

The Full History Of The Reading Transport Society and British Trolleybus Society 1961-2011

by Dave Hall

The story up to now has covered the formation of the Reading Transport Society (RTS) in April 1961 up to the end of 1968. The RTS had a fleet of five preserved trolleybuses: Reading 113, South Shields 204, Bournemouth 212 (99), Glasgow TB78 and Manchester 1344 as well as ex Reading motorbus 47 and a 1902 Horse-Drawn Tower Wagon. Mike Dare had purchased a chapel in Belton, Lincolnshire in early 1967 and Derby 172, Glasgow TB78 and Manchester 1344 were housed therein. The last remaining trolleybus route in Reading was abandoned on 3 November 1968 which led to much gloom and despondency within the RTS, although at the same time there was optimism that a site for a working trolleybus museum had at last been found. The site was a former Second World War airfield at Sandtoft situated less than three miles from Mike's Chapel. However, the asking price for the four acres of land was £6,000 and the financing of this was going to be very difficult.

Other trolleybus societies existed including the East Midlands Transport Society (EMTS) who had a site at Plumtree near Nottingham on which a number of preserved trolleybuses were stored. The National Trolleybus Association (NTA) had a fleet of ten preserved trolleybuses and having been thwarted in securing a site for an operational trolleybus museum at Heanor in Derbyshire they were now looking for alternative sites. The Huddersfield Trolleybus Preservation Society (HTPS) also existed and they owned Nottingham 506 as well as Huddersfield 619 and 631 which they acquired following the closure of that system in July 1968.

Chapter 12 – The Dream Becomes a Reality

This chapter is devoted entirely to the setting up of the trolleybus museum at Sandtoft. By necessity this chapter refers to many RTS committee meetings in order to show what the thinking was at that time and how the project developed.

The RTS, along with other trolleybus preservation societies, had been patiently searching for some years for suitable land on which to construct an operational trolleybus museum. Most of the sites looked at were either unsuitable or too expensive. In 1967 the London Trolleybus Preservation Society (LTPS) reached an agreement with the East Anglia Transport Museum to store and eventually operate their fleet of preserved trolleybuses at Carlton Colville, the first trolleybus society to do so.

It will be recalled from previous chapters that at the RTS committee meeting on 29

August 1968 Mike Dare had presented details of the former World War Two airfield at Sandtoft which was up for sale and for which he believed planning permission was likely to be granted for a 20 vehicle depot, overhead and sundry other buildings.

At the committee meeting on 12 September 1968 Mike reported that he had requested a loan for £6,000 (the total cost of the plan) from a London finance company and was awaiting their response. All other enquiries for loans had been met with a negative response. He was also awaiting a quote from Condor regarding the building of a 20 vehicle trolleybus depot. Mike was asked to make further enquiries:-

- To ask Lord Montague and Mr. Baylis (who owned a small chain of supermarkets in Reading) for a £6,000 loan. (Presumably both declined as



D.G. Chick The site at Sandtoft before any depot construction commenced. The view was taken on 1 September 1969 from what is now the back road looking across to where the first depot was built.

nothing further was recorded in the RTS minutes).

- To circulate a request to 60 members for loans of £100 each.
- To share the project with other trolleybus societies
- To write to the local MP for aid.
- To seek advice from the Transport Trust.

At the following committee meeting on 26 September 1968 Mike reported that a £6,000 loan had still not been obtained but further enquiries were being made. He also stated that he had made an offer of £3,000 to buy the four acre site. A list of the 60 members who were to be approached for a loan of £100 had been prepared for circulation and it was agreed that 5% interest would be paid for such loans. Fred Ivey suggested that a further list of people to request a loan from, not necessarily RTS members, be prepared.

Mike Dare offered to put up £1,000 as a loan to the RTS at the committee meeting on 21 November 1968. It was agreed to look into the possibility of purchasing the site jointly with the NTA. If this were to happen then Sandtoft would become a joint site with a joint society. Enough vehicles were owned by the RTS and NTA to fill a 20 vehicle depot. It was further agreed that if Sandtoft was purchased then committee member Mike Smith would be appointed Site Manager. Members of the NTA committee were to be invited to see the site being proposed at Sandtoft.

At the RTS committee meeting on 5 December 1968 Mike Smith confirmed that planning permission forms for a trolleybus museum, erection of overhead and a 20 vehicle depot had been posted. Following a site visit by NTA committee members Mike Dare reported that he had received a letter from the NTA Chairman, Paul Sutherland, highlighting three snags with the Sandtoft site:-

- Was there a guarantee that further land would become available?
- It was noted that single-storey buildings had already been granted planning permission but was there planning permission for a trolleybus depot 20ft high?
- The site was too far from London.

