12:00, 13:30, 14:30, 15:30

**Ticket Prices: Adults - £8, Children - £13.50,
Babies under 12months - £6 or free without a present**

Book online at www.ticketsource.co.uk/rhts

Rushden Railway Station, Station Approach, Rushden, Northants, NN10 0AW
www.rhts.co.uk 0300 302 3105   [Rushdenrailwaystation](https://www.instagram.com/rushdenrailwaystation)

RAF Thurleigh (RAE Bedford) and Twinwood post WW2

While the expansion of the UK aircraft industry had begun in the mid to late 1930s, it was the demands of World War II which led to its huge growth in capability and size. As the tide of war began to turn in favour of the Allies, thought was given to the nation's post-war industrial base. The aircraft sector was singled out as a primary industry for exploitation.

An Aeronautical Research Committee Report No. ARC 7500 recommended the setting up of a National Establishment for aeronautical research and development. The Government, in accepting the report, wanted the organization to be called the "National Experimental Establishment", and it was initially proposed that it should be sited at Farnborough along with the already-existing Royal Aircraft Establishment.

Later it was decided that the National Aeronautical Establishment would be built on land in North Bedfordshire encompassing the wartime airfields of Thurleigh, Twinwood Farm and Little Staughton. The site would feature a new five-mile runway to Little Staughton and a new Wind Tunnel site and testing centre. Electrical power for this project was to come from Little Barford Power Station, and water for the site (estimated to be 400,000 gallons a day rising to 750,000 gallons a day) from a pumping station on the River Great Ouse at Sharnbrook.

The original proposals were scaled back and the Establishment was developed on two sites: one adjacent to Twinwood Farm airfield to house a suite of large wind tunnels; and the other at Thurleigh Airfield, which was rebuilt to become one of the most comprehensive research airfields in the World.

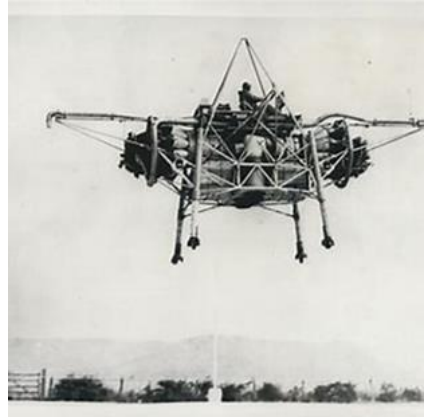
Construction began in 1947, initially with new roads, followed by the first wind tunnel on the Twinwoods site, and finally the airfield at Thurleigh. Existing runways were extended and new ones were built, along with new hangars. The Naval Air Department moved in during the summer of 1954 bringing various aircraft, and the Aero Flight moved from Farnborough. In 1957 the Blind Landing Experimental Unit arrived from Martlesham Heath.

Major building work continued to at least 1957. Later, new runway lighting and improved radar and air traffic control facilities were added. With the advent of the cold war, Thurleigh was selected as a Bomber Command dispersal base for the V- Bomber force. A Readiness Platform was built at the Eastern end of runway 27 together with accommodation for the crews and ground crews. 50 Squadron from Waddington were the most frequent visitors. The airfield was used extensively by both military and civilian operators for training purposes, and was also visited by aircraft from other countries.



Image above: Just before closure some of the aircraft at Thurleigh.

During the 1950s, Thurleigh saw testing of some of the most important aircraft in British aviation history. Two of the best-known were Fairey Delta 2 research aircraft WG774 and WG777. The former had the distinction of attaining the absolute speed record on 10th March 1956, flying at 1,132 mph at 38,000 feet. Testing for the dynamic behavior of the Concorde, and for jet-powered airliners takeoff, and Avro Vulcan XA889 were all carried out at Thurleigh.



Above left Fairey FD2 (WG777) and above right : The Rolls Royce "Flying Bedstead" all images www.airsciences.org.uk

The most famous research of the day was the Rolls Royce Flying Bedstead XJ314 which came to Thurleigh in June 1956 and came to grief in September 1957 after toppling over. This project was to examine the concept of vertical takeoff and landing flight.

