

The Road Locomotive Society 75th Anniversary – The Society's First Seventy Five Years

John H. Meredith – May 2012

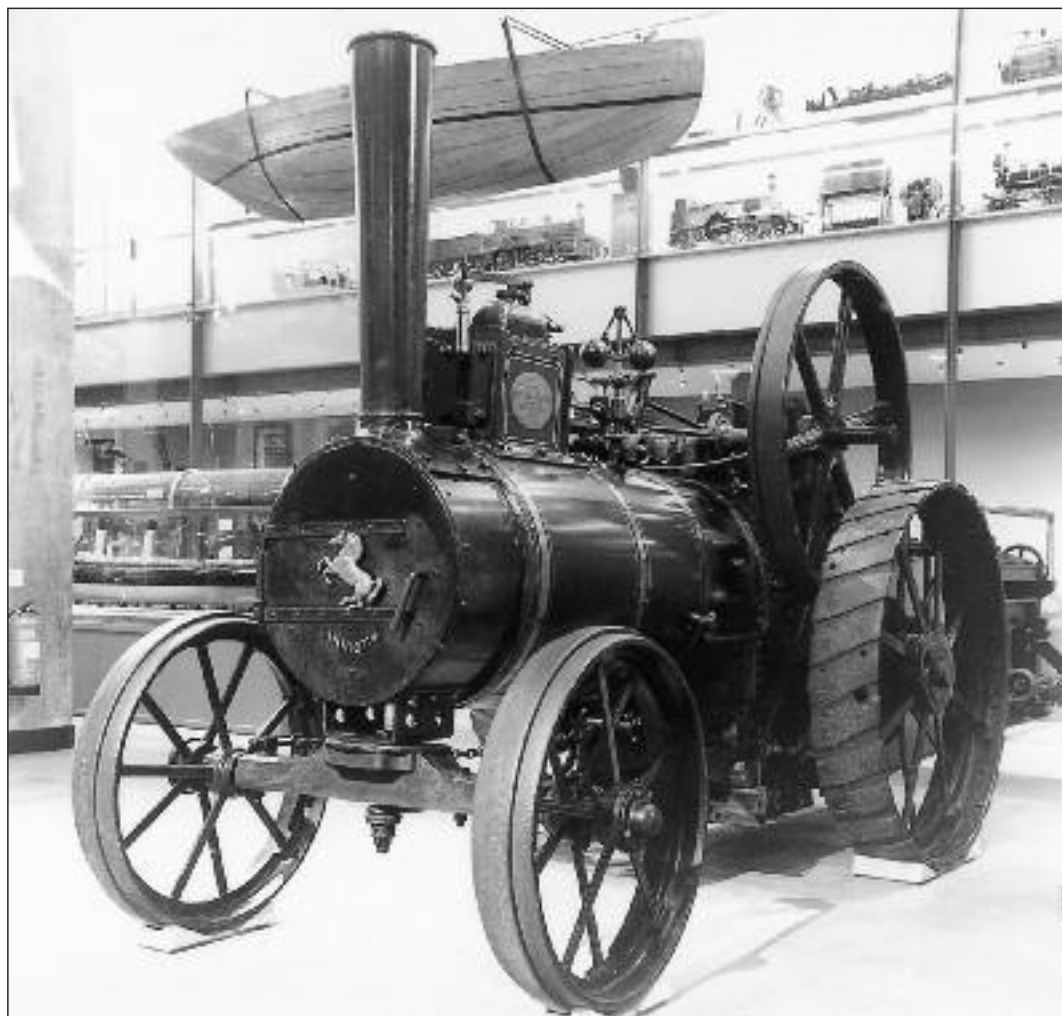
The beginnings of the Road Locomotive Society go back beyond its 75 years and stemmed from a widening of horizons in science and machines by the younger generation. This came about by better education, a rising standard of living and increased leisure time. Main line railways were a particular attraction and interest in them was nowhere stronger than among schoolboys in London and the larger provincial cities. Many schools formed their own clubs to further these interests and railway and model railway clubs became quite common. Schoolboy curiosity tended to extend these interests further and one place where this occurred was at Kings Wimbledon School where the study of main line railways spread to industrial railways. The Stoyel brothers, Ivor and Derek, attended this school and their enthusiasm was strong enough for an

