

Robert Crawley - Chairman

When recently asked how long had he served as a Trustee, Robert Crawley had to quickly think back thirteen years to 2000, when he was invited to be one of its earliest Directors. Championing the archive has been Robert's main responsibility and some may regard him as an archive exhibit himself, having served the Trust for that length of time and nearly five years as Chairman.

The idea of WHOTT captured his imagination back in 1999 when Colin Billington first approached him with a vision that he thoroughly endorsed. The object was ambitious and a desire to see it flourish was paramount in Robert's mind. That situation still exists because this region has a lot of commercial transport history that should be protected. There already exists several groups and individuals who are doing sterling work in their own fields but WHOTT is proud to say that, although it has no museum up and running yet, a huge amount of infrastructure is already in place. Robert has seen this grow over the years and has now reached a stage where more people need to be actively involved in preserving the Trust, let alone what it represents. There was a need to change the constitution as a means to attract new blood and already fresh names are putting themselves forward. It is hoped that the emerging team will gain the respect of all its members, far and wide as they are, to confidently move WHOTT to a place it can call its own.

Way back in one of the early editions of WHOTT's NEWS there were some words describing Robert and what he could bring to this organisation. Having had a childhood admiration for buses and coaches in his native Exeter and living within a stone's throw of some bus company managers, it didn't take long for an introduction to come his way to apply for a job that was going in the engineering department of Western National. So it was there that he started in 1962, actually getting paid for something he loved doing. Not that the salary was anything to get excited about but, it must be said that, in all the years he was in the industry, there were a good number of people who were loyal to the job rather than just admiring their pay packet. It then struck him that there was a huge camaraderie amongst busmen – and women – indeed marriages were forged on lonely bus routes and at Head Office where he worked, his future wife emerged from the wages department! It was then that he realised that behind buses was a most interesting aspect of social history and sub-consciously he was drawn into investigating what the company was made of, where it had originated and who tugged its strings. The vehicles and services just happened to be a part of the whole, for the industry was largely people driven and public carrying. Wherever there's that combination there is always a story to tell, so with some friends he turned to writing up notes and persuaded his wife to type them. The bus company gave him 25 memorable years of employment but the axe of redundancy eventually fell and so to other avenues that, with the benefit of hindsight, opened up fresh opportunities and perfecting old skills. From now on Robert would no longer be sitting at a desk pushing a pen, but driving hundreds of miles around the country in a boiler suit with a box of tools.

Having survived that and now semi-retired, Robert feels that there is still much to contribute in various directions that interest him. So while WHOTT is something close to his heart and he wishes to remain involved, he'd prefer to concentrate on one aspect of it rather than the whole. This would, without any feeling of guilt, allow him to pursue other interests in natural history, astronomy, architecture, genealogy, writing and music, church organ restoration and playing 'cello in the EMG Symphony Orchestra.