Another important set of tests in 1963 were the examination of take offs and landings in slushy conditions after snowfalls (following the Manchester United Munich Air crash), the conclusion being that the clearing of slush from runways was critical and in future it would be a major factor in allowing aircraft to take off. Other important research projects included the "Blind Landing Experimental Unit," in an era of the Cold War, the RAF's V-Bomber force had an automatic landing capability, so extensive trials using Vulcan XA889.

After RN officer, Lt. Cdr. D R Taylor RN, proposed the ski jump as a way of improving a Harrier's performance at sea, an experimental ski jump facility was built at Thurleigh to assess the concept. The first launch of a Harrier VTOL aircraft from a ski-jump took place on 5th Aug 1977. More than 500 launches were completed proving the technique and the ski-jump was adopted by the Royal Navy for Invincible class ships.

Helicopter research was added in the guise of the Naval Air Department which also added French and NASA research centers to its list of users.

On 31 March 1994 Thurleigh Airfield was closed, and all the aircraft took off for the last time. We shall never know all the secrets of the projects researched at the airfield, but no doubt many things considered farfetched years ago are now mainstream.

Philip Bettles/Catharine Young



Christmas Afternoon Tea

in the Buffet Carriage

Sunday 22nd December at 3pm

Adult £25, Child (under 14) £20

Menu

Selection of seasonal
sandwiches

Variety of festive cakes &
savouries

Homemade cranberry &
orange scones with jam &
clotted cream

Sherry Trifle



Book online at
www.ticketsource.co.uk/rhts

Buffet Carriage at Rushden Station, Station
Approach, Rushden, NN10 0AW

0300 302 3150 catering@rhts.co.uk www.rhts.co.uk

LOST BUILDINGS OF RUSHDEN

THE LIGHTSTRUNG GARAGE—BY C.M.YOUNG

The Lightstrung Garage was located at the bottom of Skinners Hill in the centre of the town. It was owned by the Denton family who in the 1890s were known as cycle manufacturers. The cycles were known for their strength and were of lighter construction than previous manufacturers had supplied. The trade mark "Lightstrung" was born out of the two words, but 'strung' instead of strong as that's how it was pronounced in Rushden.

After the original Rushden gas works closed in 1892, the site had been bought by the Lightstrung Cycle Company. Cycles were made in a workshop in one of the former gas works buildings, and a small showroom was built at the front of the site. Below is a view of the garage as at the beginning of the 20th century, the small cycle showroom can be seen and behind a part of the old gas works. Next door is the building where the "Pizzeria Venezia" restaurant is today and can be clearly identified by the ornate brickwork.

View of the Lightstrung Garage at the turn of the 20th century - www.heartsandsoles.co.uk



In the early 1900s, as the motor car began to be seen in the area, the company began to trade in the sale and repairs of motor vehicles as well as cycles. The garage applied to the Council for a licence to sell petroleum and was granted a provisional licence for three months in September 1901.

The company expanded, and manufactured a small range of motorcycles and also had a series of showrooms and workshops across the area. It also supplied commercial vehicles and became an agricultural engineers, repairing and supplying tractors to local farmers.

The garage survived a bombing raid on Rushden in October 1940. A lone German bomber dropped a string of bombs over the town. One hit the shop of Geoff Morgan which was the next shop but one to the Lightstrung garage. It made a hole at the foot of the stairs but did not explode.

In the 1950s a modern building was added at the front of the garage which served as a forecourt shop and reception area. The Lightstrung Motor Co. was an agent for Morris, Wolsley, Standard and Triumph cars.



View of the Garage in the 1960's—image from www.heartsandsoles.co.uk

The garage and surrounding site was purchased by Northamptonshire County Council to allow future road improvements in the area. A roundabout was to be built at the bottom of Skinners Hill, whilst the brook that ran along Duck Street was to be culverted. The garage was leased to "Checkpoint Motors" for a number of years by the County Council. In 1975 the Adult School at the foot of Wellingborough Road, and the garage, were both demolished. This was to make way for the roundabout and a road widening scheme along Duck Street.



The area around the garage is still known as “The Lightstrung”. It was still the main stop for all the local bus services to and from Rushden during the 20th century. The bus stops are now located opposite the site of the garage, but the name Lightstrung is still used by local people to describe this area of Rushden.



Images : www.rushdenheartsnadsoles.co.uk

EVENTS SUMMER 2024

After a successful start to the events programme for 2024 we are now well into our Autumn events schedule.