unofficial club – somewhat grandly titled ‘The London Locomotive Club’ – to be continued after their schooldays were over. To quote from Derek Stoyel, when many years later he became President of the Road Locomotive Society, the club ‘centred primarily around industrial railway locomotives but soon also embraced road locomotives’.

Unfortunately, Ivor Stoyel disbanded the club in 1936 but other members thought this was precipitate and as a direct result the inaugural meeting of the ‘Industrial and Road Locomotive Society’ was held at Derek Stoyel’s home at Orpington on the 27th January 1937 with ‘E. F. Preston in the chair and 7 members present’. The neat manuscript minute book survives (typed minutes did not appear until 1954) and it is obvious from the well thought out prospectus and rules emanating from this first



Aveling & Porter traction engine No. 721. The photograph was taken at Maidstone after initial tidying-up prior to the engine's restoration by Aveling-Barford (Photo – RLS Archive).

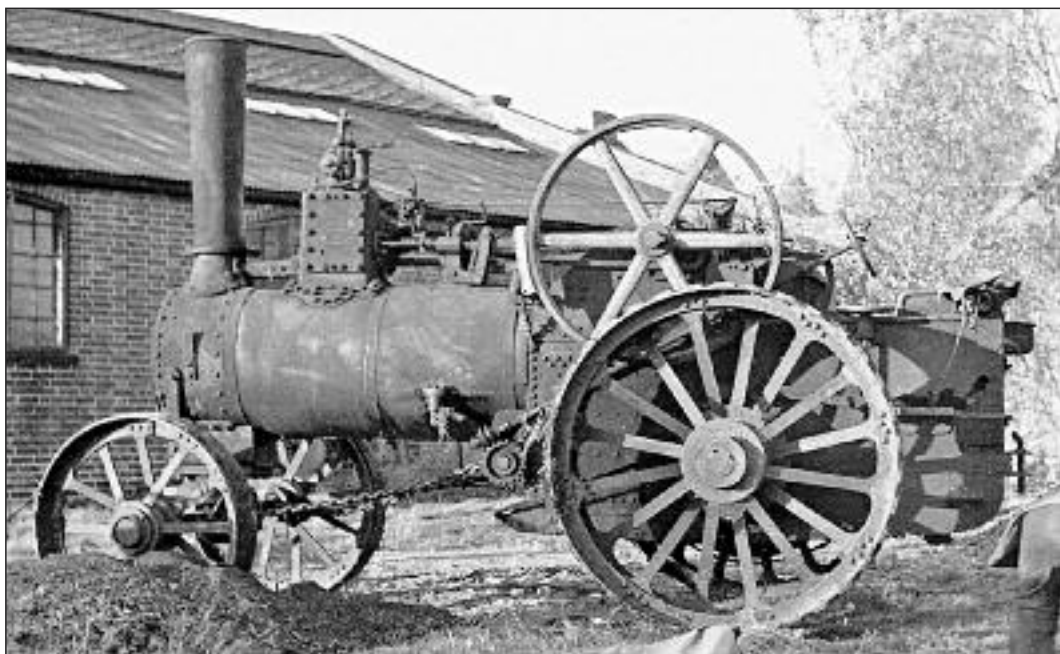


Resplendent Aveling & Porter No. 721 in the Science Museum at South Kensington (Photo – John Meredith).

meeting that much forethought had already been given. The annual subscription was fixed at 3 shillings for one section (either industrial locomotives or road locomotives) or 4 shillings for both sections. Activities were to include a photographic collection, a library and museum, visits to locomotive owners and the preparation of portfolios of manuscript articles pending production of a magazine at a later date. Members were only admitted by invitation of the committee, a rule that holds good today and is still misconstrued; its primary aim is to safeguard irreplaceable records which members are able to borrow. The original officers and committee were Secretary: B. D. Stoyel, Treasurer: E. F. Preston, Committee: G. Alliez, R. E. D. Markillie, J. P. Mullett, G. C. Parkinson, and T. E. D. Russell.