The NTA were also looking at a site at Longmoor in Hampshire where a military railway existed and Mike Dare was asked to find out more about this site.

An acknowledgement regarding the planning permission forms had been received by Mike Smith by the time of the next committee meeting on 19 December 1968. He stated that if nothing further was heard by 6 February 1969 then planning permission was considered granted. The NTA had decided by this time that they would not become involved at Sandtoft as, in their opinion, it was unsuitable. They felt the Longmoor site was more extensive with a series of roadways whereas the Sandtoft airfield was not long enough.

At the committee meeting held on 2 January 1969 it was reported that members of the Doncaster Omnibus and Light Railway Society (D.O. & L.R.S) had been shown around Sandtoft on Boxing Day 1968 and had expressed an interest in becoming involved. They owned Doncaster's last trolleybus No. 375.

The Treasurer reported that he had only received £24 11s 0d (£24.55) following an appeal for site funds but with loans from three members and the site fund money, £1,400 could be raised. This still meant that a further £1,600 was required by mid February 1969. It was agreed to make a further appeal for funds to finance the Sandtoft project in the February edition of *Trolleybus* and also *Buses Illustrated*. Fred Ivey agreed to approach 16 RTS members for £100 loans to make up the balance. However, there is no record in the RTS minutes if an approach was actually made or how successful he was.

By the time of the next committee meeting on 13 February 1969 full planning permission had been granted for the erection of overhead and buildings on the Sandtoft site on condition that no overhead would be erected on the road outside the museum and that adequate parking facilities would be provided. Mike Dare proposed that he purchase the site and depot and let the RTS rent space within it. He would arrange for the erection of the depot but the RTS would buy their own power supply equipment, overhead and traction poles. The RTS would also keep the profits from any vehicle running in public service. The committee agreed unanimously to accept Mike's proposal.

At the committee meeting held on 27 February 1969 Mike Smith reported that details of landscaping, tree planting etc had to be sent to the District Council and the Land Commission had to be notified of the use of the site. Mike Dare announced that he would be advertising for 20 vehicles to fill the trolleybus depot and that spaces would be granted on a 'first come first served' basis. He also pointed out that in addition to overhead equipment, a tower wagon, pole lorry and towing vehicle would have to be found.

By the time the next committee meeting took place on 13 March 1969 Mike Dare reported he had received confirmation that

his offer of £3,000 had been accepted for the Sandtoft site and that he had also received a quote of £5,800 to build a 20 vehicle depot. A few days after this meeting the agreement for the Sandtoft site was signed and registered and now the hard work was about to start! The April 1969 edition of *Trolleybus* announced on the front page that a working trolleybus museum at Sandtoft was to go ahead.

Mike Dare reported that nine vehicles had definitely been given places in the 20 vehicle depot when built. However, at some point in time after this meeting Mike reduced the depot size to 10 vehicles. Mike also stated that he was arranging to purchase some traction poles at £1 each that were being taken out in Caversham Road, Reading. With regards to the running and administration at Sandtoft, Mike announced that this would be dealt with by a site committee consisting of two members of each representative society.

Mrs Dorothy Dare, Mike's mother attended the RTS committee meeting on 7 August 1969 and agreed to input the remaining £4,500 required to finance the site and depot. However, an emergency committee meeting was held on 23 August 1969 as she had decided to withdraw her offer for a number of reasons on the advice of her solicitor. A long discussion took place about the responsibilities, financial and otherwise on Mike Dare in owning a site alone. A suggestion that a Company be formed to deal with the site administration was made. The debate continued on the subject of ownership of buildings, fixed equipment such as power supply and overhead and the principle was agreed that the Company should own all fixed equipment and buildings, fencing and overhead fittings etc., subject to satisfactory agreements for disposal of items formerly owned by the RTS that could be regarded as 'museum items' (e.g. irreplaceable overhead fittings) should the venture be unsuccessful. The Society/Societies participating at

Sandtoft should merely be fund raising and enthusiast bodies.

It was proposed that as soon as possible Mike Dare should form a company to look after the running of Sandtoft and that a special site-policy committee be formed from all interested participating society parties at Sandtoft to put suggestions to the Board of Directors of the Company. Until such time as the Company was formed it was agreed the RTS should be responsible for managing any necessary affairs at Sandtoft. Towards the end of the meeting Mike stated that all his mother wanted was an assured regular income from rent. The committee saw no reason why this could not be attained and maintained and accordingly Mrs. Dare re-instated her offer of finance.