The buffet carriage led the way with multiple events over the past 4 months, the end of July saw a Cream Tea on the train and at the beginning of July a Strawberries and Cream afternoon tea in the buffet carriage.

Another popular offering was “Ploughman’s on the Pacer” for Father’s Day, this attracted over 50 customers for the trip on a train with a Ploughman’s lunch served on the train.

This Autumn has seen several Cream tea afternoons held on the Pacer which have been successful. All the buffet carriage events were very well received by our visitors.



Armed Forces Day 2024

June saw one of the most popular events on the events calendar, Rushden Armed Forces Day. This year the event had a slightly different format to the past few years. The Society ran trains on the day which





One of the Highlights of the day was a flypast by the “Red Arrows” over the Station. The timing co-incident with the start of the parade from the town centre. The parade finished in the Goods Shed car park and was followed by an outdoor drumhead service.



In the evening a 1940's dance was held in the Goods Shed featuring The Blitz Dancers and local singer Neil Richardson. A very enjoyable and successful day !



Platform Sale

The end of June concluded with the return of the "Platform Sale" organised by the bar committee. This proved very successful with the Station platform full of recycled and second hand goods for sale.



Classic Car Show 2024

One of the most important events in the year, this was the 4th running of the event in Rushden's Hall Park. The event was solely run by the Society this year with help from many community groups from the local area. Over 400 classic cars, 50 classic motorcycles, and 40 traders were booked into the event. The weather was fine, a beautiful August sunny day. The public came out in their droves to support the event, many of the traders and food outlets reported running out of stock and supplies towards the end of the day.

The local sea cadets and scout groups did a fantastic job with keeping the park in tip-top condition ensuring that litter was dealt with rapidly. A special thanks must go to all the volunteers from the RHTS and other local organisations, without whom the event would not go ahead.



Teddy Bears Express

This event ran over the weekend on 16/17th August. The weather was ideal , the first two trains of the day were over 90% full , this meant the event got off to an excellent start with many visitors enjoying the ride. Afterwards there was the opportunity to visit the Teddy Bear Hospital to attend to any issues with their teddy. On sale within the hospital were local crafts for sale from one of our members. Over the weekend over 450 visitors rode the “Teddy Bear Express“ providing another successful railway event.

Sausage and Cider Festival

The weekend got off to a difficult start with typical bank holiday weather during the first part of Saturday. Over the weekend over 40 ciders were on sale along with a wide variety of sausages. Thankfully the weather on Sunday and Monday was much improved weather encouraged many more visitors to come along to the festival.

Oompah evening with the Bierkellers

The annual Oompah evening was slightly earlier than its normal mid-September spot, but this didn't stop 200 people from coming along for an evening of singing, dancing , marching and general mayhem. A big thank you to all who came along to the evening and to the bar staff and volunteers who set up the Shed in the week and for helping at the event.



2024 Model Weekend

The 2024 Model weekend was once again well attended with the Goods Shed and frontage of the building full of exhibits. Having the trains running over on the Station side meant that both sides of the Station site were busy. A very successful weekend !



Graeme's Comedy Night



A new activity for the Station on a Sunday night in September was a Comedy night in the Goods Shed. The event was to raise money for the Northamptonshire Health Charity and was in memory of Graeme Scott who sadly passed away in the summer.

Organised by The Comedy Crate and the Scott family special thanks must go to the many acts that gave up their time. It was a brilliant night and over £4000 was raised.

Beer and Music Festival

Thankfully it stopped raining just in time for the festival. With over 35 real ales and 30 ciders on offer as well as a B-B-Q there was something for everyone.





RUSHDEN HISTORICAL TRANSPORT SOCIETY

Charity no: 285535

CHRISTMAS GIFT & CRAFT FAIR

AT RUSHDEN GOODS SHED

Thurs 28th & Fri 29th November
4pm - 8pm
50p entry, kids free

Handmade Crafts
Christmas Gifts
Stocking Fillers
Decorations
Christmas Cards
Handmade Jewellery
Cakes & Sweets
Candles & Wax Melts
Pet Accessories +
& Much More



Rushden Goods Shed, John Clark Way,
Rushden, Northants, NN10 0FW

administrator@rhts.co.uk  rushdenrailwaystation