On the 4th August 1937 the first reports of visits were received, these were to George Taylor of

Redbourn, Hertfordshire and Kensal Green Gasworks, whilst visits were planned to H. Ward of Egham, Sydenham Gasworks and Greenhithe Cement Works, illustrating the combined road and rail interests of the Society. On the 2nd November 1937 it was reported that the Southern Railway had 'given permission for the Society to make use of its duplicating apparatus'. Prior to this the first 'I & RLS Bulletin' had been produced by direct typing of carbon copies – the membership in 1937 rose from 23 to 26, so the duplicating facility must have been greeted with feelings of relief. Incidentally, the first Bulletin reported new Aveling-Barford rollers for Bath and Rhondda and a Green roller for Colne. The second annual general meeting was held on 18th January 1938 at Mr. Russell's home in Balham. Eight members were present and the original officers and committee were re-elected except that Alan Duke replaced John Mullett. Alan had attended



Burrell traction engine No. 1007 at Horsmonden (Photo – Ron Dawe collection).

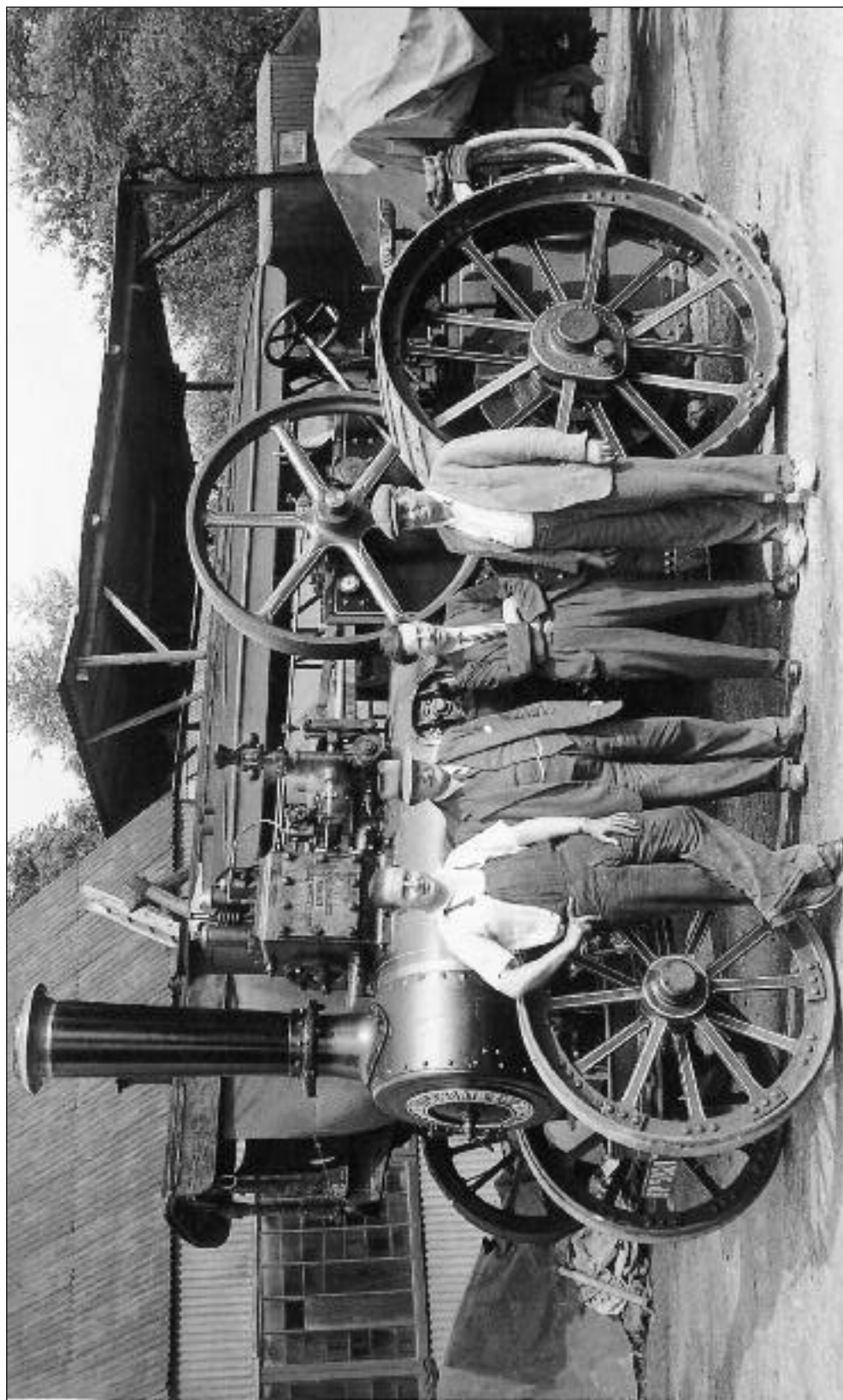
the inaugural meeting a year earlier and continued to serve on the committee until his death in 1993.