Conveyancing of the museum site was effected on 25 August 1969 and was now the property of Mike Dare. The depot size was reduced to eight vehicles following agreement that both Reading 113 and South Shields 204 would not be taken to Sandtoft in the immediate future. The construction of the depot was due to start on 6 September 1969 for completion by the end of that month. RTS Vice-Presidents Ronald Edgley-Cox (Transport Manager of Walsall Corporation) and Harry Taylor (Transport Manager of Oldham Corporation) expressed a willingness to provide useful assistance in the setting up of Sandtoft where possible.



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A number of vehicles were towed to Barry Dodd's yard in Belton where they were stored until the depot was complete at Sandtoft. Reading 181, Glasgow TB78, Bradford 410, Huddersfield 541 and Reading 193 can be seen in this view.

Below: This first depot to accommodate eight vehicles is under construction in October 1969.

Construction of the trolleybus depot was delayed by Atcost and building work did not commence until 6 October 1969. A number of trolleybuses were towed to Barry Dodd's yard in Belton for storage until the depot was finished. Vehicles included Reading 181 and 193, owned by RTS members, Huddersfield 541 (owned by the NTA), Glasgow TB78 (RTS) which had been ousted from Mike's chapel to make way for Reading 144 and Bradford 410, an ex London RT owned by Graham Rhodes. The HTPS, by now renamed The West Riding Transport Society (WRTS) had expressed an interest in becoming involved with Sandtoft and depot space was granted for two of their vehicles, Huddersfield 619 & 631. The D.O. & L.R.S were also keen to become involved with Sandtoft and their trolleybus, Doncaster 375 was also allocated a place in the depot.

The depot was finally completed towards the end of October 1969 and at 15.00 on Saturday 1 November 1969, Reading 193 became the first trolleybus to be towed to Sandtoft and take its place in the depot. Later that afternoon Huddersfield 619 and 631 and



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193 was the first vehicle to be towed to the new depot at Sandtoft and is seen arriving at 15.00 on 1 November 1969.

finally Glasgow TB78 took their places in the depot. Bradford RT 410, Bournemouth 212 (now 99) Reading 181 and Doncaster 375 arrived later in the month. There was no room for Huddersfield 541 in the depot so it was stored on site outside the depot.

A site meeting took place in December 1969 (exact date unknown) with members of the D.O. & L.R.S, Notts & Derby Transport Society (N & DTS), RTS and WRTS. Agreement was reached for them to become participating societies at Sandtoft. The RTS were thus one of the four founder participating societies at Sandtoft.

At the RTS committee meeting held on 12 February 1970 it was agreed that the Transport Trust be approached for a loan of £5,000 to enable a second depot, housing 14 vehicles, to be constructed and also for some overhead equipment to be purchased.

The idea of Mike Dare forming a Company, as agreed at the committee meeting held on 23 August 1969, was dropped after Mike's solicitor advised against it due to being too complicated. Instead he recommended that a Trust be formed. At the RTS committee meeting held on 26 February 1970, Mike's solicitor was in attendance to give advice on forming a Trust to govern Sandtoft. Amongst some of the suggestions he made was that a Trust with a maximum four trustees be appointed

who were not tied in with the participating societies. Their sole responsibility would be to hold all capital equipment in trust for the owners. It was also suggested that the participating societies would lease the site from the owner and pay a reasonable rent. Mike Dare considered this to be ideal as far as his mother was concerned. These suggestions were put to the four participating societies at a meeting in April 1970 and it was agreed to form a Trust to be called the Sandtoft Transport Centre Association, which could then be registered as a charity.

Mike Dare had received a report from Graham Rhodes on progress with the Sandtoft site. By early February the whole of the runway had now been cleared of grass, weeds and rubbish. Visitors to the museum site were large in number at weekends and lighting on site was now being taken from the mains. On the down side the depot doors were causing problems when trying to open and shut them. Mike proposed that Graham Rhodes be appointed as Site Foreman and the committee agreed to this. Publicity for the new museum was generated by the RTS with the slogan 'See You At Sandtoft'.

At the AGM held on 26 April 1970 at St. Mary's Church House, Reading, the possibility of renaming the RTS to reflect a more national name was proposed and members

The first RTS vehicle to arrive at Sandtoft was Glasgow TB78, the last of the four trolleybuses towed there on 1 November 1969.



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voted their agreement to this. A competition was to be set up whereby members could submit suggestions for a new Society name and a prize would be awarded to the person whose suggestion was adopted. More on this and other events involving the RTS during the 1969/70 period as well as future developments at Sandtoft will appear in the next chapter.



Mike Dare

The only other RTS trolleybus to go into the first depot at Sandtoft was Bournemouth 212 (now 99) which is seen shortly after arriving on 8 November 1969.