However it is for his work outside the committee that he is most valued; with single minded devotion he painstakingly studied the records of engine manufacturers and vehicle licensing authorities throughout the UK and amassed impressive lists of works numbers and registrations which are held by the Society and now recognised as definitive by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency. His work was indeed timely as much of the licensing authorities' source material was subsequently lost when their work was concentrated at Swansea in the 1980s.

A meeting of the committee had been called for Tuesday 5th September 1939 (War was declared two days earlier) but 'could not be held as there was no quorum as a result of the recent outbreak of hostilities'. Strangely enough however a meeting on the 21st October 1939 seemed from the minutes to be business as usual but on 25th November a blow fell with the withdrawal of the duplicating arrangements and 'the next issue of the Bulletin had not been produced'. However, Derek Stoyal went on to say that 'there should be an endeavour to issue a Bulletin of smaller size at monthly intervals in order to keep members together during the period of hostilities'. A committee meeting and the 4th annual general meeting were held at Wimbledon on the 20th January 1940 but as it turned out, no more meetings were then held until after the war, although Derek Stoyal did manage to produce one

more Bulletin (No. 10) in February 1940.

The marriage of industrial and road locomotives was not entirely successful as each aspect tended to have its exclusive devotees. Hence when peace returned the first move was to propose separating the two interests and this was put to a special general meeting at Orpington on the 21st September 1946. Only pre-war I&RLS members took part in the ballot and the motion was carried by ten votes to one. Inaugural meetings were then immediately held for what had become the Industrial Locomotive Society and the Road Locomotive Society and it is interesting to note that the ILS subscription was fixed at 5 shillings per annum and the RLS at 10 shillings 'bearing in mind that the (road) engine preservation scheme will involve considerable expenditure'. The two societies were to be run by a joint committee until completely separate organisations could be set up and the following appointments were made to deal with road locomotive matters: Chairman: R. G. Pratt, Lists: A. Duke, Photographs: J. P. Mullett, Library: R. G. Pratt, and Museum: C. W. Lambert. A committee meeting on the 14th January 1947 at Lyons Strand Corner House decided, inter alia, that a road locomotive magazine should be produced with R. G. Pratt as Editor, and Journal No.1 duly appeared in August 1947. Like the pre-war Bulletins these were duplicated and production remained in that form until 1956. However, from June 1948 well produced photographic plates were issued with the duplicated texts. Final separation of



Clayton & Shuttleworth traction engine No. 36336 at Horsmonden in 1954 with from left to right, Michael Pink, the engine's owner, Chris Lambert, Bill Love and Michael Salmon, all of whom played a prominent role in the Society's development. The engine immediately behind is Garrett tractor No. 33295 (Photo – RLS Archive).

the Industrial Locomotive Society and the Road Locomotive Society came in 1949 and was formally agreed at a special general meeting held in the Kingsway Hall, London, on the 24th September. The parting was entirely amicable and friendly relationships have continued with Journals still being exchanged.

Turning to the engines themselves, which are the *raison d'être* of the RLS, it is evident that members' principal interests were in seeing, photographing and drawing up records of them. Engines were still in fairly widespread commercial use but numbers were dwindling and the desire to preserve appropriate examples was apparent and indeed preservation was a dedicated aim of the Society. Members came largely from an urban background, few had motor cars and the prospect of owning and operating engines was beyond their wildest dreams. There were, of course, one or two exceptions where even without their own land to stable them or generous means to pay for their upkeep, a few members did actually manage to run their own engines.

Luckily there were also some commercial users of engines interested in their preservation. First and foremost was Chris Lambert of Horsmonden. Another was Esmond Kimbell of Northampton. Both of them presented engines to the Society which were intended to form the nucleus of a museum; it was then thought that the two most likely ways of saving engines were either to persuade established museums to take them or for the Society to set up its own museum. The former course was done successfully in the case of the historic Aveling & Porter traction engine (No. 721 of 1871) which was discovered in a very run down condition near Maidstone. It was acquired by the Society, Aveling-Barford undertook its restoration and in 1953 it was presented to the Science Museum in South Kensington where it remains on display and is kept in optimum conditions. However, the establishment of a Society museum was not successful; the preliminary hurdle of land acquisition could not be accomplished and the three donated engines were eventually disposed of. Regrettably, two traction engines went for scrap (Burrell No. 1007 of 1883 and Ransomes No. 12456 of 1889) but the third engine, a tractor (Tasker No. 1666 of 1917) survives in preservation.

Well before the Society's museum proposals were dropped, the effect of even greater leisure and wealth was leading to all manner of pursuits being adopted and the owning of traction engines was one of them. Unlike railway locomotives, they do not require a track to run on and it soon became quite feasible for individuals to own and operate road locomotives, particularly if they were in rural areas with land and some workshop facilities available,

factors rarely accessible to the original members. The final inducement prospective owners needed was to have somewhere to take their engines and this was solved by the timely challenges made by Arthur Napper of Appleford to his engine owning friends. The races at Appleford on the 30th May 1950 and at Nettlebed on the 24th June 1951 achieved wide coverage in the national press and with a lot of hard work on Arthur Napper's part and some near financial disasters, his highly entertaining antics led directly to the development of traction engine rallies.

Another result of his activities was the formation of the National Traction Engine Club which despite some early setbacks went on to flourish and soon gained a dominant position for the new engine owners and for rallying aspects. The RLS and the NTEC (later to become the National Traction Engine Trust) soon realised that they could complement each other with the Club essentially dealing with the current scene whilst the Society concentrated on history and records. For many years, a representative from each body attended the other's committee meetings and although this practice has long ceased, the two bodies continue to have close relations. Many persons joined both organisations and indeed Arthur Napper was an RLS member from 1952 until his death in 1998.

From the 1960s the Society consolidated its position as an educational and research body and it became a charitable trust in 1969. Its membership increased from 50 in 1948 to around 750 in 2012 and its finances have improved in consequence. This enabled the Society to purchase the Burrell records when they came on to the market in 1987 and also to invest in their appropriate storage and conservation. The records consist of several thousand working drawings, comprehensive build specifications for practically every engine the firm produced and the boiler records and accompanying test certificates. Following purchase, much of the collection was first housed by the local authority at Thetford but was later transferred to the more professional hands of the Museum of English Rural Life at Reading (a branch of the University of Reading) and this has led to a very close relationship between the Museum and the Society.

The Society's growth has also enabled its activities to be increased resulting in the setting up of additional specialist sections to undertake research into particular aspects of study, each administered by a 'Section Officer'. However, the Journal remains the most important activity and for many members it is their sole means of contact. The first printed Journal appeared in February 1957; this was Volume 10, Issue 4, as the numbering carried on from the previously mentioned duplicated versions. From its start in 1947, six issues were



I & RLS founder members Alan Duke (left) and John Stone at the Long Shop Museum at Leiston on the 16th May 1992. The engine immediately behind is Garrett tractor No. 33295 (Photo- John Meredith).

published annually, but in 1971 a quarterly production was adopted. Each year's issues continue to be grouped into volumes, hence this issue forms a part of Volume 65. These 65 volumes have produced a massive record of steam road locomotive history, much of it unique but with some inevitable duplication whilst in common with similar specialist magazines they lack continuity and an index. It is a coincidence that the first five issues of the printed Journals featured a serialised article on Allens of Oxford so foreshadowing the subject that would be chosen for the Society's 75th anniversary publication.

The Society has also published many books, commencing in 1956 with a modest booklet entitled *Some Horsmonden Engines*. Subsequent works

have included historical research by eminent authors within the Society including Geoffrey Gilbert and Robert Whitehead whilst another venture has been the reprinting of now scarce engine builders catalogues held in the Society's library. A particularly successful book, produced in 1969, was *A Modern Manual for Drivers of Steam Road Vehicles*. This was a joint work by several Society members with a wealth of experience of driving their engines on busy motor roads of that period. The latest works, *The Reading Iron Works* (2010) and *Allens of Oxford* (2012) have broken new ground in that the Society has commissioned experts in the field to both undertake research and to write the narratives.

Copies of all the foregoing publications are held

in the Society's library but they form just a small part of what is probably the world's largest collection of literature devoted to steam road vehicles. Among the most valued items are W. Fletcher's *A Chapter in the History of the Traction Engine* (1898), Mr Gurney's *Petition for the repeal of Legislative Restrictions on Steam Engines running on Common Roads* (1834), John Bourne's *A treatise on the Steam Engine* (1861) and W. D. Wansborough's *The Portable Engine* (1912). There is a comprehensive collection of catalogues from British builders and the plethora of recently published books is well represented.

Of similar importance to the library are the Society's engine records initiated by Alan Duke. These are maintained in two different forms: engine builders' records by each manufacturer and engine owners' records kept alphabetically by counties. The greatest task today is to keep track of the many changes in ownership which occur in this age of preservation.

Another source of historical information is the portfolio collection. This was developed by circulating appropriate information to members interested in specific types of engines or their workings and they would add appropriate data and photographs. The resulting portfolios have been edited and as with many other of the Society's records, are available for loan or inspection by members. Photographs themselves are yet another historical record and the Society's collection extends to several thousand images of engines, a

high proportion of which show engines at work. Photographs from the preservation era, including colour prints and slides, are kept by a separate Section Officer. Finally, there are sections devoted to liveries and to portable engines together with an Information Section, which deals with matters not directly covered by the other sections.

In spite of the disappearance of engines from the commercial scene there is still much to learn about their history; enough to keep the Society busy for many years to come. It is apparent that although the Society as a recording body takes a passive role, the general consensus among members is that in preservation, historical accuracy should be maintained. Most members abhor the tendency to convert engines into forms in which they never appeared in their commercial days and one measure that the Society has adopted to combat this trend is a 'reversion award'. This is granted on an annual basis for a converted engine that has been restored to an authentic pre-preservation condition.

It is now a far cry from the Society's early years when it was thought that the only places of survival for a very limited number of engines would be in museums. We now seem to be assured of a continuing presence, even extending to new builds and with some 3000 engines within the UK, the fears of our founders have truly not been realised. We welcome this turn of events and await the future with great interest and will continue to investigate the history of steam road locomotion.



A past Reversion Scheme Award recipient is Garrett tractor No. 33353 (photo – Bob Cook).